Being an e-fly on the wall, observing an EFL computer-mediated teacher[*]

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> 'Ai como é difícil isso... Só espero passar logo esses dias...e poder olhar pra trás e ver q valeu a pena... ou q deu resultado..pois há tanta gente desacreditada... e eu quero provar que é possível ensinar em contextos mediados por computador...' - Ana, an EFL teacher, on e-education.

This contribution to the table is made in the form of a discussion about some of the existing connections between computer-mediated language teaching/learning and intercultural and technological aspects. A concise review of the literature on computer-mediated learning is used as background for the discussion of the intercultural nature of the problems arising in online education. Selected passages from 9 chat sessions between the students and the instructor in an EFL online course and a set of e-mails exchanged between the teacher and the technical team that assisted her will be used to illustrate the discussion from the perspective of an insider who is not immediately participating in the teaching. The presentation will try to address questions concerning the cultural skills in online course and the differences in participants' cultural construction and expectations of online learning contexts. It seems that, although the need for co-construction of a local culture between teachers and students has been a given on face-to-face instructional contexts, in online learning environments this co-construction of organizational, pedagogical and technical perspectives has the potential to make online teaching and learning (im)possible.

Introduction

In this paper I will attempt to discuss some of the existing connections between

computer-mediated language teaching/learning and intercultural and technological

aspects[1]. No strict definition of culture as 'nationality' will be adopted here because of its

obvious lack of uniformity/unity as a concept. In this respect the literature offers evidence of how hard it is to study e-communication across national cultures and to correlate different communicative patterns with different nationalities. Frank & Toland (2002), for example, address research questions as to how cultural background affects the extent to which e-students from different nationalities communicate through e-mail with educators and other students for academic and social reasons. They examined Australian and Fijian students' use of e-mail and found out that the Australians used e-mail significantly more and were more active in discussion lists than the Fijians. This was credited to cultural differences between the Australian Individualist cultural background in opposition to the Fijian Collectivist culture[2]. Although students from the collectivist background tended to ask more questions than the individualistic students, their questions were more likely to focus on group formation, reduction of assignment ambiguity, and social interaction with their peers, while individualistic students were more likely to volunteer answers, maybe because they felt less anxious about "losing face" among their peer group. Although studies like this tend to stimulate our curiosity, questions remain as to what extent we can think of 'national culture' as a homogeneous concept. Frank & Toland were not able to account for the reason why students with rural background used the email less than those from urban background within the same nationality and as to how unequal access to technology within the same country affect different patterns of electronic communication.

Therefore because I am still toiling with the concept, I will not use a strict definition but will adopt instead a commonsensical view on 'culture' as the set of values, practices

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[2] According to Gooderham & Nordhaug (2001), the 'Individualism-Collectivism' dimension tries to capture the variable degrees with which people tend to focus on themselves and their immediate families rather than take care of some wider collectivity such as the extended family or clan.

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and beliefs 1) that we construct through social interaction, 2) that makes our symbolic exchanges possible, and 3) that we share and are defined by it as a social group.

To discuss intercultural communication and e-education, I'll report on a case study of the struggle of a young teacher – I'll call her Ana - trying to be a mediator and a tutor in an online EFL course called WebEnglish[3], and having to deal with participants' different cultural backgrounds concerning their views of what course design and online learning involve. WebEnglish developed at Labler-Laboratório de Leitura e Redação at UFSM, is a course that aims at fostering students' Internet communication skills, by using basic linguistic functions in English as a Foreign Language. Through Internet navigation, e-mail messages and chat sessions, students solve questions and tasks and report to the group both on their virtual explorations and on their more personal experiences.

Because e-learning is too recent an area of study to have a wide array of shared knowledge between technical support, teachers and students. Different conceptions, in turn, can create a stressful and turbulent territory on which we must operate in our attempts to develop distance learning computer programs.

Such different values, practices and beliefs concerning online education roughly relate to:

1. the course design itself, i.e., the extent to which the technological support team and the course designers – Ann and the teacher adviser that works with her - are aware of the students' pedagogical needs;

2. both teachers' and the students' degree of expertise in using technological tools and access to hardware and their anxiety in facing the challenge of making the

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[3] Syllabus, scheduled activities and plans available at http://coralx.ufsm.br/labler/webenglish/

transition from the traditional classroom to a context whose culture we are just beginning to construct and get familiar with;

3. Ann's anxiety in becoming a virtual teacher and having to motivate students, the other course designer and the technical support to keep their involvement with the course (students' lack of time to spend with course activities because they have to work; depart of not paid members of the project to get better paid positions; the other teacher's need to give attention to other areas of her professional life, etc).

These cultural expectations, beliefs and practices form a chaotic picture not entirely strange to many of the people that want to work with online education in Brazilian public universities today. In a recent inventory of her academic life and her involvement with education and technology, Vera Menezes Paiva (2002) states that, contrary to what complaints lead us to believe, there is federal financial support for online education today in Brazil, as long as you have a theoretically sound and innovative project. At our lab at UFSM, after a five-year project, we have finally verified that this is true, but I still think that you have to make too big an effort to get support for an obviously noble cause. Things should be easier and reward should come sooner.

In addition to low-income levels supporting federal students and teachers, online learning entails a set of more general questions as to how are we best to use web-designed resources. The philosophical principle that 'content should be freely reusable so as to make knowledge available as common knowledge for the common good' (Keats, 2003:2) usually associated with open content and free software grow in importance as we attempt to improve online education[4]. As we know, this simple assumption is

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[4] The literature has detected that paying can sometimes create an ideology of: 'Now I've paid, and I expect you to teach me' (Nulden, 2001) that can influence negatively the process of fostering students' autonomy.

complicated in real life. Among other things, we have few online publications that grant free access to users and few researchers are willing to publish actual results of their projects, showing flaws and accomplishments in their research so that other people may profit from their experience.

Such economic and philosophical considerations set the context for my observation as a fly on the virtual wall of an online EFL course. My perspective here is that of an insider – more precisely, a teacher adviser - who is not immediately interacting with the students but who participated of all the stages of the teaching process, namely the planning, designing, elaborating and evaluating of the course.

In studying the process through which our teacher Ana goes through, I'd like to foster a discussion about what I call a problem of intercultural communication in computer-mediated language teaching/learning.

At the structural level, universities like the one I work at lack a policy for distance education which means that no specific budget, time or effort is specially dedicated to developing the area. That depends on individual teachers' persistence.

At the pedagogical level, we need more laboratories, personnel, and time to really be able to incorporate the discussion about technology and education into our classrooms in a systematic way. Our pre-service teachers still resist to get involved with "less" important matters like info-literacies in favor of traditional schooling where they can practice the foreign language they will be teaching in schools.

In a paper from 1993, Jay Lemke predicted that schooling as a learning model will be out of site in 50-year time, with schools being replaced by libraries. By then, 'Education will not be the foundation of a common global culture; only shared technologies will

interface between diverse communities' (p.5). In such a social and cultural order, local knowledge and learning autonomy will be a given. But do we all share the same horizon of expectation?

Methodology

Because I took part in the design and implementation of WebEnglish and because the course was the departing point for Ana's Master's thesis, I felt that I owe her some reflection on the work dynamics that we had established.

To do that, I took an ethnographic approach to this virtual study (Paccagnella, 1997; Nocera, 2002) by adopting an insider's perspective of a fly on the wall observing Ana while she acted as the teacher in the course, interacting with the students in a set of chat sessions. Nine (09) of these online chat sessions and a set of e-mails exchanged between her, me and the technical support team were analyzed to let a set of categories to emerge from the data. Ana acted as both my informant and collaborator in the data interpretation process.

As the fly on the virtual wall, I experienced three stages in the analysis:

Stage 1

In this stage my status as participant in the research group granted me the proximity I needed to make Ana aware of the purpose of my research. The practice that predominates is active observation and the record of the interactions and communications is saved on hard disk.

Stage 2

In the second stage I identified some relevant and key issues in the chats and e-mails. Through focused ethnographic interviews, Ana provided in-depth

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knowledge and interesting accounts about her personal experiences and the community's cultural framing.

Stage 3

In the last stage, a concluding analysis was made so as to arrange the resulting emerging categories found during the research process. The qualitative data was analyzed as text-based discourse as social action (Fairclough, 1989, 1992; Swales, 1998).

The resulting categories that emerged were identified with three major problematic areas: **organizational, pedagogical, and technical aspects**. As I revolve my discussion around these three items, I will argue the obvious - when operating from different pedagogical cultures, we have to recontextualize our pedagogical experience and construct a new shared virtual culture in order to make room for learning.

Results & Discussion
a) **Organizational aspects** of the course have to do with how the program is divided or how each screen should be read to obtain best results. Very often, we find that discrepancies in interpretation result from the local character of any teaching situation, i.e., what works best in one situation may not apply in another context. Therefore, the practical experience as a tutor and student is contingent and will vary according to each course group, topic, and moment.

For example, Ana's beliefs about how students perceive learning and how the online classes ought to be conducted differed from those of one of the teachers in her qualifying committee:

> Bom, eu sei q vc nao tem obrigação de me responder esses questionamentos (...) mas estou te contando pq a Profa. XXX me fez varios questionamentos desde como acontecia

o processo de interação com os alunos na aula virtual e na aula semipresencial. ela me perguntou se eu falava em ingles todo o tempo..e eu disse q tentava..e so recorria a lingua maternal qdo eu sentia q o aluno nao estava entendendo..ou qdo eles mesmo manifestavam q nao estavam entendendo.. ai ela disse q eu tinha "um furo" no meu trabalho..pq eu tentava usar lingua estrangeira todo o tempo em um contexto que os alunos nao poderiam estar entendendo nada....ai eu discordei com ela dizendo q eu achava q eles se manifestavam qdo eles nao compreendiam. A prof XXX tambem nao me disse pq tinha o furo.. só q ela insistiu q acreditava que os alunos nao se manifestavam se estavam entendendo ou nao.. e eu afirmei pra ela q não q achava q eles se manifestavam... agora eu estou com essa duvida..,.sera q eles se manifestam mesmo ou nao?? ou sera q o aluno [simplesmente] desiste de um curso a distancia, sera esse um fator ???
bom..estou cheia de duvidas.... any way... mas isso eh fazer pesquisa nao eh?
Bjus Ana

As I have argued elsewhere (Motta-Roth, 2001), chat sessions can promote effective interaction among students and that in turn can create learning experiences. However, the written dynamics of a chat can become too complicated in initial stages of the course, as Ana explains:

(...) a comunicação escrita pode gerar ambigüidade no discurso, ou ainda a falta de compreensão, então a concentração que se requer neste ambiente é muito alta.

Organizational and pedagogical aspects are directly related because one serves as epistemological context for the other.

b) pedagogical aspects relate to how learning and teaching are perceived by students and teachers and their role in the process: Ideally, our aim in designing WebEnglish was to foster students' autonomy and co-responsibility in the language learning process, through student-group and student-technology interaction so that information is shared and decisions are negotiated in a collaborative process.

She argues that differently from face-to-face interaction, for the organization of a virtual environment, each participant's performance is a paramount component, especially at the beginning of the course where no cultural framework is yet shared. As

the group starts the course sometimes a few minutes would go by before she realized what was her student's problem. Also, the first classes may sometimes offer an extra burden to the student because he has to learn how to interact with the technological interface without the immediate visual feedback from the teacher and has to rely on his capacity to run risks, read from the screen and explore the site.

One thing that must be mentioned is that, similarly to our students, we teachers also have a hard time adapting to distance teaching. Although Ana has taught this course a number of times in a semipresential format, this is the first time it's solely at distance on the Internet. We have a hint at this when she evaluates her first class:

[Na primeira aula] eu pulei uma etapa que eu geralmente faço no curso semipresencial, que é de apresentar os ambientes do curso aos alunos. Eu fiz isso pq tinha como pressuposto que os alunos tinham lido as instruções e que teriam já navegado previamente no ambiente antes da atuação deles na sala virtual. Por outro lado, isso demonstra que os alunos ainda não têm toda essa autonomia esperada pelo professor a distância. Temos que fazer uma primeira semana de aula (ou essa primeira aula introdutória) somente para tirar dúvidas sobre o curso, e tbm para navegar com os alunos no curso para que justamente eles se infobetizem melhor sobre o ambiente e tenham maiores conhecimentos sobre os recursos que eles vão encontrar no curso. Isso tbm chama minha atenção sobre se o design (estou pensando na estrutura de menus, icones, cores, palavra-chaves,etc..) do curso estão realmente adequados!!
(...) A falta de familiarização com o curso gerou este desconforto entre eles... o que possibilitou que se sentissem perdidos. Na segunda aula, devido a ter detectado esse problema, eu torno a falar sobre os recursos que eles tem no curso e a sequencia aconselhada de links e faço uma explicação mais detalhada sobre as aulas, os hiperlinks dessas aulas..como eles podem acompanhar se as tarefas enviadas por eles estao chegando ou nao..enfim..sobre..os ambientes do WE. Hje os alunos não têm dificuldades alguma com o ambiente.

She realizes that she took too much for granted in this virtual context and should have gotten the students acquainted with the site map first instead of assuming that they would do that by themselves.

Horton (2000:517), cited in Weyersbach (2002:22), presents a short list for tips to be remembered when designing an online course[5]:

- Limit the amount and sophistication of technology needed for the course to work;
- Give clear instructions;
- Make students use the system before the course begins;
- Plan the technical support;
- Establish an entrance test for students to verify if they are apt to take the course;
- Give full descriptions of the computer;
- Prepare support systems for eventualities (students' doubts);
- Organize a support system for the design team.

In that respect, the analysis showed that Ana's expectations were different from the way the students perceived their role in the assignments, as can be seen in this exchange when Ana evaluates her first class:

> (...) vale ressaltar que eu esperava que os alunos já estivessem navegado no curso anteriormente a atuação deles no chat, e tivessem principalmente lido as instruções disponibilizadas no site. Eu esperava que trouxessem para esta aula as dúvidas referentes ao funcionamento do curso em si, no entanto, o que realmente podemos observar é que isso não ocorreu, pois alguns alunos não haviam sequer logado ainda no ambiente [conforme passagem abaixo:]
>
> Chuck 18:53:38 prof. what´s the course web site?
> Aline 18:49:42 Where is the class one?

Here the lack of the students' preparation for the first class is evident despite Ana's request that they surfed the site in advance in order to learn about how the site was organized.

Ana recognizes that the transition from face-to-face classrooms to virtual learning environments will depend on our ability to foster students' co-responsibility and autonomy.

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[5] I am grateful to Liane D.M. Wissmann (Mestrado Letras/UFSM) for having pointed out this citation to me from WEYERSBACH, Sheila Riyadh (2002). *Curso de inglês negociado no contexto digital da Internet: relato de uma experiência.* Dissertação de mestrado inédita. PUC – SP.
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Discrepancies in teachers' and students' expectations about each other's roles and responsibilities in the course seem to be a recurrent feature in online learning environments especially in terms of how much interaction the technology, the program and the teacher are able to foster among the students, as Ana explains:

> Em minha opinião, vejo um aspecto negativo nesta aula [primeira], especialmente, pq a interação ficou muito prof-aluno, aluno-prof, e foi muito pequena a interação aluno-aluno. Eu queria que justamente eles se conhecessem melhor, mas não foi assim q ocorreu.

Wissmann (2002:21) cites the results reported by Braga & Costa (2000) of a comparative study of two types of classroom, traditional and virtual. The authors concluded that in the virtual classroom, both the teacher and the students favor a teacher-centered type of interaction indicating that 'changes in patterns of pedagogical interaction do not occur abruptly, but are accomplished gradually, as the participants come to feel familiarized with the new possibilities of the new media and understand more clearly its specificities' (p. 78).

In the following passage from the first class, because students' typing, navigating and linguistic skills and needs are different, each student demands from the teacher a specific solution to each individual doubt and no student-student interaction is established:

> Ana 18:58:04 talks to Chuck yea, Chuck, can u introduce yourself now for the group?
> s.18:58:33 help please, I don´t know my login, neither my password.
> Ana 18:58:39 talks to Gaucho How about Gaucho, who is Gaucho? Could you introduce yourself too? Chuck 18:59:11 Ok.
> Ana 18:59:30 talks to s. ohhh Darling.. it is the login you chosen when you did …you sent your request to the course.. let me try to checkit..wait a minute.
> s.19:00:08 talks to Ana ohhh, i remember it.
> Chuck 19:00:08 I´m Chuck. I´m studing master in Food Science.
> FlyMan 19:00:12 entra na sala.
> s. 19:00:18 talks to Ana let me check it out.
> FlyMan 19:00:34 Please teacher. Help me!
> s. 19:00:39 talks to Ana bingo!!!
> Gaucho 19:00:41 talks to Ana I no am understand!
> Ana 19:01:00 talks to s. you chose the login: s. and a password.. do you remember it?

> FlyMan 19:01:10 What I have to do ?
> s. 19:01:23 yes, I do now

Here, the students have not yet perceived, as they do a couple of classes later on in the course, that the virtual environment demands a collaborative ethics for learning to occur.

In relation to that, Little (2001) calls attention to the 'social-interactive dimension of learner autonomy and its implications for the pedagogical dialogue'. Autonomy in this case results from an interactive process defined by the interdependency of each individual as a social being[6]. In online courses that use chatrooms, participants get used to negotiating meanings and decisions within the group. Since the focus of attention tend to change from the teacher to the group, autonomy and critical awareness of the learning process seems more evident once the group dynamics is established and course advancement becomes dependent on the negotiation of the group (Motta-Roth, 2001:240-41). My experience with using chat sessions as a pedagogical site since 1998 has shown me that chatrooms with more than 5 participants present several problems related to interaction such as unclear thread of interaction, lack of coherence and cohesion in question-answer patterns, difficulty in identifying relevance of each contribution.

c) technical perspectives refer to learners' experience with online environments and how the technical support group in charge of 'making the program work' relate to the course: We thought that the technical team should work close to the pedagogical process so that we could exchange information about teaching and learning and technology so

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[6] I thank Liane D.M. Wissmann for calling my attention to Little's views on the social-interactive dimension of the learner's autonomy. Shepointed out to me that "Deve-se reconhecer que a autonomia do aprendiz é muito mais um produto da interdependência do que da independência. Sendo assim, me parece muito cedo para que os alunos, antes mesmo do início do curso, tenham esta autonomia que a professora espera deles."

that the virtual course would be appropriate. Timetables were defined and the design of the course established.

The analysis of the e-mail messages and chat sessions showed different horizons of expectations among participants:

1) Ana tended to think that because her students had previous experience in dealing with virtual environments, it would be easier to have them navigate the course.

> Meu objetivo principal neste primeiro momento, então, era auxiliar os alunos com problemas técnicos e solucionar alguma dúvida que pudesse surgir sobre o curso. Eu acreditava que os meus alunos eram usuários ativos da Internet e isso facilitaria a interação entre os participantes, no entanto, nem sempre foi assim.

As pointed out before, sometimes she ended up having to interact with students individually because they were having to deal with difficulties at different pace. Even when previous experience with typing and Internet surfing is required from participants, very seldom is the group homogeneous:

> Eu acho que dei conta de estabelecer uma interação nesta seção de bate papo pq tenho uma grande agilidade com digitação, o que talvez para um outro professor seria um grande problema! Vc acha que o discurso na sala de aula virtual não fluiu muito? (…) eu acho que o discurso se torna muito topicalizado nestes casos, justmente pelo diferenças de conhecimento, de agilidade com a tecnlogia que os participantes tem, q tu achas?

Had the technical support been more effective, the technological interface would have been better explored by the students beforehand and under supervision of the technical team. This showed us that our planning of technical support and the support system available for the students are still faulty.

2) Another source for chaos is the imbalance between the speed of problem-solving solutions and new problems arising from the implementation of the solutions. In our course, the technical support was too optimistic about their capacity to solve problems as we can see at two different moments:

> Ana,

Testei várias versões de terceiros para fóruns e chats, poucas funcionaram e todas apresentaram bugs.… Infelizmente, não vou me dar tão bem com o chat :(.
Tudo o que pude fazer foi instalar e adaptar uma versão de terceiros (dLeitChat) que já funcionava no curso anteriormente. Bom... funcionaria bem não fosse aquele bug da rolagem que não consegui resolver. :(

One of the main features in online course design is the extension of time needed to get

a program to work reasonably. Usually, problems cannot be anticipated in all their

extension:

Ana
>>> tentarei <<<< entregar o curso com todo o sistema básico com o suporte a professores + sist. de acompanhamento (como vc pediu...) pronto." Muita coisa aconteceu depois deste e-mail lembra? Percebeu-se que o buraco era mais fundo do que se imaginava... e eu precisaria de um bom tempo para tornar o web multi usuário (lembra que eu expliquei que seria necessário reprogramar praticamente tudo?)
Paulo

Also, as the web becomes increasingly complex, security systems of institutions that host

online courses become tighter:

Ana, Terminei o fórum! Está em http://coralx.nonono. Ainda não funciona porque preciso ir copiar as dbs! (não posso enviar as dbs direto de casa devido ao sistema de segurança da UFSM.)
Um abraço
Paulo

3) Ultimately, what becomes evident is that both Ana and the technical team had

different views on the amount of commitment needed and what was necessary to make

the course work adequately:

Oi Paulo e Douglas, eu estou escrevendo por uma última vez para pedir uma coisa para vcs: Eu PRECISO URGENTEMENTEEEEEEEEE q VCS me façam os LINKs DAS RESPOSTAS DAS ATIVIDADES DAS AULAS 8 e 9 no Activity CRONOGRAM. Será tão dificil TERMINAR ISSO PRA MIM??? POXA, eu preciso ver as resposta e não consigo, JÁ DESDE JULHO Q EU PEÇO PRONTO ISSO…! POR FAVOR, será possível TERMINAR, PELO MENOS, ISSO? APOSTO Q VCS fazem ISSO RAPIDINHO!

Final considerations

Although I bear in mind all the immense amount of time and effort put in this enterprise and the less than satisfactory results we still obtain every now and then, the positive evaluations we receive from our students have kept us going.

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1) :-) Hello teacher!!! Acredito que o curso é uma forma incrível de educar e ensinar, pois é uma nova tecnologia de ensino que com certeza num futuro próximo será rotineira, devido a praticidade e facilidade de acesso, onde tanto a pessoa que tem condições como a que não possui computador pode usufruir do método.

2) O site do curso foi muito bem elaborado.

3) A seleção de conte'udos foi muito bem escolhida e pode ser bem aproveitada.
4) Atinge todos os objetivos para uma conversação bem sucedida na web.
5) Não usa provas, avaliando o que realmente se sabe e não "decoreba".
6) O curso promoveu a interação entre os colegas, por isso houve conversas e a possibilidade de conhecer melhor a turma.

In addition, as I told you in the beginning, Ana is young and her enthusiasm and dedication to the students have guaranteed our success:

A professora sempre tentou nos ajudar nas dúvidas e nos auxiliar quando era necessário. Isso me estimulou a gostar do curso e da matéria. A professora é bem legal e todos os alunos gostaram dela.

The media hype led us to believe that technology would guarantee the improvement and facilitation of knowledge production, teaching and learning, however we have not yet been able to fully account for it (McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996; Ahern, 2001), have not yet been able to compensate for inadequate capital investment, institutional resistance to change and weaknesses in institutional policy in both developed and developing countries (Steiner, 2001).

If we consider the annual budget for Brazilian public universities and the estimated $US25,000 needed to develop an online course in a US university today, with the additional $US5,000 to maintain it (Keats, 2003:2)[7], we might believe that we should better forget about e-learning altogether. Online education development is an expensive enterprise and needs still to take advantage of communication technology with freedom and solidarity as is suitable in a free and solidary society (Cooper, 2002). Payment by students is an issue in point although the literature has detected that paying can sometimes create an ideology of: 'Now I've paid, and I expect you to teach me' (Nulden, 2001) that can blow in our faces.

It seems that, although the need for co-construction of a local culture between teachers, students and technical support has been a given on face-to-face instructional contexts, in online learning environments this co-construction of organizational, pedagogical and technical perspectives has the potential to make online teaching and learning (im)possible.

There are lessons, though, that have been learned from previous experiences that are worth mentioning (Steiner, 2001):

a) '**User feedback** is essential' and '**effective communication** is crucial': How each individual **Interacts, i.e.,** relates to the group to find solutions for problems, is determinant of how s/he will learn. Like in open source projects, any online education project, instead of having a structure of different levels rising above one another, needs a structure with a flat circular hierarchy that maintains an ongoing flux of contributions from participants, as I have argued elsewhere about the role

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[7] The primary source of this information is referred to, by Keats (2003), as NWUKE, O.K. (2001). "Reforms in higher education and the use of information technology," *Issues in Higher Education, Economic Growth, and Information*

of chats in EFL learning and teaching (Motta-Roth, 2001). But even so, the figure of a leadership and responsibility are central to convince others to give contributions so that the process keeps going (Keats, 2003:7);

b) **Trust and Co-Responsibility** are fundamental. Perceived value depends on participation in the implementation of the project. Trust of each participant in the abilities and integrity of one another, especially when these members do voluntary work and are easily mobile (Keats, 2003:7) like the ones in public institutions in Brazil. Co-Responsibility of the group for the creation of their learning community within the course is an important component because I believe that 'users are likely to place greater value on content when they have been included in its planning and development' (Keats, 2003:14).

These are underpinnings for a culture of online pedagogy and awareness of how they combine in the process can lead participants to successful e-learning. Teachers and students must develop common awareness of how virtual environments construct patterns of interaction that rely on such features as readiness for autonomy (Braga, 2000; Paiva, 2001; Motta-Roth, 2001). This in turn demands a 'dialogic understanding of cognition, learning and language [that] requires a quite different form of pedagogical discourse, always immediate, embedded in the here and now of the teacher and her or his learners, focussed on jointly understanding the process in which they are engaged' (Little, 2001). Such is the basis for the co-construction of a common learning culture between course participants.

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As long as we fall short from developing common e-literacies and dialogic expectations about e-learning, our attempts to learn and teach in electronic environments will be less successful, even if we manage to obtain the financial support that have been absurdly lacking for public education in Brazil as far as I can remember.

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