Why use Web 2.0 in intercultural education?

Not so long ago, intercultural education within language learning and teaching (LLT) meant using two types of resources: “static” documents and limited “living” interactions. The first type of materials often consisted of textbooks, “authentic” documents (a questionable notion, I admit) such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, but also films, songs, novels, etc. The birth of Web 1.0, often referred to as cyberspace, which was mostly “read-only,” allowed teachers to access a lot more material like this. “Living” interactions, on the other hand, could only take place with pen-pals, foreign teachers/assistants, through visits/stays abroad. With the birth of Web 2.0 technologies and applications (Facebook, Skype, Twitter, Flickr), unparalleled possibilities have opened up for language and intercultural education. Instead of static cyberspace, this living web is user-centered and urges people to share information, collaborate, network, create, and manipulate. Put simply, Web 2.0 allows us all to “read-write-execute” online (according to Sir Tim Berners-Lee, who is credited with inventing the web).

Through Web 2.0, we have become the “auctors” (authors/actors) of our lives (Bauman 2008) who “create and shape things as much as... [we] might be a product of that creation and shaping.” This is very interesting for LLT as a whole as this new Web offers meaningful ways in authentic contexts, bringing variety to our work, breaking the routine, getting new experiences, being creative, and “meeting” our students (http://www.elearningguide.net/guides/te-GUIDES-TUTORS-EN.pdf). Web 2.0 can contribute immensely to intercultural education.

What is intercultural education?

First of all, intercultural education is not the same as cultural training. The French professor Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (2007) tells us that “Understood as a knowledge of the Other, cultural training remains external to the act of training because it rests upon a discourse of categorization and attribution particularly on the basis of factual and descriptive knowledge.” What she means is that knowledge and facts about a culture (the Other’s or one’s own) do not necessarily contribute to intercultural education. In other words, the “old thinking about culture” (Holliday 2009), which tended to present objective recipes for intercultural communication (if you meet somebody from China, you should do this or that and say this or that), was a product of that creation and shaping. In this context, intercultural education is dynamic, involving interaction and negotiation and is driven by the particular cultural contexts of learners and teachers.

Fred Dervin explores how teachers can use the Living Web (Web 2.0) for intercultural education in language learning and teaching.
Technology that) and relied far too much on the wobbly concept of culture, should be put aside when trying to educate interculturally. As such, the concept of “culture” cannot be satisfactorily defined and described, and can lead to confusion, contradictions and manipulations. Alongside a handful of other researchers (Nynäs and Illman in Finland, Jack in Australia, Holliday in the UK), I propose a critical or reflexive intercultural approach, which aims at preparing learners to experience “free” interactions with others, which move away from unfair objectivist treatments of the self and otherness (you are Finnish so you can’t understand) and mediate interculturality (i.e. transfer savoir-faire such as to be able to analyze, interpret and question stereotypes and cultural recipes). In order to reach these goals, the approach concentrates on identity construction and the use of culture in discourse (how people refer to their culture in order to explain something they do or say, or explain themselves). It considers seriously, in a coherent and consistent way, the fact that everyone is diverse, and has thus multiple identities. At the same time, the approach understands and tries to take in contexts and situations in which these multiple identities can be reduced in front of an Other through stereotypes and representations, or even lies (hierarchy, political correctness, intimidation). All in all, a critical/subjectivist approach to intercultural education in LLT is not interested in the question “what is culture?” (Such as Finnish, German, Mexican, American cultures) but in how do we talk about culture and for what purposes?

How can we combine Web 2.0 with intercultural education?

What is clear from the assertions in the previous section is that Web 2.0 should not be used to find evidence of other cultures or identities. In fact, language learners should be led to reflect on how to make intercultural communication more respectful of individuality and how people use identities and cultures to talk about themselves, construct who they are, and manipulate others. Project pedagogy and task-based learning represent good alternatives for combining Web 2.0 and interculturality. The following questions can frame a long-term project aimed at developing awareness of subjectivist interculturality: What does it mean to be Finnish, American, German, French? Can we get rid of national stereotypes (but also other types of stereotypes)? Is it a lottery win to be born in Finland? Why? Does culture explain everything I do and say?

Web 2.0 can be used for activities like document gathering (mining information, accompanied with critical analysis); authoring/creating; virtual ethnography (Hine 2000), through which learners can collect field notes, set up focus groups/interviews with other technology users, observe “lurkers,” cooperate and participate, and to distribute questionnaires.

The following lists of Web 2.0 applications represent a pedagogy...
Applications for working with data and ideas

The four important skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) can be worked upon simultaneously with intercultural education using the following applications. These tools can be used to mine data and ideas (how people construct their cultures and identities in videos, texts, speeches), share/speak about data/phenomena, and to create new material about that data/phenomena.

The first logical use of Web 2.0 is for gathering bookmarks that can be shared with others if students are asked to work in pairs or groups. Social bookmarking is useful for students to share, organize, search, and manage the bookmarks of the resources that they retrieve. For example, http://delicious.com allows users to access and share their bookmarks from any computer, which is practical when learners work in pairs or groups. Students can also leave comments and notes about tasks to be completed on a virtual wall: www.wallwisher.com.

Wordle (www.wordle.net) is an application which can be used for getting a quick impression of what is in a document. Users copy and paste a text document (either from Word or straight from a blog), and Wordle returns a cloud-like figure (word cloud), where the words that appear more frequently in the original document are bigger than others. This is useful when introducing a topic such as definitions of culture, identity, stereotypes. It can give a quick idea of how culture is used and understood in a certain document, and it can also allow identifying stereotypes and representations.

At www.surveymonkey.com, students can easily create a survey (questionnaire) and send it to people or copy and paste a link to the questionnaire on a website, Facebook, or a blog. In terms of creativity, Web 2.0 offers unlimited possibilities. Students can create documents that can be placed in a classroom or online, where they can summarize mined data, give examples of data, or provide analysis. They can also produce documents on “what they have learned about culture, identity, communication, intercultural competence” or themed documents with titles such as “What is a stereotype?” or “How can we really meet others?”

Here are some examples of creative applications:

- Make posters: http://www.blockposters.com
- Make slides online that can be shared: http://280slides.com/Editor
- Edit pictures with image editor Phoenix Online: http://aviary.com
- “Cleanse” stereotypical images or “stereotypize” images in order to...
to reinforce how stereotypes work and are created).

- Make mind-maps: [http://www.bubbl.us](http://www.bubbl.us)
- Make videos: [http://www.videonormal.com](http://www.videonormal.com) users write a scenario first, then decide on what kind of characters and places they want to include, and input data into the online program, which makes a nice video out of it. Students imagine, for example, how people from different countries talk to each other about their cultures and make a version without stereotypes.
- Add subtitles on any video: [http://desub.com](http://desub.com) (students can be asked either to translate into any language — not necessarily their own — or write some comments on the video content).
- Podcasting: [http://audio lucrative sourceforge.net](http://audio lucrative sourceforge.net) (Students easily create audio documents that they post on the internet and share. Examples of good practice: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eb18tk1gE&feature=player_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6eb18tk1gE&feature=player_embedded)).

Applications Involving Others

The following applications lead to more interaction with the outside world. Learners can be given multiple tasks in order to allow them to meet others in the living web. In an educational context, evidence of what has been achieved and done for any set task should be provided by the students. To evidence their work, students can use JingProject ([www.jingproject.com](http://www.jingproject.com)) to provide screenshots or videos of on-screen actions.

One of the most interesting and stimulating tools for involvement with others is Multi-User Virtual Environments (or MUVEs). According to Nelson and Ketelhut (2007) “Educational MUVEs have emerged in recent years as a form of social construction-based educational software” — which is in line with the idea of subjectivist interculturality. A few studies about the use of MUVEs in LLT and for intercultural education have recently been published: Cooke-Plagwitz, J. (2009), Wang, C., Song, H., Xia, F., and Yen, Q. (2009) and William C. Diehl and Esther Prins (2009).

MUVEs are online 3-D virtual environments, which are immersive. Users are required to create their own avatars (virtual representations of themselves) to navigate and create environments. For communication purposes, text messages, audio conversations (through voice over internet protocol (VoIP), and avatars’ non-verbal gestures (e.g., waving, thumbs-up) can be used. Unlike games, there are no pre-determined player goals in MUVEs. The most famous MUVE is Second Life (SL), which can be downloaded at [http://secondlife.com](http://secondlife.com).

For language education, SL can lead to informal learning, such as: “Yesterday a cheerful Italian gave me a Blabber translator, so we started teaching each other Italian and Hungarian using English as the common language, which was real fun, especially since we...”
What can we observe in environments like Second Life for intercultural education? We can watch people's behaviors in different SL locations. How do they link national identities and created identities? Can you guess where people come from? If so, explain what clues helped. Converse with SL residents on various topics related to interculturality. Set up a class where your learners can mediate their knowledge on intercultural education. A tool such as SL can help teachers to cover all the methods for working on intercultural communication as previously presented: mining, virtual ethnography, interviewing, and observing. It may also encourage students to learn to work together.

Bear in mind when working with MUVEs that students need to be fully prepared for set tasks and the advantages and potential problems of MUVEs; students' performance must be monitored, post-task reflection is essential, and teachers and peers should provide feedback on what has taken place. Teachers should also beware of the fact that harassment, spamming, intolerance, and racism can occur in MUVEs and can hurt or shock students. The second tool for involvement is social networking, and especially micro-blogging. Many social networking applications that are available in Web 2.0 (Facebook, MySpace, Twitter) have a lot to offer for LLT and intercultural education. Amongst other things, they permit feedback; they have conversational, collaborative and communal qualities and they can allow support for interaction between learners and Others. Their major disadvantage is that boundaries between the private and the public are unclear, so students should create separate accounts for school work.

Microblogging is the posting of short messages similar to SMS (text messages up to 140 characters), which may also include photos or sound clips. These can be sent from a computer, a mobile phone or other mobile device. The following video gives a concrete example of how Twitter can be used in LLT in primary education: http://www.teachers.tv/video/37390 (jump to 1:50).

Conclusions
We need to be vigilant about technocentrism, putting aside education and pedagogy and concentrating only on technological aspects. As always in LLT, progression, reinforcement, and assessment need to be taken into account. We need time to think how, when, why and for how long we should use the tools presented here. What are their advantages and drawbacks? What good do they offer to intercultural education? What specific objectives are we trying to reach when including them in our teaching?

In such hyperplural worlds as ours (the plural form is intentional), these tools seem vital for working within the subjectivist approach detailed here and to avoid categorizing, fixed and naïve cultural training. The main outcomes of combining Web 2.0 and intercultural technology

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education in LLT are the exercise of critical skills, learning how to spot identity strategies (others’ — self’s), and noticing stereotypes quickly. Finally, based on these skills, learning how to react in an ethical and “individuality-respectful” fashion.

Blogs for Language Training
- http://ictforlanguageteachers.blogspot.com
- http://osieva.typepad.com
- Video about using social networking in teaching and learning:
- Lists of free resources on the Internet:
  - http://www.boxoftricks.net/?page_id=29
  - The European Network: Social Media and Language Learning, 6 key dialogues:
  - http://www.elearningeuropa.info/languagelearning

References

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