Title of Project:
Online professional development and intercultural competence:
A qualitative study of learning processes and outcomes

Researcher:
Erin Marie McCloskey
Harvard Graduate School of Education
emccloskey@post.harvard.edu

Research Supervisor:
M. Stone Wiske

Erin Marie McCloskey

Abstract:

Intercultural competence and communication skills have recently gained attention as essential elements of participation in economic, social, and civic arenas -- arenas which are increasingly co-created internationally, mediated by technologies, and cultivated by diverse users who enact unique and nuanced cultural, linguistic and technological traditions within these contexts. Developing the intercultural and communicative sensitivities to negotiate such spaces, however, has rarely been incorporated into teacher professional development (TPD) efforts, despite the rapid proliferation in students' lives of communicative media that afford them unprecedented access to and engagement with people and ideas from around the world. Not surprisingly, recent studies of EFL teachers in Europe reveal that many cannot ably target sophisticated objectives in both language and culture in the EFL classroom.

Recent innovations in teacher professional development suggest that online learning offers a potentially powerful lever in such pursuits, but few empirical studies have investigated teachers of foreign language. My dissertation aims to fill this gap in the knowledge base by studying an online course for EFL teachers from around the world, who join together in a virtual classroom and learn to orchestrate classroom projects that connect their EFL students with each other, across cultures, and via technologies. I will address questions of how technological, linguistic and cultural considerations impact the teachers' experience in the course, what they learn, and how it translates into practice. My results should shed light on dilemmas in EFL education, EFL teacher professional development, and the role of networked technologies to support both endeavors.