Powerful Pedagogies in Times of covid: An Online Pedagogical Collaboration Between efl Students and esl Teacher Candidates

Pedagogías poderosas en tiempos de covid: una colaboración pedagógica entre estudiantes de ile y docentes en formación de inglés como segunda lengua

Pédagogies puissantes dans les temps du covid : une collaboration pédagogique parmi des étudiants d'anglais langue étrangère et enseignants en formation d'anglais langue seconde

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Abstract

In the context of the global covid-19 pandemic, educators at all levels had to re-imagine their teaching practices to respond to the necessity of conducting all courses on-line. This article reports on the collaboration of two university instructors to create a trans-national model of learning in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. By virtue of this collaboration, the efl students based at a large public university in Colombia were engaged in four online sessions and paired with teacher candidates taking an esl endorsement course in the United States. This online collaboration afforded the Colombian efl students an authentic opportunity to practice their English learning and the us teacher candidates a meaningful context in which to conduct authentic language assessments. Using interview and questionnaire data, this qualitative case study explored the experiences of the efl students. The data demonstrate that online exchanges can afford students meaningful opportunities for language development. The results further show that online learning can be enriched through mutually beneficial collaborations across universities and transnational contexts.

Keywords: English language learning; online teaching; transnational collaborations, efl; esl; teacher education; covid-19; ict.

Resumen

En el contexto de la pandemia global de covid-19, educadores de todos los ámbitos se vieron en la necesidad de reimaginar sus prácticas docentes para responder a la necesidad de dictar todas sus clases en línea. Este artículo presenta la colaboración entre los instructores de dos universidades para crear un modelo transnacional de
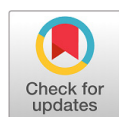
731

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aprendizaje en el contexto de la pandemia de COVID-19. Gracias a esta colaboración, los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE) de una importante universidad pública en Colombia participaron en cuatro sesiones en línea y se unieron con docentes en formación que tomaban un curso de certificación para la enseñanza de inglés como segunda lengua en Estados Unidos. Esta colaboración en línea brindó a los estudiantes colombianos de ILE una oportunidad auténtica de practicar lo aprendido del idioma inglés y a los candidatos a docentes en Estados Unidos les brindó un contexto significativo para realizar evaluaciones de lengua auténticas. Con datos tomados de entrevistas y cuestionarios, el presente estudio cualitativo de caso exploró las experiencias de los estudiantes de ILE. Los datos demuestran que los intercambios en línea pueden brindar a los estudiantes acceso a oportunidades significativas de desarollo de la lengua. Los resultados también muestran que el aprendizaje en línea puede enriquecerse mediante colaboraciones entre universidades y contextos transnacionales para beneficios de ambas partes.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje del idioma inglés; docencia en línea; colaboraciones transnacionales, ILE; ingés como segunda lengua; formación de docentes; COVID-19; TIC.

Résumé

Dans le contexte de la pandémie globale de COVID-19, les enseignants de tous les horizons ont jugé nécessaire de réinventer leurs pratiques d'enseignement pour répondre au besoin d'enseigner tous leurs cours en ligne. Cet article présente la collaboration parmi les instructeurs de deux universités pour créer un modèle d'apprentissage transnational dans le contexte de la pandémie de COVID-19. Grâce à cette collaboration, des étudiants d'anglais langue étrangère d'une université publique très connue en Colombie ont participé à quatre sessions en ligne et ont été jumelés à des enseignants en formation suivant un cours de certification pour l'enseignement de l'anglais langue seconde aux États-Unis. Cette collaboration en ligne a fourni aux étudiants colombiens de l'ALE une opportunité authentique de mettre en pratique leurs compétences en anglais et aux enseignants en formation aux États-Unis un contexte significatif pour passer des évaluations linguistiques authentiques. À l'aide de données extraites d'entretiens et de questionnaires, cette étude de cas qualitative a exploré les expériences des étudiants de l'ALE. Les données montrent que les échanges en ligne peuvent donner aux étudiants l'accès à des opportunités significatives de développement linguistique. Les résultats montrent que l'apprentissage en ligne peut être enrichi grâce à des collaborations mutuellement bénéfiques entre des universités dans des contextes transnationaux.

Mots-clés : apprentissage de l'anglais ; enseignement en ligne ; collaborations transnationales ; anglais langue étrangère ; anglais langue seconde ; formation des enseignants ; COVID-19 ; TIC.

Introduction

Using a qualitative case study methodology, this article presents a study based on a pedagogical collaboration at the university level across the transnational contexts of a large midwestern city in the US and a large city in Colombia. Facing the necessity of transitioning from face-to-face to online education because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the two instructors (also authors of this article) collaborated to use the virtual teaching environment to support their respective course goals and outcomes. One group of students were master's level secondary pre-service teachers at a private university in the US enrolled in a course about authentic assessment for emergent bilingual learners taught by Sarah as part of the English as a second language (ESL) endorsement. The other group of students, at a large public university in a city in Colombia, were undergraduates enrolled in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course taught by Daniel, as part of their required coursework. The ESL teacher candidates were paired with the undergraduate EFL students to conduct authentic assessments of their English language development once a week for 4 weeks in a virtual synchronous environment via Google Meet®. The US-based teacher candidates implemented authentic assessments in speaking, writing, reading, and listening they developed specifically for their English learner partner.

Mediated learning opportunities were developed (van Compernolle & Williams, 2013) through this online collaboration to create a context where ESL teacher candidates could apply their theoretical learning in meaningful interactions with English learner students to replicate the non-Covid field-based learning environment. The teacher education program uses a field-based model that situates theoretical learning and skill development as joint endeavors through a participant apprenticeship orientation (Davin & Kushki, 2018). Given that PK-12 students were also being taught remotely, Sarah was unable to rely on field-based school partnerships commonly available to foster

learning in action for the ESL teacher candidates (Cohen et al., 2018). Typically, school-based partnerships provided these venues to interact with an English learner crafting and administering authentic assessments to gather information about their funds of knowledge and English use across language domains (Heineke & Giatsou, 2019).

Development of the assessments was grounded in a funds of knowledge theoretical approach (Moll & Gonzalez, 1997), building on the experiences and resources students bring with them. Similarly, the EFL students who Daniel taught were given access to meaningful and authentic interactions in English in this online community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Our aim was to support the communicative language teaching approach of creating meaningful linguistic input and negotiation of meaning through authentic tasks (Mayo & Pica, 2000) for the EFL students.

The study reported in this article focused on the experiences of the EFL students in relation to this collaborative online learning experience. Our aim was to explore their language learner identities and learner experiences as seen through interview and questionnaire data based on the cross-cultural online collaboration. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and written questionnaire responses of EFL student participants. The research questions were as follows:

1. How did the EFL students experience themselves as language learners in their interactions with the US-based student partners?
2. In what ways did the online collaboration shift the EFL students' perception of the language learning experience?
3. How did this online collaboration change the experience of EFL students' learning in the pandemic-imposed online university language classroom?
4. In what ways did the online nature of the project contribute to the students' experiences of language learning?

733

Theoretical Framework

We situate this project within sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) which understands learning to be socially mediated and embedded in the learning context. In the context of this project, the EFL students had had their course moved online unexpectedly within the socio-political context of a global pandemic. Seeing learners as "members of social and historical collectivities" (Norton & Toohey, 2002) acknowledges and builds on the agency of learners to influence their learning and their learning environments. Through this study we seek to understand EFL learners' identities and their perspectives on their learning and participation in the online exchange with their US-based peers. The relationships formed between the ESL teacher candidates and their EFL partners were seen through the lens of mediator-learner interaction described by Poehner et al. (2016) in which interactions assist the learners in their acquisition of new skills by virtue of mediated task-based activities with a more expert "other" (Vygotsky, 1986).

While online education has been employed for several decades in one form or another including the EFL teaching context (e.g., O'Dowd & Ware, 2008; O'Rourke, 2005; O'Dowd, 2011), the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in an unplanned opportunity to transform previously in-person courses to online platforms virtually overnight in most countries around the world. In many cases, students faced inequitable access to technology, and instructors had to create online courses with little preparation to use remote teaching technology much less in ways that were specifically oriented toward their subject matter (Shin, 2020). This study contributes to the field of research in foreign language teaching online (e.g., García, Díaz, & Artunduaga, 2017; Gimeno, 2018; Canals, 2020; O'Dowd, 2011). For our study, we are specifically interested in the arguments of O'Dowd (2011) regarding the need to create a more embedded online exchange focus for foreign language teaching. We are also interested in the literature supporting mutually beneficial

partnership for cross-cultural learning (e.g., Belz, 2003; Fuchs, Hauck, &Müller-Hartmann, 2012).

Norton and Toohey (2011) explain the important role that learner identities play in any analysis of motivation or learning experience, which bears on the online environment as much as any other. A further consideration in studying learner identity is the value placed on English as a global language and the role it takes as a form of linguistic imperialism (Canagarajah & Ben Said, 2011; Phillipson, 1992). Because the EFL learners in this project were put into partnerships with English-speaking students from the US, the perceived dichotomy between native vs non-native English speakers (Holliday, 2006) feature in our analysis of the data. Canals (2020) found that while online exchanges that involve interactions between language learners and native speakers, can elevate anxiety, there is also a high level of motivation from those students who typically opt to participate in such projects. Recent research has examined the role of the virtual learning environment to promote communicative interaction and negotiation of meaning (Belz, 2002; Yanguas & Flores, 2014). We look to the data from this study to understand how this project interacted with EFL students' English learner identities and the role that the online exchange played in their learning and motivation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

This study is grounded in qualitative case study methodology (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to explore learner data from this online pedagogical collaboration (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005). The project involved two different groups of students; however, for the purpose of this paper, our data, analysis, and discussion focus solely on the perspectives shared by the students in the EFL class at the Colombian university. This study consisted of three main phases including the pedagogical collaboration, the invitation for students to participate in the research study, and the subsequent data collection and analysis. For the pedagogical collaboration, the undergraduate Colombian

734

students were paired one on one with the graduate-level pre-service teachers from the US. Below, we outline each of the phases and elements of the study.

Participants

Of the twenty-five students in the English II (A2 level per the CEFR) course, seventeen students opted to participate in the collaboration with the US teacher enrolled in the ESL assessment course. Out of the seventeen EFL students who participated in the English language exchange with their peers from the US university, 10 agreed to participate in the follow up study. Those who participated in the questionnaire were 5 female and 5 male students aged between 19 and 24. They belonged to different schools in the university and were pursuing a range of professional degrees including Topographic Engineering, Forestry Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Systems Engineering, Elementary Education, Social Sciences, and Biology. Of those 10 participants who responded to the online questionnaire, four agreed to be interviewed. Below, we outline the timeline that the project followed.

The Courses

During the four weeks of the project, students from the two courses met once weekly. For the Colombian EFL students, this meeting time came during the last hour of their English class using a Google Meet that they created with their partner for this purpose. The partners had been organized in collaboration between the two instructors. Once Daniel had received word from the 17 students who agreed to participate in the project collaboration, he sent their names to Sarah with information about their interests from a project they had created for his course. Based on this information, she matched students' backgrounds, majors, and interests to partner with her students. She shared the background information from the EFL students with their pre-service teachers partners so that they could use it to help prepare their materials and activities for their first meeting with their Colombian EFL student partners.

The content of the online sessions focused on using authentic assessments to promote the development of the four language domains while developing rapport and sociocultural exchange and learning between the partners. Prior to each session, Sarah guided her students in the creation of authentic language assessments that were based on the theories which they were learning. For the first meeting the pre-service teachers were asked to create interactive activities using a funds of knowledge (Moll & González, 1997) lens for the to learn about their EFL student partner. During the next three sessions, the pre-service teachers created authentic oral language (listening/speaking), reading, and writing assessments (in that order) to both promote their partner's use of English, and, in so doing, gather data on their partners' language and literacy development to enable future instructional recommendations.

Data Collection and Analysis

At the end of the course, the EFL students received an invitation via email to participate in an online survey and to be interviewed to gather information about their experiences and insights about the online exchange. Data were collected through written questionnaires using a Google Form® (see Appendix A) sent by Daniel to all seventeen EFL students who had participated in the project. After the questionnaires were returned, both Sarah and Daniel analyzed the students' responses to gain an initial and overall perspective of the students' experiences and insights after the online pedagogical collaboration. Following the collection of questionnaire responses, Daniel sent invitations to request their participation in individual semi-structured interviews. Responses in the affirmative were received from four students and Daniel organized a schedule for interviews. These were then conducted in an online format.

The semi-structured interviews consisted of 13 different open-ended questions (see Appendix B) including general perspectives on the online exchanges with their US pre-service teacher

735

partners, initial expectations, challenges, and benefits, and more. The interviews were carried out in Spanish via a Google Meet® online forum and lasted on average 30 minutes. Two of the interviews were conducted by Daniel, and two were conducted by Sarah. The interview data were transcribed and translated into English by Daniel and reviewed and analyzed by both researchers. Data were coded following a grounded theory approach; that is, building the analysis based on the patterns that emerged from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Following the identification of recurrent patterns, the transcribed interview data were grouped into corresponding thematic categories for further analysis to respond to the initial research questions. In the following section, we elaborate on our findings and discuss our analysis.

Findings

The findings of this study indicate that online student exchanges can offer rich language learning opportunities when there are meaningful goals for interactions between the partners. We concentrate our analysis on the language learning experiences and identities of the EFL students based on the questionnaire and interview data. We draw on a sociocultural framework of learning to examine the role that the online exchanges played in the EFL students' perceptions of themselves as learners and speakers of English as a new language.

Students' Feelings Within the Project: From Apprehension to Success in the Language Practice

Our first research question sought to understand the EFL students' feelings about themselves as language learners within this collaborative online project. Of the 10 survey respondents, eight of them shared that this experience was relevant for their objectives as language students, and the other two said that it was partially relevant. While the overwhelming sentiment of the study's participants was of a positive nature, there were many

nuances to their responses from the questionnaire and the interview data that we share below.

Several students disclosed that they began the project with a degree of anxiety and apprehension. The nature of this anxiety was varied but several themes emerged including the novelty of interacting in English with a non-Spanish speaking person as well as the anonymous nature of the first meeting. For instance, Solanyi shared that, "At the beginning it scared me a lot. It is like being paired with a person that we *don't* know and who *doesn't* speak Spanish. [I worried that] we will not understand each other" (Solanyi, Interview on February 19, 2021 Lines 2–5). Duván also ascribed his feelings of anxiety to the fact that prior to this project he had never interacted with someone who spoke only English and no Spanish, explaining that he "felt nervous since the first thing one wants to do is to be able to understand. [...] In my personal case, I had never had the opportunity to talk to a native person of that language." (Duván, Interview on February 18, 2021, Lines 2–5).

Interestingly, while both Solanyi and Duván expressed their apprehension in relation to the newness of the experience, they also both explained their concern as being centered around the importance of being able to understand and be understood. They also both singled out the novelty of speaking in English with someone who was a "native speaker" (Holliday, 2006) and who did not also speak Spanish. On the other hand, some students, such as Nicolás, asserted that his initial reaction to the project was one of excitement about the possibility of engaging in a collaborative online learning practice with a peer from the US university. He explained his initial reaction this way:

> When you mentioned the idea in class, at first, I felt quite excited [...] because it is an opportunity that [...] I have always wanted. One acquires certain knowledge of the language and so, but they *don't* really matter if one *doesn't* have anyone whom we can practice or talk. (Nicolás, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 2–6).

Nicolás' excitement seemed to stem from his interest in putting into practice previously learned classroom knowledge in a more authentic manner particularly highlighting the opportunity to practice. Of note is his sentiment that the knowledge acquired in the classroom *doesn't "really matter"* without the prospect of additional practice or authentic conversation. The data support a view of learning as a dialectical form of change based on learners' appropriation of new forms through mediated tasks (Poehner, 2016).

Those students who noted that they were concerned about their ability to understand what was being said in their first interactions also explained that their fears diminished as they gained experience with their US student partners. For example, Manuel described the ways that his US partner supported his English usage:

> At the beginning it was very difficult but with the passing of the sessions he also helped me how to say some things and the meaning of some words. In fact, he sent me texts in English for us to read in the sessions. That really helped me a lot. He was way understanding with me since at the beginning I [...] didn't know how to say some things in English, but he understood me, and he told me the meanings. [...] He gave me some examples and that really helped. (Manuel, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 42–49)

According to Manuel, his anxiety and sense of challenge was allayed by the way that his partner interacted with him to build meaningful interactions and rapport between them. Sebastián's quotation similarly suggests that the interactions were constructed in a way that supported his learning and diminished his anxiety.

> I liked the kindness, willingness and empathy of the students from [the US]. From the first session they were patient. They corrected us. They knew that we were learning English...but despite the fear, there were nice talks in which we could share our likes, interests, plans [...], and everything was done at our pace and in English. (Sebastián, Questionnaire submitted on February 16, 2021, Question 7)

The quotations shared from Sebastián, Manuel and Solanyi support the idea that while anxiety can be present in EFL students partaking in such online exchanges, their fears can be mitigated by effectively guided interactions. These findings align with the research reported by García et al. (2017) who found that students in their study increased their level of participation in English due to the interactive nature of the online learning exchanges.

From Theory to Practice: Students' (Self-) Perceptions of English Language Learning and of Themselves as Language Learners

Our second research question sought to learn what shifts the EFL students experienced in relation to themselves as English learners based on their online interactions with the ESL teacher candidates. In the EFL students' accounts of their experiences, there were clear references to a differentiation between theory and practice in relation to language learning. Several of the students described this online collaboration as an opportunity to transition from theory to practice in their learning of the English language. Interview data revealed that students' represented theory and practice as dichotomous aspects of English language learning, indicating that their prior experience in language classes had felt like a theoretical language learning experience compared to their one-on-one interactions with their US partner. For example, Manuel shared, "(...) I had to put my English into practice. And I was thrilled with the experience since I could use English. One oftentimes learns it but only in the notebook and one doesn't practice it." (Manuel, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 50–53). Sebastián's comments also indicated his sense of a distinction between theory and practice in his characterization of the benefits of this project "If you *don't* practice, all the theory is worthless. I could correct *lacks* that I had, I improved in different aspects, and I even made a friend" (Sebastián, Questionnaire submitted on February 17, 2021, Question 6).

For these students then, this online collaboration served as an opportunity to move from theoretical and decontextualized linguistic knowledge

737

that may remain in their notebooks to a praxis in which language had specific communicative and social purposes. Their comments also illustrate the dialectical nature of their learning in a mediated context with their more expert peers (Vygotsky, 1986). Take, for example, Devi's assertion.

> Learning really occurs when speaking with a person that doesn't speak Spanish because that forces you to study and to maintain a fluid conversation. It is frustrating when the [other] person doesn't speak Spanish, but I could learn because oftentimes during the conversation there are many repeated words, and then you start thinking in English and saying words in English as an obligation. It was good for me because it was such a challenge. (Devi, Questionnaire submitted on February 16, 2021, Question 6)

In addition to comments from Devi and Manuel drawing a perceived distinction between theory and practice in their English use in the online exchange versus their university language classes, they also indicated that they found themselves obligated to speak English with their teacher candidate partners. Within their accounts, English language learning was made possible when they had the imperative to interact with their teacher candidate partners. Therefore, this collaborative online experience provided the EFL students with a situation that required their output (Swain, 1993) with a partner with whom they felt pushed to use their English language even when there were initial anxieties. This project therefore created a more authentic scenario in which language was used as a social and mediating tool (Vygotsky, 1978), enabling the EFL students to put into practice previously acquired theoretical insights about language. Sebastián shared the following:

> It was quite important. It was the first time that I was going to have a conversation with a native and I could take the advantage of those chats to continue learning and practicing which is the most important thing. (Sebastián, Questionnaire submitted on February 16, 2021, Question 6).

However, in his discussion about the interaction, Sebastián also brings up the notion of an idealized "native" speaker (e.g., Davies, 2004). For Sebastián,

this opportunity was more meaningful to him because he could interact for the first time with a person who was a "native" English speaker which he asserted would help him improve and correct his self-perceived inaccuracies in the English language. Nicolás also referenced the importance of practicing with an English "native speaker" explaining that, "Speaking with a native student made me realize and self-assess my own level, my strengths, and drawbacks when listening to and speaking with a native." (Nicolás, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 67–69). Solanyi touched on this issue with a slightly different perspective commenting that neither she nor her partner spoke the dominant language of the other which gave her some comfort about the interaction:

> I realized I could do it. Sometimes one has the fear that it is impossible, or that doesn't know, and nobody is going to understand you and it is going to sound bad. […] But I guess the exercise was about to leave those fears and prejudices behind. I also realized that she *didn't* understand Spanish either. We were both at the same level and at an exercise to mutually learn. She [her peer] as a teacher and I as a student. (Solanyi, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 24–29)

Several themes emerge from those data, including the perception of native vs non-native speakerism as a binary for some of the students as well as the mutually beneficial nature of the online exchange that served to offset some of the anxiety for the EFL students. For Nicolás and Devi, they saw the interaction with a native speaker as an advantage to help further their English learning. While Solanyi initially positioned herself in a deficit stance, her perspective shifted to a recognition that this was an opportunity to leaving "fears and prejudices behind." While all 3 of these students seem to fall into a binary vision of native vs non-native speakerism, their comments also suggest the positive nature of an online exchange such as this one to benefit from the different strengths that each group of students bring with them. For Nicolás and Devi, that meant being in a situation where they could gain more insight into their strengths and weaknesses in English and push their language development further. While

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Powerful Pedagogies in Times of covid: An Online Pedagogical Collaboration Between efl Students and esl Teacher Candidates

much research has pointed to the devaluation or demotivation that can occur because of the native vs (non)native construction (e.g., Arboleda & Castro, 2012; Mariño, 2011; Viáfara, 2016), these findings suggest that some students may take the opportunity as a factor that motivates them in their learning. Additionally, Solanyi's comments showed us that by virtue of an exchange that is deliberately constructed to be mutually beneficial it is possible reach beyond binaries such as those of native vs. non-native speaker of teacher vs. student and theory vs. practice.

Linguistic and Sociocultural Learning From the Online Collaboration

Our third research question asked how the online collaboration contributed to the students' experiences of language learning. We were specifically interested in how the efl students interacted with their us peers to negotiate their learning and what they thought about this collaborative exchange. participants' language learning. From the questionnaire data, we learned that one student had asked questions of their us student partner regarding their desire to be a teacher explaining the value she felt by connecting with someone who was passionate about supporting their future bilingual students. For this efl student, learning went beyond solely the development of English skills to sharing in the educational goals of their us student partner. In his interview, Nicolás shared, "I could work on the four [language] skills (...). However, the one that I think I worked on the most [...] was the one that I wanted to work on, speaking and listening." (Nicolás, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 60–63). While he specified that he worked on speaking and listening the most, Nicolás also said that these were the language domains that he *wanted* to focus on the most. In his interview, Duván also cited that the language domains of speaking and listening were those most impacted in the online exchanges.

> Definitely, speaking and listening. Speaking because *that's* when we are forced to think about what and how

to say it. It's like thinking about all of those classes that I have had and to see that they're worthy and put it into practice. (Duván, Interview on February 18, 2021, Lines 53–56).

These participants' comments point to the role that motivation plays in student learning (Canals, 2020); although the collaboration was intended to promote the four language domains, the efl learners expressed their agency in making the experience one which reflected their own needs and interests. These data also indicate the ways that a collaborative exchange such as this one can promote negotiation of meaning through the interactive learning context (Mayo & Pica, 2000).

Data further revealed that participants' experiences of the project collaborations came to be about more than language learning to include social connections and the development of cross-cultural understandings (Davin, 2016). Results from both questionnaire and interview data suggest students gained additional supports from their teacher candidate partners by engaging in other dimensions of life in their language meetings. Solanyi shared the following:

> It was like an exchange of what she was living in the pandemic. (...) We both shared that because of being inside all the time, sometimes we were bored, and it was suffocating (...), but it was like talking to someone who was experiencing the same thing. Interacting was better because it was not only a person far away who was talking to me, but like a friend. It was like making a friend in another part of the world. (Solanyi, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 43–49)

Solanyi's experience highlights that this project created a space in which students could engage in more socially and contextually embedded dialogue regarding the global pandemic. The language learners could move beyond decontextualized practices of language learning and acknowledge the socio-historical and political conditions that they and their us partners were experiencing. Solanyi's quotation also noted that this exchange allowed her to learn about another culture and gain respect for the time and care that her partner took in creating

739

the activities for practicing English. Manuel also commented on the social dimensions that permeated through the online sessions:

> Beyond learning English, we could create good empathy between us because he asked me how I was, how things were going in Colombia, how everything was going, and how I felt during the lockdown. (Manuel, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 31–33)

Manuel and Solyani's words remind us that language learning does not occur in a vacuum; our own subjectivities and backgrounds shape our learning experiences and the inextricable nature of the sociocultural context in which learning occurs is highlighted. Being asked by their partner to discuss their lives during COVID-19 indicates the power of being listened to as a learner as well as the ability of the partners to identify with each other's lives due to the common experience of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Students' Experiences Regarding Online Learning: Benefits and Challenges Within Remote Learning

Our last research question asked how this collaboration changed the experience of learning in the pandemic-imposed online university language classroom. The data discussed in this section focuses on the medium and the structure of this project. Data indicate that the online project carried both advantages and disadvantages for the EFL participants. Through the questionnaire data, we found that while all respondents had a positive reaction to the online project, 3 respondents were critical of having had only 4 sessions in which to interact with their US student partners, and 1 respondent expressed a wish for the sessions to have lasted longer than they did. In response to the questionnaire, another participant shared that this project gave her a new outlook about online classes, showing her that online classes could be personalized in contrast with all her other online courses included no interaction with peers or instructors. Another student, Ximena, shared that this experience made her change her mind about online learning.

It changed my perspective, since I considered that online education was not good. However, with this experience I realized that it can bring many benefits such as communicating and interacting with people who are long distances away. (Ximena, Questionnaire submitted on February 17, 2021, Question 12)

As in her questionnaire responses, Leidi explained the benefits of the collaboration saying, "It gave me the opportunity to talk to people who are not nearby and this supported my learning" (Leidi, Questionnaire submitted on February 16, 2021, Question 12). While the use of the Internet fostered meaningful learning interactions for Ximena and Leidi, the online collaboration had complications for others. Manuel explained, "It was hard. I had to stay here at home with all my family while speaking in English, a language that I do not control." (Manuel, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 86–87).

Manuel's comments remind us that this project was not just a fun online exchange; it took place in the context of a global pandemic requiring that students be in their homes (typically their family homes) with other family members and activities going on around them during class time. In addition to the potential disruptions and/or lack of a private space for the Colombian students during their meetings, for many the technical aspect of using the Internet for video classes and meetings caused significant and repeated issues. Solanyi's underscored this:

> "The biggest hindrance was the [Internet] connection because I had a quite unstable connection. There were some moments when the Internet shut down and the [video]call was off. (…) There was another time when there was no electricity here at home." (Solanyi, Interview on February 19, 2021, Lines 55–58)

Aspects such as connectivity problems and the transformation and adaptation of students' homes to serve as their classroom space created obstacles for some students during this project. At the same time, the type of rapport that students reported from their online exchanges may have been created in part because of the home-bound

nature of their online work, especially since students from both countries were familiar with these same challenges. For example, Solanyi shared that she could hold her dog during her and her partners' meeting times, something not possible during non-COVID and in-person learning times. And although each student's experience was different and challenges varied from student to student and from country to country, they all had in common that they were living through a global pandemic, that their learning contexts had shifted dramatically from in-person to online due to the pandemic, and the vulnerabilities that the pandemic had created on a personal and societal level.

Discussion and Conclusions

We begin this section by discussing the overarching results of our study and the ways our findings align with and/or diverge from other studies. While anxieties were present initially for the efl students, they diminished after the first meetings with their us partner. Participants indicated several reasons for this, including their ability to connect with their us partner about topics of interest and the realization that there was an element of parity regarding the language knowledge of each partner: one not knowing Spanish and the other not knowing English. For other participants, their anxiety was overshadowed by their desire to meet the challenge of the exchange. This is consistent with Canals' (2020) research showing a relationship between anxiety and motivation for efl students in online partnerships with English speakers. Participants highlighted the project's shift in their learning experience from decontextualized theoretical stances of the English language toward authentic opportunities for language practice (O'Dowd, 2005). These findings underscore that learning went beyond language skills to include sociocultural insights by virtue of the online peer interactions. The data also demonstrate a range of perspectives regarding efl students' language learner identities including a focus on native vs (non)native speaker identity

and learner agency regarding their desire to use this opportunity to challenge themselves.

While the project was developed out of a sense of urgency for authentic connections to support remote teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, we believe these results have broader relevance. Data indicate the potential of transnational collaborations to promote meaningful interactions between students from different countries, to provide language learners an opportunity to push their skills to new levels, and to promote authentic language practices and increased motivation for efl students (Belz, 2002; García et al., 2017). We concur with O'Dowd's (2011) argument for online intercultural learning exchanges to be more than a peripheral activity in language teaching contexts. We see the potential for online exchanges to contribute to intercultural communication in foreign language teaching (Belz, 2003). We also argue that whether courses are taught online or in person, efl pedagogy could incorporate a (re) consideration of the imagery and discourses that language students may perceive around the idea of native speakerism. Including this topic as well as the issue of linguistic imperialism in classroom discussions could provide salient opportunities for reflection and discussion. Bringing this type of issue into the language classroom is especially relevant in the context of the worldwide pandemic which brought global inequities into full view. Although teachers and students around the globe faced challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw that the creation of online connections can overcome physical barriers to promote language development and pedagogical praxis, leading to both language skill development and enriched sociocultural understandings.

In spite of its importance, the study had some limitations. Firstly, due to the small number of participants in this study, we cannot assert generalizable claims. Another limitation is that the Colombian efl undergraduate students were the only participants. While this was a deliberate choice, it is

741

also a limitation regarding the study's ability to speak to the interactive nature of the project. A further limitation relates to the researchers' close relationship to the data given our dual roles as both instructors and researchers. Nevertheless, we assert that the insights gained can contribute to the literature and inform those interested in similar pedagogical and research questions (Donato, 2003). The above limitations also point to ideas for further research.

In sum, this study opens possibilities for continued projects that include cross-national exchanges building reciprocal learning opportunities that expand pedagogical and learning modalities. In relation to this specific project, future research should look to include data from both student groups enabling a more three-dimensional analysis of the mediated learning dynamic. It would also be of interest to focus research on issues raised by the EFL learner students regarding native vs. (non)native speakerism, motivation, and learner anxiety from the point of view of their US-based partners. Future studies could also include work samples from both student groups to facilitate analysis across a more varied and expanded data set. Finally, it would be interesting to examine the collaborative dialogue (Swain, 2000) that was enacted between the students of different language backgrounds to enable a closer analysis of the ways the learners use their language to mediate their understandings (Swain, 2006).

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Appendix A. Powerful Pedagogies in the Time of COVID: An Online Pedagogical Collaboration With EFL Students and ESL Teacher Candidates: Google Forms Questionnaire

What is your institutional email?

What is your professional degree?

How old are you?

What is your gender?

Please carefully read the following questions. Take your time while reflecting and submitting your responses.

1. What are your goals for learning English?

2. How do you consider your learning English process has been? (Mention, for example, how the process was at school, university, language courses, autonomous study, etc.)

3. Before the exchange program with the students from (name of the university), and apart from your English classes at the university, have you ever had any experience of interaction with other people in English?

   a. Yes

   b. No

4. In case you selected "Yes" in the previous question, please describe an experience of interaction with another person in English.

5. Do you consider that the exchange with the students from (name of the university) was relevant for achieving your goals as an English student?

   a. Yes

   b. No

   c. Partially

6. Considering the previous question, describe the relevance for you of this exchange with the students from (name of the university).

7. What did you like the most from the exchange with the students from (name of the university)? Why?

8. What did you dislike the most from the exchange with the students from (name of the university)? Why?

9. What do you think was the biggest challenge when interacting online with the students from (name of the university)?

10. What do you think was the main asset when interacting online with the students from (name of the university)?

11. Do you consider that this exchange experience with the students from (name of the university) changed your perception/experience of online learning?

   a. Yes
   b. No

12. In case you have selected "Yes" in the previous question, please mention how this exchange changed your perception toward online learning during the covid-19 pandemic?

13. Utilize this space to write and share any other aspect that you think was not included in this questionnaire (suggestions, comments, experiences, etc.) *Optional

Appendix B. Semi-Structured Interview Questions

How do you assess your experience of practicing/learning English with a person from the United States as part of this project?

- What were the main hindrances and/or benefits of this collaborative project for you?
- How did you feel during the collaborative project with your peer at the University?
- Was this collaborative practice pertinent for your language learning and practice? How and why?
- What were the main insights you gained from this experience?
- What did you learn from your University peer through this experience?
- What language skills could you practice and develop the most through this collaborative practice? [speaking, listening, reading, or writing]
- What sociocultural perspectives and insights do you think you gained from this experience?
- What were your expectations of this collaborative practice before it began?
- Did you face any challenges in terms of technology when carrying out this collaborative practice? Which one(s)?
- Would it be important to continue this collaborative practice with future students? Why? Why not?
- Did you feel that the University students were engaged in getting to know you?
- In what ways do you think the activities responded to/built on your own interests as a language student/person?