



Title of the Project: Developing Transnational Repertoires:
Adolescents' Language and Literacy Practices in a Digitally
Mediated Network

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Final Report

Motivation for the Research

Digital technologies open up more possibilities to cross borders physically and virtually in this interconnected world. Although we live in the local community, we can live with a greater sensibility of transnationalism through online connectivity. Despite the interconnectivity and circulations of language and text via digital technologies, little is known about how we can use digital technologies to examine the interconnectivity of students' language and literacy practices in classroom settings. In this digital era, as people can communicate readily via online, this study also attempts to broaden the concept of transnational communities with those who cross virtual borders, such as participating in global digital communities. The aim of this research is to discover: (1) how to utilize digital technologies for adolescents' language and literacy practices across borders and (2) how to broaden the concept of a transnational community via digital technologies. Responding to these purposes, this study intentionally recruited Korean adolescents, who live physically, linguistically, or metaphorically near or on the borders of two different countries, to explore their language and literacy practices by deterritorializing the concept of borders.

Research Questions

1. How do Korean adolescents near or on the border engage in multimodal composing in a digitally mediated transnational community, and in what ways do students use digital tools to express themselves and communicate with one another?
2. How do the adolescents negotiate multiple languages and modes in the global community?
3. How do the adolescents shape their identities in relation to nationhood as they engage in intercultural communication?



Research Methodology

I employed design-based research (Barab & Squire, 2004) and ethnographic methods (Marcus, 1995; Murthy, 2011). Design-based research can provide thick descriptions of events and contexts in a research setting as “researchers and practitioners work together to produce meaningful change in contexts of practice” (Design-based Research Collective, 2003, p. 6). I worked closely with teachers and two groups of Korean adolescents in two nations by connecting them via Write4Change in developing an online community and co-designing the curriculum. The first focal case of this study is Korean American adolescents living in a northeastern state in the United States. The second focal case study is South Korean adolescents living near the geopolitical border between North Korea and South Korea. I recruited a public high school near the area because I assumed that they might have a high sensibility of the border because of the unique sociopolitical and geographical context of their living situation. In total, 20 students participated in their hybrid classrooms with their teachers. The two groups of Korean adolescents engaged in multimodal writing with their teachers and utilized digital tools. Data were collected over one year. Multiple data sources included artifacts (e.g., students’ writings, postcards, lesson plans, meeting notes), interviews, field notes, analytics from the platform, and surveys. For analysis, I used open coding and a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) and organized data using Atlas.ti to create a codebook. I also used multiple case studies (Stake, 2006) to find similarities or differences across cases.

Summary of Findings

The key finding that emerged from the analysis of the two groups of Korean adolescents’ language and literacy practices in a digitally mediated transnational network was that these students engaged in transnational practices not only by crossing but also by connecting multiple borders in multimodal composing landscapes. For example, as they traversed the complex world of multiple forms of linguistic and semiotic systems in online, physical classrooms, and through handwritten postcards, they learned how to create a mutual learning community together that allowed them to build a sense of membership and develop their transnational identities. Through the networked language practices with audiences, who used a different language as their primary language, the students showed flexibility in their language use and practices, shifting their contact language from English to multiple forms of languages across spaces in the platform, representing their identities in mixed languages, and replacing language with images and drawings. Over time, both groups of students positioned themselves as mutual language learners who were learning different languages from one another. This transnational language pedagogy (i.e., connecting with authentic audiences for language practices) facilitated students’ self-directed language learning through online searches, using translation as a tool and collaboration with their peers as another resource for language learning.

Implications

This study sought to find ways young people could engage in meaning-making across borders regardless of their physical locations, languages, and cultures, as well as participate readily in collaborative composing with new innovative tools across time and space. The findings of this study highlight the need to connect language learners with authentic audiences in classroom settings beyond their local classrooms and communities. The results of the research also help researchers and teachers understand how these young people’s individual or collaborative



practices move “across interactions among people, things, texts, contexts, modes, and media” (Stornaiuolo et al., 2017, p. 72) in a multilingual context. Methodologically, the study was beneficial as it employed a design-based study approach and allowed the researcher to co-design curriculum to suit students’ various proficiency language levels and to meet their need for language learning. This study shows that we need new analytical tools to examine students’ language uses with modes in digital spaces. Teachers need support to take up this connected approach across borders and to use it in their classrooms for their students’ language and literacy practices. One way to support teachers would be designing curriculum for/with students, and another way would be to find other teachers and students who could work together in a long-term partnership. In addition, policymakers can support these efforts by providing digital platforms for teachers to connect youth globally and make open-source curriculum available for teachers.



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