Title of example of practice:	TaLLICo Project

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Institution and initiating department/faculty
(i.e. where example of practice takes/took place):
Waterford IT, Department of Humanities. An integral part of a module on Intercultural Communication for Language students.

Departments/faculties in which initiative implemented/to be implemented:
School of Humanities. Students on BA Languages and Marketing and BA International Business for Irish and Erasmus students.

Abstract
(QA question: What are/were you trying to do?)
Tandem Language Learning for Intercultural Competence (TaLLICo) is an on-going project at Waterford Institute of Technology, Ireland, with the overall aim of stimulating intercultural dialogue between students of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The context of the research was an intercultural communication module for language learners (full-time WIT students and visiting Erasmus or International students). As part of the module, students participate in face-to-face tandem language learning with native speaker partners, which involves meeting a minimum of five times (anywhere, anytime). Students are given guidance on the principles of Tandem Language Learning, and are given suggestions for topics, if necessary. They present a written reflective report at the end of the module, this forms part of the assessment process.

The project aims to:

- foster meaningful intercultural dialogue

- improve linguistic and intercultural skills

- encourage awareness of 'self' and 'other' through reflection

- develop the students' sense of autonomy and reciprocity

The approach used by the project researchers was to review student reports over the past 4 years, to show the progression in their linguistic and intercultural competence. Key words were identified i) to show evidence of reciprocity in the tandem exchanges, (ii) to identify growth in awareness of self and other, and (iii) to show students' emotional reaction at different stages of the partnership.

Student reports show evidence of increased motivation to use the language they are learning, progression in linguistic and intercultural competence, positive attitudes towards intercultural dialogue, a deeper and more diverse experience of 'otherness', and a reduction in anxiety of Irish students before placement abroad.

Background – contextual issues giving rise to the initiative

(QA questions: Why are/were you trying to do it? / What are/were the aims and objectives?)

The idea of the project began to form when the coordinators noticed that there was little intercultural dialogue between Erasmus and Irish students, at either a social or academic level A second concern was to provide participants with the opportunity for a lived experience in order to inject reality and meaningfulness into the concepts associated with intercultural communication theory.

The main objectives of the project were:

- to encourage social interaction and collaboration between learners of different languages.

- to develop the practice of autonomy and reciprocity in language and intercultural learning.

- to enable students to improve their language and intercultural skills in authentic contexts.

- to create a direct link between language and intercultural learning

- to provide opportunities to reflect on their own and their partner's cultural context and intercultural experiences

- to bridge the gap between knowledge of theories of intercultural communication presented in lectures and development of intercultural competence.

Description of activity or initiative

(QA question: How is/was the activity/initiative implemented?)

In the introductory session, students were given an outline of the principles of tandem language learning (reciprocity and autonomy) and a loose framework within which they could participate in the task of face-to-face tandem language exchange. The first autonomous task was to find a partner who was a learner of their mother-tongue and whose language they were learning. The student partnerships were required to meet for one hour at least five times during the semester. Each student was responsible for

- Agreeing time and location of meetings
- negotiating topics for discussion and setting objectives
- ensuring reciprocity in terms of time and effort
- Recording their reflections and critical analysis of the meetings in their reports

During subsequent weeks, some clarification of the process was given where requested by students, and suggestions made for possible topics.

Students were required to hand in individual written reports before the end of the semester, this formed part of their continuous assessment for the module.

Evaluative comments

(QA questions: What are/were the outcomes? What is/was the impact? Is/was the activity/ initiative successful? How do you know whether or not it works/worked?)

Findings emerging from the analysis of student reflective reports indicate an increase in motivation to improve and use the language, as well as a decrease in anxiety of intercultural exchange and of the prospect of spending a year on Erasmus placement abroad (particularly among Irish students). The students' reports clearly demonstrated a difference between the learner's state of mind at the beginning and the change that occurred or may occur during the collaborative process with a more knowledgeable peer (Vygotsky's ZPD). In their reports they mentioned a growth in awareness of language and cultural identity as well as increased motivation to learn the language and communicate with students who spoke that language. The influence of the Intercultural Communication class allowed them to apply the theories to real situations, and to reflect on these with their partners (e.g. communication style, factors which influence culture, their own beliefs, values and behavioural norms).

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The real success of the initiative is shown by the fact that students continued the contact after the module, or are keen to have tandem partners for other languages they are learning. TaLLICo has now been adopted by other colleagues in the Department and has been integrated as a form of assessment in many language programmes in the Institute.

The project was a recipient of the European Award for Languages 2008.
http://www.leargas.ie/media/EALBooklet2008.pdf

Advice to others

It may be difficult for all students to find partners, particularly for less-widely spoken languages. At WIT we have used the help of the International Office to contact students who may not be part of the course.

Contact fkennedy@wit.ie or afurlong@wit.ie for further details of how this is integrated into students' learning.

Reflection/any other comments

QA question: Is/was that the best way to do it? Why/why not? What improvements or adjustments are needed?

- Our experience was that this is less successful if student participation is not rewarded by integration into the assessment process.

- A list of possible topics or activities was offered to some groups of students, e.g. http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/tandem/tasks-en.html

- The approach is enhanced by following up on face-to-face tandems with e-tandems. This can also be used where there is a problem finding a partner for face-to-face tandem.

Further details

e.g. web links; relevant references/publications; alternative contact names

Kennedy, F. and Furlong, A. 'Face-to-face Tandem Language Learning: a Zone of Proximal Development for intercultural competence?' Paper presented at Royal Irish Academy Conference, University of Limerick, November 2007 (not yet published)

Tandem Server Bochum http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/index.html [accessed 02.06.2009]

Vygotsky L.S., (1962) Thought and Language. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press.

E-tandems: http://www.slf.ruhr-uni-bochum.de/etandem/etindex-en.html [accessed 02.06.2009]