There has been considerable talk about the future of research and practice in education. Occasionally the discourse tends to the euphoric, sometimes it strays more to the dystopic. Public debates often explore how educators can and should meet society’s demands in the globalised, interconnected geopolitical situations of today. Voiced concern about learners (as future ‘global’, ‘digitalised’ citizens) regarding what skills and competencies they must have and what knowledge they are constructing (or not), both formally and informally, are prevalent in frequent public debates. However, no matter where one stands on the issues of debate, there is a general consensus that education will be transformed in the next decades in order to accommodate the rapid technological, socio political, geographical, and environmental changes the world is experiencing, not to mention the many changes on the human level that we all live on a daily basis.

Of course society – and subsequently education – have always undergone continual change. Nonetheless, the past decades have brought about an almost vertiginous sense of change. Twenty years ago, Appadurai (1996) described these changes in a model of ‘transcultural flows’ that theorise five different domains of transcultural movements: ethnoscapes (involving flow of people); mediascapes (flow of information); technoscapes (flow of technology); financescapes (flows of finance); and ideoscapes (flow of ideology or ideas). These changes have an impact on how the world is perceived: for millennia social life was largely inertial; traditions marked and influenced learning and individuals perceived a relatively finite set of possibilities for their future.

Now education must find a way to encompass, address, and embrace all of these shifting ‘scapes’. This can be disconcerting. As the online journal ‘Education Week’ has pointed out, “when it comes to predicting the future of work, top economists and technologists are all over the map”. Faced with this uncertainty,
Foreword

teachers, administrators and policy makers inevitably feel consternation and anxiety. Educational research, carried out in conjunction with teachers and students, can provide key answers on how to shape the future of learning

The KONECT project (EDU2013-43932-P) set out to gather and analyse innovative approaches to education in primary and secondary education in several countries in order to draw up guidelines, teaching materials, and books that are based on transnational, technology-enhanced, multilingual, interdisciplinary and issue-based teaching and learning. This book in particular draws on a meticulous study based on a relatively recent pedagogical approach to teaching and learning (virtual interaction), providing key insight into the learning processes – and individual learner identities – that emerge from interaction in online environments.

The study discussed in this book shows how online learner identities are discursively constructed between the participants and that these identities are dynamic and fluid. The author carefully outlines how the actions of the ‘teachers’ (facilitators in this case), the online platform, and even the local environments of the participants can affect the outcomes, and identity construction of the participants, during dialogue-based learning sessions in an online environment. The arguments are laid out for a critical interrogation of the predominant discursive construction of telecollaborative participants’ identities in static and essentialist terms – identities which are often ‘marked’ through a focus on national languages, identities, and cultures.

Given the importance of intercultural education in telecollaborative language learning, the relevance of this point should not be underestimated. Studies show that too often intercultural education falls into the concept of a fixed static entity (see Barbot & Dervin, 2011; Finch & Nynäis, 2011). This is compounded by the difficulties of actually defining intercultural competences and intercultural

1. Parts of this preface are already published in the introduction to teaching materials developed by the KONECT project; https://www.konectproject.com

2. This book has been supported through funding provided by the Spanish Ministry of Economy, Industry & Competitivity: Proyectos I+D del Programa Estatal de Fomento de la Investigación Científica y Técnica de Excelencia through the KONECT project. Grant number: EDU2013-43932-P); 2013-2017 (grant extended to March 2018); https://www.konectproject.com
awareness; as is witnessed by the many different terms that have been used to describe them: multi/pluriculturalism, intercultural sensitivity, global citizenship, just to name a few examples. These theoretical questions are exacerbated by ethical issues when teachers have to ‘assess’ gains in intercultural awareness (see Borghetti, 2011). It seems to be a ‘Catch-22’ of measuring ‘internal’ gains through ‘external’ traits and behaviours – all of which are contingent upon the context in which the individual is interacting. As Helm points out in this book, teachers are responsible for creating the situated contexts they ask their students to participant in – and this underscores the need to be more aware of their own ideological underpinnings which will influence the identities they (both teachers and students) make relevant.

In this sense, the contents of this book go far to critique and advance previous knowledge in an area that bridges technology with applied sciences of education, language learning, cultural mediation and intercultural communication. It also presents innovative and inspiring pedagogical recommendations for online dialogic learning that can provide a cornerstone for promoting critical and reflective intercultural transformative learning. This latter point underscores how opportune this book is, given the current geopolitical occurrences of global upheaval (unprecedented numbers of displaced persons, acts of terrorism, upswing of racism and nationalism in mainstream politics, etc.). This book serves as an excellent model for what politically-engaged pedagogy (and research) can be.

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