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# Global Teachers: A Model for Building Teachers' Intercultural Competence Online

Docentes globales: un modelo para el desarrollo de la competencia intercultural on-line

## ABSTRACT

Foreign language ability, global awareness, and intercultural communication skills are increasingly recognized as essential dimensions of productive participation in the emerging economic, civic, political and social arenas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Consequently, these skills are being promoted more intentionally than ever across the spectrum of K16 education. This newly articulated set of objectives for today's students implies a concomitant set of competencies in educators. These competencies have not traditionally been a focus of professional development efforts in the United States, and little is known about how best to cultivate these competencies in educators. These competencies can be understood in terms of Byram's (1997) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The principles of ICC development point to online learning as a potentially powerful lever in cultivating teachers' own competencies in this arena. A review of studies of intercultural learning, technologically-mediated intercultural learning and online teacher professional development is offered to suggest how these three domains might overlap. A synthesis of the findings across these literatures suggests a set of principles and educational design features to promote the building of teachers' intercultural competencies. A key finding reveals the unique affordances of networked technologies in online learning opportunities to support the development of intercultural competencies in teachers across all subject areas.

## ABSTRACT (Spanish)

La competencia en lenguas extranjeras, la conciencia global y la comunicación intercultural están cada vez más reconocidas como aspectos esenciales de la participación productiva en el ámbito económico, cívico, político y social del siglo XXI. Como consecuencia, la promoción internacional de estas competencias adquiere una importancia única en el espectro de la educación infantil, básica y secundaria en USA. El conjunto de nuevos objetivos para estudiantes de hoy implica el desarrollo de nuevas competencias entre docentes que no han sido contempladas hasta ahora en las iniciativas de desarrollo profesional llevadas a cabo en USA, y poco se sabe sobre la adquisición de estas competencias entre educadores. Estas competencias pueden entenderse según el modelo de competencia comunicativa intercultural de Byram (1997), cuyos principios de desarrollo se basan en señalar el aprendizaje on-line como una herramienta eficaz para la adquisición de competencias entre docentes. En este artículo se presenta el análisis de varios estudios sobre el aprendizaje intercultural; aprendizaje intercultural y tecnología; y el desarrollo profesional on-line de profesores, con el fin de plantear la posibilidad de las tres dimensiones. En suma, se nos ofrece una serie de principios sobre el diseño educativo que promueven la construcción de estas competencias interculturales en los profesores, entre los que destaca la evidencia de que las tecnologías en red aplicadas al aprendizaje on-line poseen aspectos únicos para desarrollar las competencias interculturales en todas las áreas.

## KEYWORDS

Intercultural, competence, teacher, professional development, on-line, conceptual model, networked technologies. Competencia, intercultural, docente, desarrollo profesional, on-line, modelo conceptual, tecnologías en red.

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## 1. Introduction

In the United States, foreign language ability, global awareness, and intercultural communication skills are increasingly recognized as essential dimensions of productive participation in the emerging economic, civic, political and social arenas of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the call to promote these capacities in today's students has been sounded across the spectrum of K16 and higher education, as well as cross-sector organizations concerned with competitiveness in the global economy (American Council on Education, 2007; Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2009). This newly articulated set of expectations for today's students implies a set of parallel competencies in K16 educators, but little attention has been paid to articulating these competencies for teachers or imagining how to promote them. The most comprehensive understanding of teachers' skills in this arena derives, not surprisingly, from the field of foreign language education, which has been promoting intercultural learning for over a century. Professional preparation documents, such as those prepared by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (2002), imagine teachers who are capable of engaging sophisticated and nuanced interactional, interpretive and analytical skills when interacting with members of foreign cultures, conducting cultural investigations, and encountering cultural artifacts or information, as well as capable of designing educational opportunities that promote similar competencies in students. Conceptual writings about culture in the language classroom affirm the knowledge, skills and dispositions explicated in these professional documents (Byram, Nichols & Stevens, 2001; Fox & Diaz-Greenberg, 2006; Kramsch, 2003). While intended as a description of language teachers, this portrait readily applies to teachers of any content area in this global, mobile and multilingual world.

As envisioned, then, teachers who are capable of promoting intercultural competencies possess knowledge of cultures that is deep, deliberate, and constantly evolving, and this knowledge is used in the service of complex communicative and reflective tasks. Teachers are critical, inquisitive and self-aware, and their dispositions reflect a flexible orientation toward the nature of knowledge and experience. They tolerate uncertainty because they are skilled in the process of broadening their perspectives through deliberate investigation of cultural texts and experiences. Byram's (1997) model of «intercultural communicative competence» (ICC) sufficiently encapsulates the capacities expected of effective teachers in this domain by integrating the skills and knowledge required for sophisti-

cated learning about cultures with the dispositions, metacognition and self-awareness required to employ those skills and knowledge in a meaningful way. This model of intercultural competency will be used in this article as a useful proxy for the skills that teachers need in order to develop students as self- and globally-aware, interculturally sensitive, multilingual participants in global societies.

### 1.1. The promise of online learning for developing ICC (intercultural communicative competence) in teachers

The few existent studies on culture and teachers reveal that they may lack the skills and sense of purpose to teach towards this outcome. Many teachers question the value of targeting culturally-related objectives, have little experience conducting rigorous cultural explorations (Sercu, 2005), or doubt their preparedness to teach in-depth cultural content (Sercu, Mendez & Castro, 2005). Professional development for teachers must adopt a more sophisticated approach that better addresses the skills in culture and pedagogy that teachers require.

Online learning may offer teachers a unique way to meet their professional development needs in the area of ICC. For starters, it could offer a logistically and financially appealing alternative to intercultural travel programs by facilitating teachers' interactions with teachers from other cultures and countries. Beyond overcoming logistical hurdles, online teacher professional development, is increasingly being recognized as a powerful context for teacher learning. Studies of innovations on online TPD (teacher professional development), suggest that online learning can offer teachers opportunities to participate in a professional community, engage in reflective dialog, and build knowledge collectively (Barnett & al., 2002; Wiske & al., 2006). These mechanisms for interaction and community-formation have been widely acknowledged to be effective levers in achieving meaningful, durable impacts of professional development (Hawley & Valli, 1999; Wilson & Berne, 1999). Furthermore, online learning would offer teachers the opportunity to practice and engage their intercultural communication skills within the very technologically-mediated environments that increasingly pervade every sector of our societal participation. It stands to reason that teachers would do well to learn in ways that replicate and reflect the communicative contexts that their students inhabit, indeed the very contexts in which students will apply their emergent intercultural competence.

## 2. Material and methods

The remainder of this article articulates an analytic framework to guide the development of opportunities for teachers to develop intercultural competence through the incorporation of online learning. It represents the intersection between a seldom-targeted set of skills (intercultural competence), a context (teacher professional development) and a medium (online), all for a specific audience (teachers-as-learners). Little empirical literature investigates this unique intersection; therefore, the following framework integrates key principles from a study of empirical literatures that addresses one dimension or a subset of the dimensions articulated above: intercultural learning, technologically-mediated intercultural learning and online teacher professional development.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Intercultural learning

A review of conceptual work on cultural learning models and study abroad research reveals a consensus about the fundamental principles underlying effective learning that leads to ICC (intercultural communicative competence). First, learners must have contact with the non-native culture under investigation; they must be exposed to authentic cultural products and intercultural interactions, and these interactions should take place in the second language (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 1999). Learners must actively reflect on their experiences with the non-native culture in order to learn from them. Both experiential and conceptual learning are advocated (Lange, 2003); this combination engages affect and cognition, another essential component of intercultural learning (Byram, 1997). ICC development is recognized as a developmental process that requires time and multiple cycles of learning (Byram & al., 2001; Lange, 2003; Levy, 2007). Many scholars advocate explicit cultural comparisons (Byram, 1997; Lange, 2003). Opportunities for reflection, discussion with peers from both cultures, negotiation of cultural meanings and revisiting prior conceptions are considered fundamental (Lange, 2003; Levy, 2007; Lo Bianco & al., 1999).

The above-mentioned processes are rigorous,

time-consuming, logistically difficult, and potentially contentious. Cultural information and artifacts are not always readily available in local learning contexts. Regular, sustained contact with members of non-native cultures can be difficult to find and orchestrate. Furthermore, productive discussions and reflections do not simply result automatically from the provision of opportunities for intercultural interaction (De Nooy & Hanna, 2003). They require deliberate cultivation. Finally, we don't naturally see ourselves as cultural beings; because we are immersed in our own culture, we remain unconscious of it and can project our frame of reference onto others (Kramsch, 1993).

### 3.2. Technologically-mediated intercultural learning

The careful design of learning experiences that address the demands and challenges of ICC develop-

**ICC-related online TPD should reflect, in its design, organization, and implementation, an awareness of the cultural dimensions of technologies and of communication. Furthermore, communications and learning activities should capitalize on technologies' ability to provide access to various resources, time for reflection, archived communications, and peer-to-peer discussion and feedback.**

ment would seem to benefit from the smart incorporation of networked technologies. The most obvious advantages are the bridging of geographic distances to connect learners from different backgrounds, as well as the access to examples of abundant sources of cultural content. The following summary includes a discussion of the educational design features that have been shown to promote ICC-related outcomes and the contributions of the Internet and networked communications to enhance those strategies. Consistent with trends in FL (foreign language) education research, the vast majority of these studies occurred in traditional undergraduate language classes (not teacher preparation or professional development) that practiced some form of telecollaboration, in which two classrooms collaborate for mutual linguistic and cultu-

ral learning. Findings are presented in terms of relevant categories of Byram's model of ICC (intercultural communicative competence), with acknowledgement that the categories themselves are fluid, and learning gains often overlap distinct categories.

In addition to straightforward cultural information, knowledge about discourse, communication processes, and cultural variety has been cultivated through Internet-based learning. In just one example, Osuna (2000) found that the abundance of text, video, and

with C2 members from another culture benefitted from having access to multiple and contradictory views. Second, time for deliberation and reflection promoted learning from the various cultural viewpoints represented. Given the importance of cultural comparisons and reflection for intercultural learning, this finding hardly surprises. What bears mention is how the pace of asynchronous communications like email and online discussion boards supported the reflection process. For example, in O'Dowd's (2006)

study of a German-American partnership, students used email to compose thoughtful, in-depth descriptions of their own culture for their tele-collaborators, which stimulated reflection and sustained dialog throughout the semester. The author argues that such deliberation would be unlikely to occur in synchronous communication, where reactions are necessarily more immediate. Together these studies confirm the importance of creating opportunities for reflection and dialog on multiple cultural perspectives, while highlighting the advantage that asynchronous communications can lend to the reflective dialog process.

Intercultural tele-collaborations provided opportunities for students to practice and improve their skills of discovery and interaction. Students' innate possession of these skills varied significantly; while

some students may be naturally predisposed to enact and maintain an ethnographic stance during intercultural dialog, many are not (Bauer & al., 2006; Belz & Muller-Hartmann, 2003; Furstenberg & al., 2001; Hanna & de Nooy, 2003; O'Dowd, 2003, 2006). These skills become even more important in networked communication, where many interactions lack the nonverbal signals that promote understanding (Schneider & von der Emde, 2006). Belz and Muller-Hartmann (2003) found that even professors who are committed to goals of intercultural learning might display ethnocentrism under the stress of real-world tasks, such as tele-collaborating to coordinate an exchange

**While this analysis has demonstrated a potent match between the affordances of technologies and the processes of ICC development, it has shown the equal importance of careful educational design choices and facilitation to assure that technology promotes rather than undermines the goals of ICC. Many ICC studies offered examples of learners that developed their ICC skills by engaging in experiences that forced them to surface their own views, look clearly at them, reflect on them individually, consider alternative perspectives in dialog with others, and revise ideas. Layers of deliberate, structured reflection on cultural information, perspectives and experiences, from the vantage points of learners and teachers, allowed program participants to distance from and evolve their beliefs.**

audio resources on the Internet helped students to build deep understandings about cultural topics. Technology facilitated knowledge construction by providing abundant resources and examples of language, culture and discourse, a finding echoed in many studies (Furstenberg & al., 2001; O'Dowd, 2003, 2007; Ware & Kramsch, 2005).

Two main stories emerged from studies that showed gains in skills of interpreting and relating (Bauer & al., 2006; Furstenberg & al., 2001; O'Dowd, 2006; Osuna, 2000; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006). First, students who used the Internet to build cultural knowledge or who participated in tele-collaborations

for their students' benefit. Promoting these skills is paramount to the ICC learning enterprise. In email exchanges, Bauer & al. (2006), O'Dowd (2003), and Schneider and von der Emde (2006) discovered associations between the written characteristics of an ethnographic stance (such as requests for personal perspectives or encouragement to write more) and gains in cultural awareness and perspective-shifting. Conversely, an absence of an ethnographic approach often led to miscommunication, tension, or disengagement (O'Dowd, 2003; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006; Ware & Kramsch, 2005).

Together, these studies suggest that learners might benefit from several design features: explicit instruction in how to communicate respectfully and ethnographically, opportunities to study both satisfying and dissatisfying communications, and periodic self-assessments to appraise one's skills in conducting intercultural inquiry. The archival nature of technologically-mediated communication would facilitate these processes and afford students the access and time to reflect thoughtfully on communications, to compose appropriate messages, and to process emotional reactions to potentially contentious writings from others. However, the technologies that facilitate these interactions cannot be assumed to embody universal «cultures-of-use» (Thorne, 2003); technologies' purposes and use can differ according to cultural context and, consequently, constrain communication. Shih and Cifuentes (2003) argue that the invisibility of the culture-of-use of the technology indicates a need for explicit instruction in these potential obstacles to communication, in other words, to treat the context for communication as an object of study.

In most of the tele-collaborations, increased cultural understanding generated students' curiosity and openness to further exploration, which in turn promoted their continued engagement in a process of cultural discovery. Conversely, attitudes of favorability were undermined by interactions that somehow went wrong, which fortified negative stereotypes and/or built resistance to further intercultural learning (Bauer & al., 2006; O'Dowd, 2003; Shih & Cifuentes, 2003; Ware & Kramsch, 2005).

O'Dowd (2003) and Schneider and von der Emde (2006) discovered the importance of careful topic selection (Spanish bullfighting and school violence, respectively) in exciting students' interests and passion, motivating them to explain carefully and rigorously their perspectives. Grappling in writing with those explanations increased their metacognitive and critical awareness of culture by showing them the dif-

ficulty of articulating tacit cultural beliefs. In a cautionary tale about the potential downside of emotional topics, Ware and Kramsch (2005) found that, in the absence of an ethnographic stance to ground discussions of the American military presence in Germany, some German-American email collaborations deteriorated due to students' insufficient communicative skills for negotiating conflicting perspectives on the topic. However, these miscommunications or conflicts can foster development of metacognition and cultural awareness if the incidents are interrogated, especially via close analysis of textual interactions (Belz, 2003; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006). Schneider and von der Emde (2006) advocate including ICC models like Byram's (1997) as explicit course content to help students consider their lived experiences in relation to formal knowledge on the topic.

In addition to archiving public miscommunications, asynchronous communication and its pace seem to offer support for metacognitive development about the process of communication. An additional benefit of archived online communication is that it allows conflict analysis to occur long after the emotions of the encounter have dissipated.

Additional design considerations are offered by studies of the Cultura Project, a highly structured, carefully sequenced approach to ICC development that has generated durable gains across multiple dimensions of ICC (Bauer & al., 2006; Furstenberg & al., 2001). First, it begins with rigorous exploration of the self before the students share this exploration with tele-collaborators and compare their findings with formal texts such as films or readings. The authors argue that, through this iterative cycle of revisiting and revising cultural understandings against an increasingly complex landscape, students gradually build their understanding and communication skills over time. Second, such a process relies on a highly competent instructor to guide students through the delicate processes of interpreting contradictory perspectives, synthesizing information, refraining from judgment, and developing rich points of inquiry. The teacher must model the intercultural inquiry process herself, in part by positioning herself as co-learner, co-investigator, and co-ethnographer.

### 3.3. Online teacher professional development

A fairly robust set of design guidelines for ICC development can be based simply on findings from the prior sections. This section offers useful refinements and degrees of emphasis within this emerging set of design considerations that focus on the unique needs

of teachers-as-learners, given that teachers' ultimate objective is to be able to promote intercultural competencies in students.

There is a great deal of overlap between the online intercultural learning studies and the online TPD studies (teacher professional development), not only about how networked technologies support such mechanisms as public dialog, reflection, and metacognition, but also regarding the challenges of promoting sufficient depth and engagement in those processes to advance understanding (Barnett & al., 2002; Celentin, 2007). To a degree, overlap in findings between these bodies of literature should be expected, since the basic principles of ICC development and teacher development themselves greatly overlap. In their articulation of principles for effective teacher professional development, for example, Lieberman and Wood (2001) describe essentials of teacher learning that strongly mirror those that have been discussed herein as conducive to ICC development. The following table, in comparing those essentials, illustrates the synergy between them, including details related to interaction between primary cultures (C1) and secondary cultures (C2).

Other guidelines or models for adult or teacher learning converge around these ideas. Eraut (1994) highlights how, for adults in the professions (including teaching), traditional academic learning results in few changes to practices and beliefs if there is no concomitant opportunity for real-world application of that learning. For developing professional competencies, practicing knowledge (doing) and acquiring knowledge (learning) are the same thing. Eraut's idea of doing-as-learning recalls Byram's (1997) suggestion that much of learning ICC is simply having the chance to practice it. Effective online TPD programs for educators have enacted this doing-as-learning equation by teaching (as explicit content) and modeling (in course design and delivery) the targeted pedagogical skills, giving teachers the chance to experience a technique and reflect on it

from two vantage points, that of learner and teacher (Dooley, 2007; Muller-Hartmann, 2006).

Of particular note are two programs related to culture, the first being Dooley's (2007: 70) study of international English teachers-in-training, who co-designed lesson plans in intercultural groupings. By undergoing the task of negotiating norms of participation in their lesson plan groups, they developed an understanding of how that process happens. As they gained insight into the role of the learner in intercultural telecollaboration, they gradually shifted their perspective about the role of the facilitator, becoming «more aware of their role in determining the process, thus lessening their expectations of the teacher as knowledge facilitator». The second is a rare study of an online program to enhance teachers' capacity to teach ICC (intercultural communicative competence). Muller and Hartmann (2006) studied a unique two-tiered telecollaboration, in which one group of German English-teachers-in-training (the top tier) involved in a telecollaboration observed and studied a second telecollaboration between other German English-teachers-in-training and American German language students (the bottom tier). The top level group studied both the intercultural learning demonstrated in the exchange of the bottom tier and the pedagogy modeled within, all while experiencing their own telecollaboration. Through a series of design features that have emerged in this analysis (e.g., multiple instances of reflection, public dialog about academic and real-world knowledge, collaborative tasks, analysis of transcripts for miscommunications), the top level learners built their capacity to teach ICC. Having experienced and studied various dimensions of ICC development, including its logistical, pedagogical and social challenges, the teachers reported feeling empowered and capable of teaching ICC in their own classrooms.

Finally, Garrison and Anderson's (2003) comprehensive and compelling model for adult e-Learning

Teacher professional development	ICC development
«Teacher's knowledge is the starting place for learning» (p. 181)	Students have unique C1 knowledge and perspectives; investigation of C1
«Teachers learn from...having [their work] discussed and critiqued by a group of peers» (p. 181)	Dialogs with C1 and C2 peers help learners advance ICC-related understandings
«Nonideological» methods and means for learning (p. 183) are recommended	Techniques of ethnographic interviewing and suspension of judgment are advised
View of teaching as «messy, uncertain, and unfinished» (p. 183)	View of intercultural inquiry as ongoing process; inclusion of reflective cycles
«Teachers learn by...seeing the world through different perspectives» (p. 184)	Exposure to multiple and varied C1 and C2 perspectives

Table 1. Comparison of principles for intercultural and teacher professional development.

aligns well with the dimensions of effective TPD (teacher professional development) that were identified by Lieberman and Wood (2001) at the beginning of this section. The difference between the two frameworks is that Garrison and Anderson's is a framework for e-Learning rather than face-to-face learning. Garrison and Anderson (2003) propose a highly specific model to guide engagement in e-Learning among adults. Briefly, this model promotes cycles of what they term practical inquiry. The term 'practical' refers to the importance of grounding learning in real-world events and lived experiences, a widely accepted tenet of adult learning (Kolb & Fry, 1975). 'Inquiry' encapsulates the ongoing, cyclical nature of knowledge development, in which adults engage in both individual reflection and collective negotiation of ideas, supported by the affordances of asynchronous technologically-mediated communication.

#### 4. Discussion

The above studies offer ways of attending to the unique challenges that emerge when teachers are the learners in an educational experience designed to develop their intercultural competence. These include: incorporating practical applications of learning, such as the design of lesson plans in dialog with others; grounding all learning activities in reflective communities; inviting reflection from the dual perspectives of teacher and learner; drawing learners' careful attention to the pedagogies that are modeled in the delivery of the professional development; and ensuring the collaboration of mindful facilitators whose participation models and cultivates a critical, reflective community.

Collectively, the studies of ICC development and of online TPD (teacher professional development) suggest a real synergy between technology, teacher-learners, effective teacher professional development, and the processes of ICC development. Teacher growth and ICC development both require the shifting of perspectives, which requires reflections on multiple and often contradictory experiences. Networked technologies seem a logical choice of medium for the way they display, juxtapose, and archive the language through which we communicate and learn, and the perspectives – cultural or pedagogical – that we reveal through that language. By facilitating intercultural interactions, providing mechanisms to support cycles of reflection and meta-reflection over time, and forcing attention to communicative and learning processes, networked technologies could effectively promote teachers' ICC and related pedagogical capacity.

While this analysis has demonstrated a potent match between the affordances of technologies and the processes of ICC development, it has shown the equal importance of careful educational design choices and facilitation to assure that technology promotes rather than undermines the goals of ICC. Many ICC studies offered examples of learners that developed their ICC skills by engaging in experiences that forced them to surface their own views, look clearly at them, reflect on them individually, consider alternative perspectives in dialog with others, and revise ideas. Layers of deliberate, structured reflection on cultural information, perspectives and experiences, from the vantage points of learners and teachers, allowed program participants to distance from and evolve their beliefs. By studying the way intercultural communication unfolded, students became better intercultural learners. By studying the way that intercultural learning was orchestrated, teachers became better intercultural teachers.

##### 4.1. Hypothesized principles of effective TPD (teacher professional development)

The previous sections described how three bodies of literature yield understandings about how teacher professional development could best promote the knowledge, skills and dispositions that characterize effective teachers of intercultural competencies. They also articulated (a) the propitious overlaps between the processes of ICC development and teacher development, (b) the benefits that could emerge from conducting ICC-related professional development online, and (c) insights about how online learning could support the facilitation of ICC and teacher development processes simultaneously.

Integration and synthesis of these discoveries suggests a set of beginning principles that this author argues should be incorporated into professional development opportunities for teachers that target the improvement in their intercultural competence as well as their ability to cultivate similar competencies in their students. Indeed, the teachers might be from any subject area, and the professional development might take any number of forms. The key is to find opportunities to build all teachers' intercultural competencies, and to look for opportunities to integrate some form of ICC development into existing or new professional development opportunities. Whatever the format, organizing those TPD (Teacher professional development) opportunities – be they single activities, entire courses, or something else — around the following principles would both respond to teachers' needs for develop-

ment in this area and maximize the unique benefits that online learning has to offer teacher-learners for the purposes of ICC development:

- Multiple perspectives: Teacher-learners should have opportunities to interact with abundant and varied cultural perspectives, representations, and representatives from one's own and target culture(s).
- Reflective cycles: Teacher-learners should have opportunities to engage in deliberately orchestrated, multiple cycles of reflection over time, on both experiences and formal concepts related to culture, as well as pedagogies for the teaching of ICC.
- Ethnography: Teacher-learners should have opportunities to see, experience, learn about, and develop an ethnographic stance toward intercultural inquiry, including the opportunity to reflect on ethnographic stances enacted during the TPD itself.
- Metacognition: Teacher-learners should have opportunities to see, experience, learn about, and develop metacognition about intercultural learning, including the opportunity to reflect on their learning processes during the TPD itself.
- Technology: ICC-related online TPD should reflect, in its design, organization, and implementation, an awareness of the cultural dimensions of technologies and of communication. Furthermore, communications and learning activities should capitalize on technologies' ability to provide access to various resources, time for reflection, archived communications, and peer-to-peer discussion and feedback.

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