# Social Media in Trans-Atlantic Translation Projects

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## ABSTRACT

This chapter illustrates the ways in which seemingly peripheral contact and communication via social networking are effective means by which members of international and intercultural networked knowledge communities (NKCs) can, in largely informal ways, educate one another in terms of culture, custom, and language use. The authors argue that these increases in communication via new media have resulted in both successful writing/translation collaborations and, in many cases, satisfying long-term personal and professional relationships. To illustrate these claims, the authors draw from written student reflections collected in the last two years in the long-running Trans-Atlantic Project linking writing classes with translation classes. The reflections reveal that, in many ways, the informal, pseudo-immersive communication of new social media can be even more effective than traditional pedagogical practices that rely largely on textbook-centered approaches to intercultural education, especially when carried out through a NKC.

## INTRODUCTION

In the academic year 1999-2000, with e-mail having recently become commonplace among university students in both North America and Western Europe, Bruce Maylath and Sonia Vandepitte paired students in an international collaboration that would quickly spread to include universities in many countries and become known as the Trans-Atlantic Project, or TAP (Humbley, Maylath, Mousten, Vandepitte, & Veisblat, 2005). In its beginnings, the Project existed as a collaboration between technical writing students at the University of Wisconsin—Stout and translation students at what was then called the Mercator College of Translation and Interpretation in Ghent, Belgium. In the years since, however, the project has expanded to encompass three continents, nine countries, dozens of instructors, and thousands of students. The project has grown not only in numbers; it now also connects students at different levels (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral students alike) and disciplinary affiliations (translation, engineering, architecture, medicine and health, humanities and social science fields). In other words, the Trans-Atlantic Project has helped to develop many highly successful and complex NKCs among instructors and students alike.

Not surprisingly, TAP has undergone some changes since its beginnings more than a decade ago, due to a number of factors. The critical factor that made TAP feasible in the first place was access to instant communication via the Internet. As email replaced airmail and then facsimile transmissions, it drastically changed the ways in which trans-Atlantic communication and collaboration could be carried out. More recently, the ubiquity of various social media, including Facebook and Skype, has again changed the ways in which students and instructors can (and do) communicate and collaborate with one another.

In this chapter, the two of us —Maylath, a founding member of TAP, and Hammer, a former student

participant-turned-graduate instructor collaborating in TAP—outline recent pedagogical strategies surrounding the use of new media in the Trans-Atlantic Project and report findings from our own observations and students' written reflections of the experience. Discussion then focuses how an increase in students' *virtual* face-to-face interactions (class-to-class video conferences and one-on-one Skype sessions) with their European colleagues added to the immediacy and sense of the reality of their audience and partnership. The authors then suggest that the use of social media, especially Facebook, facilitated the exchange of cultural information between student collaborators. In summary, this chapter

- advocates and rationalizes such engagement with new media communication technologies,
- illustrates observations through the written reflections of both students and instructors, and
- points to ways in which future iterations of the Trans-Atlantic Project, and other projects like it, might utilize various new media communicative technologies to create more productive and informative NKCs.

## METHODS

We want to first clarify that this chapter is not meant to occupy a space within quantitative, generalizable research on the use of social media in the classroom. Nor do we focus on the impact of social media technologies on students' writing. Instead, we document the longitudinal use of various communicative media within a specific project and, drawing on written student reflections, discuss the ways emerging media have impacted students' experiences as well as our own pedagogical approaches to the TAP.

For purposes of this chapter, we drew from our observations as instructors in the TAP as well as American student reflections from the last two years of the project. Responses for this chapter came from American students enrolled in three upper-division writing courses at North Dakota State University: International Technical Writing, Writing in the Design Professions and Writing in the Humanities and Social Sciences. We considered students' reflections throughout their collaborations, which were collected and used by permission from students. The reflections were given in response to a post-learning report (appendix a), which asked the students to report the ways and means they communicated with partners, their level of satisfaction with communication, and any problems they encountered. Some student reflections were also collected from framing letters that accompanied their final projects. The framing letter assignment simply asked students to reflect generally on their work for the unit, both as a writer and as a part of a collaboration.

## THE TRANS-ATLANTIC PROJECT: BACKGROUND AND DEVELOPMENT

The Trans-Atlantic Project began at a critical point in history, namely when the Internet and e-mail were just beginning to become ubiquitous in developed nations—and in particular among university students. In the mid-1990s, Maylath had begun teaching technical writing students in the U.S. how to prepare procedural texts for translation (Maylath, 1997); however, at that time the students did not have the opportunity to send their texts to translators, and thus could not find out how effective their efforts had truly been. Meanwhile, after a stint as a visiting scholar at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Vandepitte returned to Belgium, where she began teaching students in an introductory English-to-Dutch translation course by assigning them published procedural texts to translate. When the instructors discovered what each other was assigning, they adapted their assignments so that the writing students in the U.S. would provide the procedural texts, which they had themselves composed and prepared for translation, for the students in Belgium to translate. The true value of the collaboration surfaced in the communication between paired students, in what in later years would grow into more extensive cross-cultural virtual teams (CCVTs), as they discussed how to render accurately the meanings of the source text into the target language. Conversations between students were rife with questions and answers regarding intended audience, terminology, tone, verb moods, and other textual issues, but also tangential questions about languages, cultures, lifestyles, and daily life. The pedagogical value, along with

representative examples of students exchanges, is traced in a series of publications: Humbley et al., 2005; Maylath, Vandepitte, & Mousten, 2008; Mousten, Vandepitte, & Maylath, 2008; Mousten, Maylath, Vandepitte, & Humbley, 2010; Mousten, Humbley, Maylath, & Vandepitte, 2012; Maylath et al., 2013.

Although such communication between international partners would theoretically have been possible before the late 1990s—via airmail, overnight delivery, or telephone facsimile—in reality such media would have been unworkable. Airmail typically took four to seven days one way. Thus, even if the partners had replied immediately upon receiving an airmail message, the reply to the original sender's query could easily have taken two weeks to arrive—much too slow for a project that had to begin and end within just a few weeks, especially if the universities' academic terms did not coincide exactly. Overnight delivery, such as via FedEx, or faxes via international telephone trunk lines would have been prohibitively expensive for whole classes of students to rely on. Though much speedier than conventional airmail, they too would have built-in lag times.

The immediacy of e-mail offered the possibility of real-time dialogue. However, the big breakthrough came when access to e-mail accounts became virtually cost-free. Though some readers may be surprised, such access could not be taken for granted at the end of the millennium, even as Maylath and Vandepitte prepared to launch the first project during the 1999-2000 academic year. While Maylath's students at the University of Wisconsin—Stout had all been issued university e-mail accounts by that time, Vandepitte's at Mercator College had not (though she, as a faculty member, had been). Before the project could proceed, she needed to survey her class to identify if a critical mass had subscribed to private accounts. To her surprise, all but two already had done so before enrolling in the course. To make sure that those two could participate with their own addresses, she asked their classmates to show them how to set up Hotmail.com accounts. About a year later, partly in response to the project's success, administrators at Mercator established university-issued accounts to the entire student body.

For most of TAP's 13+ years' history, e-mail has been the mainstay communication medium. Even in its most recent and complex iterations, linking engineering, technical writing, usability testing, and translation classes in multiple, multilateral projects simultaneously (see Maylath et al., 2013), e-mail remains the steadiest, most common communication tool. Its ubiquity, familiarity, record-keeping and categorizing capabilities, coupled with its absence of cost, make it convenient and useful for many students to use frequently to this day. Early on, before instant messaging became commonplace, students sometimes discovered that they were online at the same time, despite the time zone difference of usually seven hours. In excited tones, they would report in class the real-time conversations that they were able to conduct with their partners via e-mail. Such dialogues promoted rapport and joint problem solving to a degree not anticipated at the start. Many students reported that they and their partners had become e-mail pen pals, discussing their lives and different cultures far beyond the parameters of their assignments and semesters. As a budding social medium, e-mail provided an early glimmer of the exponential learning potential that international and intercultural NKCs might offer.

**Trans-Atlantic Partners**
Already by the fall of 2000, the nature of the Trans-Atlantic Project proved attractive to others. Within a year's time, Denmark's Aarhus School of Business (now part of Aarhus University) added its translation classes, taught by Birthe Mousten. She complemented the writer-to-translator assignment with a project that reversed the direction of "text travel": this second assignment would move from translator to editor, with her students taking a published article in Danish and translating it into English, then sending it to a U.S. class for writing students to edit for idiomatic American English. By 2003, translation classes the University of Paris—Diderot in France and Karl Franzen's University in Graz, Austria, had joined the Project's network, as had many more writing instructors at UW-Stout. A full list of participating institutions to date appears below, in their own languages where the Latin alphabet is used:

Handelshøjskolen, Aarhus Universitet, Danmark
Hogeschool Gent, Universiteit Gent, België (Flemish)
North Dakota State University, USA
Karl-Franzens-Universität, Österreich
Tomsk Polytechnic University, Russia
Università degli Studi di Padova, Italia
Università degli Studi di Trieste, Italia
Université Paris—Diderot, France
Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, España (Catalan)
University of Wisconsin—Stout, USA
Vaasan Yliopisto/Vasa Universitet, Suomi/Finnland (Finnish/Swedish)
*Starting autumn 2013:* Kenyatta University, Kenya

Most of these institutions supplied translation courses to the Project; however, North Dakota State University, the University of Wisconsin—Stout, and Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya all supply writing courses. Vaasan Yliopisto/Vasa Universitet supplies usability-testing courses. In all, 29 instructors have participated to date, many with more than one class at a time involved in the Project: The numbers of instructors breaks down as follows: 8 at UW-Stout, 6 at NDSU, 3 at Paris, 2 at Aarhus, 2 at Barcelona (Catalonia), 2 at Ghent, 2 at Trieste, 1 at Graz, 1 at Tomsk, 1 at Padua, 1 at Vaasa.

Although the writing courses most frequently involved focus on technical writing, they are by no means the only type of courses linked to translation classes in the Project. The writing courses involved in the Project just at NDSU has expanded to include the following to date:

ENGL-320 Business & Professional Writing
ENGL-321 Writing in the Technical Professions
ENGL-325 Writing in the Health Professions
ENGL-326 Writing in the Design Professions
ENGL-358 Writing in the Humanities & Social Sciences
ENGL-455 International Technical Writing
ENGL-467 English Studies Capstone Experience
ENGL-655 International Technical Writing
*Starting spring 2013:* ENGL-324 Writing in the Sciences

## Beyond E-Mail: Emergent Communication Media in the Trans-Atlantic Project

Within the first two years of operation, TAP instructors began to contemplate other means to connect CCVT members besides e-mail. At the time, closed circuit television was available but at a significant cost. However, Mousten and Maylath were able to persuade their administrators that the cost would be worthwhile if whole classes could meet in their respective campus studios and debrief each other about their collaboration at the end of the project. From the first moments that such a connection was made, the instructors could see in the students' expressions and comments how much more real their partners seemed upon seeing and hearing them live. From then on, ending the semester with live videoconferences became a culminating point, whenever logistics and budgets allowed (although they often did not).

The students' reactions also gave rise among instructors to discussion of the merits of including a live videoconference at the beginning of projects as well as at the end. Students clearly viewed their work with more gravitas when they perceived their partners as visible, audible persons, rather than disembodied e-mail messages. The first took place around 2002, when Mousten linked one of her translation classes with a technical communication capstone seminar taught by Dan Riordan at UW-Stout. With each class numbering fewer than 10, the instructors were able to use Webcams connected to computers to transmit video over the Web, using software recently available. Little in the way of content was exchanged at that

point, as the work had not even started. Much of the exchange consisted of each student trotting in front of the camera, with the American students saying in Danish, "My name is ___" (*Jeg hedder* ___) and the Danish students reciprocating in English. However, the Danish class was so thrilled that the American students had started the project by learning and using even this small bit of Danish that their excitement that night (they had gathered on campus at 1:00 in the morning for the connection, because of the time difference) carried on for the duration of the semester. The social capital generated in early real-time visible and audible media was not to be underestimated. While pre-project full-class closed circuit TV conferences were less easy to justify to administrators than their post-project counterparts, Webcam connections appeared to be workable and largely free alternative, at least when small groups could participate.

By around 2005, instructors discovered that they did not always have to be television producers to arrange video connections. Here and there, students themselves reported that they were initiating one-on-one video conversations with partners via new software, especially Apple's iChat. At first, such connections were sporadic, as they depended on each student's having the same software and necessary hardware (namely cameras, microphones, and speakers). However, as the technology became more widespread, instructors began encouraging their students to work with their partners in identifying shared media and using it periodically as projects moved from start to finish. When communication via such media took place, students and instructors began noticing that projects moved to completion more smoothly. Although they did not consciously conceptualize the notion at the time, what the instructors were intuiting was the students' smoother handling of the "fragmented communication" that Olaniran and Edgell (2008) identify has a chief challenge for CCVTs. In the years that followed, the instructors observed students experimenting with emerging social media, such as MySpace, Facebook, and LinkedIn, as well as the videophone service called Skype. By 2010, connections via these various media had become commonplace (Maylath et al., 2013).

As social media services such as Facebook began to proliferate—even dominate—the communicative lives of many of our students, these technologies began to take on more important roles in the Trans-Atlantic Project. In fact, as we discuss in the next section, many students began to find it easier to communicate via Facebook than e-mail due to students' checking their Facebook much more frequently than their e-mail. Yet Facebook's functionality stretches far beyond e-mail-like messaging; students began using Facebook with their partners in much the same way that they use it with their other friends. They began to share a variety of information with each other: music, humorous memes, photographs, travel advice, and the like. While a great deal of Facebook interaction strays from students' TAP tasks, as we show later in this chapter, students were communicating more frequently as a result. They report that these interactions continue long after their involvement in the TAP.

Most recently, TAP instructors have encouraged the use of Google's expanding suite of services, including Google Documents and Google Hangout. Google Hangout offers the same services as Skype, except that users can connect with multiple other users without creating a premium account that incurs fees. Google Documents have also become an important tool in the Trans-Atlantic Project. In Google Documents, various texts can be authored, edited, and commented upon by multiple users with specific privacy filters, there is a built-in chat function, users can access a detailed edit history of the document, and the document is stored on the web for real-time, worldwide access. Students have used Google Documents for a variety of functions, including group contact information, scheduling and holding meetings, and document storage.

In a recent study comparing CCVTs made up of students in Ukraine and the U.S., Zemliansky (2012) found that an experimental group that relied on Skype had a more successful experience than the parallel group that relied mainly on e-mail and Facebook. He concludes, "Learners need to have access to a variety of tools and channels. A good strategy might be to suggest one or two 'initial' tools, such as email

or Skype for everyone to get in touch with each other, but then allow team members to try and choose their own communication tools" (p. 285). From our observations, we have concluded much the same. Without arranging parallel or control groups, TAP instructors for some years have been using initial tools, then encouraging students to use their own tools, before bringing both (or all) classes together simultaneously via closed circuit TV.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AND THE TRANS-ATLANTIC PROJECT

As technological innovation changes the way users interact with information, from consumption to collaboration, it also changes the face of the NKC classroom. As we stated earlier, the Trans-Atlantic Project has used email as its primary source of communication from its beginnings. Yet as social media services such as Facebook began to proliferate—even dominate—the communicative lives of many of our students, these technologies began to take on more important roles in the Trans-Atlantic Project. Introducing social media technologies into the college classroom has been met with both enthusiasm and resistance, however, and this section will explore the outcomes of our own pedagogical experiences with social media in the Trans-Atlantic Project.

Resistance to the integration of social media into classroom practices typically revolves around research that finds social media to be a distracting force (read: peripheral to primary educational outcomes), whether in face-to-face classrooms (see Fulton, 2011) or in education writ-large. Roblyer, et al. indicate that these resistant attitudes are significantly higher among instructors than students; while students reported that as much as half of their time on Facebook is school-related, some instructors reported flatly that "Facebook is not for education" (138). Selwyn's (2009) study of social networking in the classroom suggests that Facebook often is a site where students perform their own "identity politics" instead of performing meaningful intellectual work. That is, students' Facebook interactions mirror how "students talk to each other in other contexts—such as the chatter of the back rows of the lecture theatre, coffee shop or after-college telephone conversations" (pp. 170-1).

Selwyn's conclusions are largely consistent with our own observations and experiences in the Trans-Atlantic Project, particularly when considering Facebook. While some of our students have used Facebook as a tool for work-related communication with their partners via Facebook's chat function, most Facebook interactions were characterized as informal, relationship-building exchanges instead of formally "productive" work. One American student commented, "My main interactions were through email which I found most productive. The few interactions between Facebook and Skype shown were mainly personal 'get to know you' exchanges." Another reflected, "[My partner] also added me on Facebook which I thought was acceptable because that way we were able to see what the other looked like and what we did in our free time." Another American student reported, "When I did talk to [my partner] on Facebook, it was mostly conversations about what we had in common. [She] was more interested in getting to know me as a person instead of helping me with my translation project."

These comments may at first seem troublesome—and might very well dissuade instructors from utilizing social media in the Trans-Atlantic Project or similar NKCs. They certainly support Selwin's conclusions, namely that Facebook and other social media spaces are largely limited to performing and navigating social roles instead of performing productive intellectual work. Yet we contend that in contexts of NKC formation, especially those that require cultural exchange (such as translation projects), this seemingly peripheral communication is not only acceptable; it is vital. After all, the success of the Trans-Atlantic Project hinges not only on students' ability to comprehend and apply principles of linguistics, translation, and technical documentation, but also their ability to form functional collaborative relationships and a sense of community with partners.

## Community Building

Several researchers have noted the importance of community building and the usefulness of social media platforms such as Facebook in achieving such communities. Not surprisingly, students who are learning a new language, or those who are learning translation benefit greatly from social media community building. Blattner and Fiori (2009) emphasize the pedagogical possibilities of Facebook in language classrooms, especially in terms of community building, increased affective learning, and positive effects on student-to-student and student-to-teacher relationships. They rightly note that social network-mediated collaboration offers students "authentic language interaction and the development of socio-pragmatic awareness (language use in specific contexts, relationship building, and language awareness through observation and/or experience), which is an aspect of language acquisition that is often omitted in textbooks" (p. 25). We find this analysis applicable far beyond students studying a new language to include students working intensively with language via translation. We have written elsewhere (Maylath & Hammer, in press) about the importance of teaching linguistics and foreign languages to students, and the importance of putting that knowledge into practice via interactive experiences also cannot be understated. In other words, we suggest that this socio-pragmatic awareness via Facebook and other social media platforms may be as important to a students' success in the Trans-Atlantic Project as their linguistic preparation.

Omar, Embi, and Yunus (2012) show that Facebook and other social networking platforms encourage increased student participation and engagement, in large part by decentralizing the teacher's role in the classroom and providing an immediate and informal venue for feedback and interaction. Their respondents reported that the use of Facebook in peer interactions removed limitations of time and space, leading to more frequent interactions and closer and more satisfying relationships (p. 71). Our own students have echoed these reflections, one American student noting increased frequency in communication: "This type of discussion opened a line of communication that I would have never had without this class... I communicated with [my partner] through Facebook and emails on average every other every day or every few days.  At the least, we communicated three times a week." Another American student discussed the ways in which social networking contributed to greater confidence, comfort, and increased interactions:

> In the beginning, we emailed back and forth almost every week to maintain communication and to be available for any questions that we had for each other. After emailing frequently with one another, we became more comfortable with each other. Before I knew it I had two new friend requests on Facebook, from both my Italian and Belgium partner. Facebook is a popular social networking website. It was nice to be able to utilize this website and put a face with the names of my two partners. After communicating on Facebook approximately five times we began to get to know one another and became much more comfortable. I even got the courage to ask both my partners to Skype with me.

Conversely, some American students reported frustrations with the project based not on difficulties in understanding communication, but due to the low frequency of communication. One student commented:

> Another difficulty was the communication. I did not hear from my partner for almost two weeks after the Unit was supposed to start so I was unable to even send my partner my text that had been prepared until after the project had started. From the time that I sent my text until the project was finished, I was only sent one message from my partner stating that they had received my text and would let me know if they had any questions. We were able to communicate effectively in the sense that we were able to understand each other but had very minimal interaction.

Omar et al. also report that social network-mediated communication helped respondents gain confidence in a new language due to their ability to work at their own pace, access other tools on the Web, and

communicate in a more casual setting (p. 71-2). Our own students have continually commented on the ways in which the casual settings often implied within social networking spaces allow for interpersonal and intercultural exchanges. Such interactions have often led to satisfying long-term friendships and working relationships. At least one American student has visited former Trans-Atlantic Project partners while traveling in Europe, and several students (including Hammer, while taking courses) report that Facebook has facilitated partners' continued communication, friendship, and cultural exchange far beyond the scope of the actual Trans-Atlantic Project. Such exchanges, while possible via email alone, seem highly unlikely when compared with the highly interactive social media technologies available, such as the real-time video capability of Skype, which one American student used frequently:

> We also got the opportunity during the first interaction to talk about our home environments and our education. It had just snowed that morning in Fargo, so I showed her the scenery from my apartment window. She was very excited about it, and extended her kind hospitality to me saying that if I were to ever be in the neighborhood of Trieste, Italy on holiday, that I must inform her so she can show me everything. I enjoyed talking and collaborating with [my partner] while doing the TA Project.

While these interactions are certainly peripheral to students' primary task of collaboratively translating and editing documents, they may well prove to be the most memorable moments of the project. And with very few exceptions, students who engaged with one another frequently and via various social media platforms not only reported satisfaction with the project as a whole but also submitted finished documents that met or exceeded instructor expectations.

In fact, student reflections often show that when students rely solely on e-mail as a means of communication in the Trans-Atlantic Project, satisfaction is typically much lower. Most student reflections discuss a lack of communicative frequency as a source of frustration. One American student noted, "Unfortunately, we had some trouble keeping on top of back and forth e-mails… I had higher hopes concerning the more personal communication with the other students. They didn't seem interested in getting to know one another." Another American student reported,

> I never received a reply to my e-mail. I e-mailed my partner again to see if she had received my original e-mail. I never received a reply to the second e-mail. This made the project more difficult. My partner never asked me any questions or gave me any feedback. I never knew if she was able to translate the text easily or if it was even translated. Overall, I learned a lot from this project. It showed how difficult working with other people can be.

Some students who report initial frustration with the project due to a lack of communication via email found that switching to Facebook or some other social media platform fosters more effective and efficient means of communication. Another American student stated,

> I did not receive any emails for about two weeks from the time I sent out my first email. Their first and only email that I received from them was just an introduction to who they were and stating that they were excited to work on my text for translation. Eventually, after we discussed in class, I emailed them and asked how the translation was going and urged them to ask questions if they had any, but I was given no response to my email. A couple weeks later I caught one of my partners on Facebook and eased into the topic of the translation project. She stated that they have not started it yet. I asked when it was due and she stated that it was due in a few days; once again I said that if they had any question just to ask.

Another American student shared a similar experience:

> After a few weeks went by, I did not hear anything from my partner and I was a little worried as to how the translation was going and if they needed any help. I was going to email [my partner] one day when I had a Facebook inbox message from her. This made me happy that she felt comfortable enough to use Facebook to get a hold of me, especially since I had not heard from her since the initial interaction. In the message she asked me to clarify the meaning to a sentence in which she and her partners were unsure. After a few messages back and forth and after I provided an example to help her out, she and her partners were able to understand what I meant by the certain sentence and they were very grateful for my answers. Also, this conversation took place around 12:00 p.m. Central time so that means it was about 7:00 p.m. over in Italy. I thought it was very cool to be having a consistent conversation with someone who is basically halfway around the world from me in a different time zone. The day after our Facebook conversation, [my partner] emailed me their completed translated text.

These tendencies may reflect reports that students use e-mail less frequently than social networking platforms (see Carnevale, 2006; Fitzpatrick, 2007), but our review of student reflections continually suggests that social networking, especially Facebook, contributed to more enthusiastic and positive remarks. Another American student reflected, "The communication with my Italian partners went well. I became Facebook friends with both [my partners], and was able to communicate with [my other partner] over Facebook." Yet another stated that

> The collaboration process was quite intriguing and a very fun experience! My collaboration communication was mainly done through the social media network Facebook. My partner took the initiative and "friend requested" me on Facebook. She also sent me a message to get things rolling. I immediately accepted her request and replied to her message.

While most of our students seem to engage with the Trans-Atlantic Project more enthusiastically, frequently, and successfully when they use Facebook or some other social networking platform, we hesitate either to require such interaction from students or to endorse social networking fully as universally helpful. As we discuss in the next section, the use of social media in the NKC classroom does require the instructor to consider some potential challenges and disadvantages of such an approach.

## Challenges and Considerations

*When Social Networking is "Awkward"*

Computer mediated communication (CMC) certainly has advantages in the NKC class, particularly in overcoming the obvious challenges of communicating with colleagues across the Atlantic Ocean. Omar, et al. (2012) indicate that communication via Facebook helps to bolster confidence in students who are shy or lack confidence in language proficiency. Walther's (1996) Hyperpersonal Model also suggests that CMC fosters comparable, if not greater, intimacy between users. Many of our students' reflections certainly seem to support Walther's model, even to the extent that some students actively avoided social media interaction because of potential awkwardness. One student commented, "Choosing to communicate only via email eliminated any awkwardness that may have come from talking over Facebook or Skype, and in my opinion made it easier to talk to them." Another echoed, "I mentioned using Skype once or twice, but I think we both felt a little awkward using video chat with someone we'd never met before." In other words, sometimes CMC via social networking is simply *too* personal, and for some students, this can cause discomfort significant enough to avoid such communication altogether.

Teaching a writing course of his own, Hammer explored a potential remedy for these feelings of awkwardness in a fall 2011 project. During this collaboration, students from the United States and France met before their active collaboration via a full-class videoconference. Students from Belgium were unable

to attend this pre-conference. While this initial videoconference was not particularly successful in terms of exchanging a great deal of logistical information (e.g., details of students' topics, individual questions and concerns), students did have the opportunity to ask more informal questions, introduce themselves, and experience what many of them expressed as "excitement" of meeting students from around the world. The effects of this pre-conference were evident across student reflections, including this American student: "Meeting my partner at the video conference made me realize that they are students just like us." Another student commented, "I think meeting our French partners before the project made working with them easier, at least easier than our Belgian partners, because we had a face to a name already." While it is difficult to empirically prove the effectiveness of a pre-conference at this stage of our research, anecdotal evidence seems to support our sustained suggestion that more frequent multimedia communication results in higher levels of collaboration, performance, and satisfaction among NKC members.

*Social Media and Privacy: Best Practices*

As social media continue to pervade classroom practices, curricula, and pedagogical strategies, institutions of higher education are beginning to address the complexities of privacy in social media spaces. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) remain relevant touchstones guiding our engagement with technology in the classroom. When combined with emergent institutional policies regarding security, intellectual property, and privacy, instructors wishing to utilize various tools of CMC in NKCs may very well find themselves in the poorly defined spaces that often accompany innovative pedagogical practices. The body of literature dealing with privacy, security, and academic institutions is growing, however (see Bryer & Chen, 2010; Chao, Parker & Fontana, 2011; Chen & Bryer, 2012; Davis, 2010; Debatin, 2011; O'Donnel, 2003; Rodriguez, 2011). Additionally, many institutions of higher education are working to develop guidelines and best practices for instructors and students in an attempt to balance innovative pedagogy and legal liability. In fact, Hammer took part in the development of North Dakota State University's guidelines for the instructional use of social media. Based on that experience and a review of existing and developing literature, we have developed a very brief list of best practices to consider when employing social media or other CMC strategies in the NKC classroom:

> *Transparency*: If social media-based tools are a vital component of a course in terms of communication, collaboration, the publishing of student work, or otherwise, instructors may consider alerting students at the outset of the course. Such disclosure not only better informs students in regard to logistical course expectations (i.e., what the students will be expected to do), but it also has potential to catalyze conversations regarding the importance of engaging with such technologies (i.e., why students are expected to do so).

> *Alternatives*: Instructors may consider offering alternatives to students who are unable or unwilling to participate in various social media-focused classroom activities. Such alternatives should address the concerns raised, but might include opportunities for anonymity, access to services that address disabilities or difficulties with such activities, or alternative means of participation. We should make the same considerations for student ability and security in digital environments as we make in physical environments.

> *Educational Records*: Instructors and students should be mindful of FERPA guidelines regarding the publication of student educational records, evaluative comments, personal information, medical information, etc. Compliance with FERPA demands that the exchange of such information must be private and secure. In a classroom setting, a student-authored document becomes an educational record when submitted to an instructor for evaluation. Publication of that

document after evaluation is still within FERPA guidelines, provided the student is doing so by his or her own volition.

*Empowerment through Information*: Perhaps above all, courses that utilize social media and various other CMC should not simply encourage students to engage with such technologies, but they should also empower students in those environments by incorporating discussions of privacy, rights and responsibilities, fair use, intellectual property, and other issues pertinent to the use of specific technologies. Similarly, institutions and departments should educate faculty and staff so as to encourage mindful, well-informed pedagogical innovation using social media.

Most of these considerations are merely extensions of those already in place and familiar to instructors and students. This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive or authoritative list of pertinent issues instructors must consider as they engage with social media in the classroom. Instead it, we hope it acts as a conversation starter and encourages readers to engage thoughtfully and responsibly with classroom technologies to develop their own best practices.

## FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

While there are many challenges in facilitating NKCs through CMC and social networking platforms, our experience suggests that such challenges are easily overshadowed by the successes experienced by those involved in the Trans-Atlantic Project since its beginnings more than a decade ago. As NKC projects similar to the Trans-Atlantic Project continue to flourish across national, institutional, and disciplinary boundaries, further research will prove vital to their success. This chapter depended on anecdotal evidence, carefully collected from instructor and student reflections. We hope that future researchers take various other approaches, considering studies with a larger scope of participants, greater control of variables, the introduction of control groups, longitudinal studies of NKC collaborations, examinations of NKCs in specific disciplinary contexts, and so on. The broad and inclusive nature of the Trans-Atlantic Project and other NKCs ensure that a variety of instructors, students, courses, and technologies might be included in future iterations.

## CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have introduced the Trans-Atlantic Project, a long-standing example of NKC pedagogy, and discussed the ways that new communicative technologies have impacted participants' experiences in those communities. Based on our observations, social media platforms such as Facebook and Skype have been invaluable tools in community building among NKC members. Such community building is often achieved by engaging in peripheral communication, seldom related directly to the students' primary tasks. Yet embracing and encouraging students to engage in these less formal digital spaces not only results in higher performance in primary tasks, but also facilitates satisfying relationships and experiences that extend far beyond the classroom experience.

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## KEY TERMS & DEFINITIONS

Cross-cultural virtual team (CCVT): A team assembled at different sites among different cultures and bringing varied expertise to a project conducted online or in cyberspace.

Networked knowledge communities (NKCs): Groups of people actively co-involved in exploring, performing, and/or negotiating intellectual tasks within physical and/or virtual structures.

Peripheral communication: Interactions between NKC members that are not directly related to assigned tasks.

Social media: Web-based services that allow users to access, generate, and share content with others.

Text travel: A document's direction during development and localization. For example, a Danish-to-English translation project travels in the reverse direction of an English-to-Danish translation project.

Trans-Atlantic Project (TAP): A collaborative interuniversity project, established in 1999 by Bruce Maylath and Sonia Vandepitte, that joins students in various countries to conduct a variety of tasks, including usability testing, editing, translation, co-authoring texts, and technical documentation.

# APPENDIX A: POST-LEARNING REPORTS

**Localisation project: translation and revision of texts**

**Post-learning report**

| | |
|---|---|
| Fill in your name (or initials) | |
| Which translator/revisor did you communicate with? | |
| Which text did you work on? | |
| What role did you have (revisor/translator) | |
| Did you mediate with your translator/revisor about the text along the way, and if so how many times? | |
| What kinds of questions/comments did you make? | Question about terminology ☐ <br> Question about phrase ☐ <br> Question about grammar ☐ <br> Question about spelling ☐ <br> Questions/comments about contents ☐ <br> Other questions/Comments, please specify ☐ |
| Please state an example, or examples | |
| How did you communicate? | By mail ☐ In person ☐ By telephone ☐ Skype ☐ SMS ☐ Other pls specify: ___ times |
| Were you satisfied with the communication with your partner? | Please comment on your yes/no.: |
| Were you satisfied with the communication with your revisor/translator? | Please comment on your yes/no and your role in the situation.: |
| **What barriers did you actually meet?** | |
| Communication problems? Please specify! | |
| About cooperation? Please comment. | |
| In email or other type of written conversation? Please specify. | |
| In personal conversation? Please specify. | |
| **Other comments in general** | |
| Please state all other comments you may have that relate to experience from project or reservations about it. | |
| Thank you! | |

**Localisation project: translation and editing of texts**

**Post-learning report**

| | |
|---|---|
| Fill in your name (or initials) | |
| Which editor did you communicate with from NDSU? | |
| Which text did you work on? | |
| Did you mediate with your NDSU partner on the text along the way, and if so how many times? | |
| What kinds of questions/comments did you make? | Question about terminology ☐ <br> Question about phrase ☐ <br> Question about grammar ☐ <br> Question about spelling ☐ <br> Questions/comments about contents ☐ <br> Other questions/Comments, please specify ☐ |
| Please state an example, or examples | |
| How did you communicate? | By mail ☐ In person ☐ By telephone ☐ Skype ☐ SMS ☐ Other please specify: <br> ___ times |
| Were you satisfied with the communication with your NDSU-partner? | Please comment on your yes/no.: |
| **What barriers did you actually meet?** | |
| Communication problems? Please specify! | |
| About cooperation? Please comment. | |
| In email or other type of written conversation? Please specify. | |
| In personal conversation? Please specify. | |
| **Other comments in general** | |
| Please state all other comments you may have that relate to experience from project or reservations about it. | |
| Thank you! | |