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## Transatlantic Tutoring: The Pittsburgh - Clermont-Ferrand Collaboration

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# Transatlantic Tutoring

The Pittsburgh - Clermont-Ferrand Experience

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Thierry Chanier - Université Blaise Pascal

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CALICO 2011

# Overview

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- The premise
  - The participants
    - Students in French Online 1 at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, U.S.A.
    - Students in a Masters program for teachers of French as a foreign language at the Université Blaise Pascal in Clermont-Ferrand, France
  - Sequence
  - Examples
  - Results and conclusions
-

# The Premise

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- Learners of French (FOL) as a foreign language will benefit from:
    - Exposure to additional native/advanced speakers of the target language
    - Designed and unexpected intercultural experience during conversational exchanges
    - Reflection on the exchanges and personal learning strategies
  - French teacher trainees (MA) will benefit from:
    - Exposure to technology-enhanced/ distance teaching contexts
    - Analyzing on-line instructional courseware
    - Interacting with culturally-situated learners of French and reflecting on that interaction
-

# Masters in FLE (MA)

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- Profile
    - Group of 13 women between 22 and 32
    - Mostly French as a mother tongue (except for 4: Portuguese, Spanish and Russian)
    - Previous experience of asynchronous online tutoring for half of them ; Uneven personal use / mastery of CMC tools
  - Objectives
    - Pre-service teachers
    - Project is part of a training for synchronous tutoring
      - Situated learning + reflexive approach
      - Specific tools used (Skype, Facebook, Moodle)
-

# French Learners(FOL)

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- Profile
    - 15 (2 drop out) : 12 women , 3 men between 20 and 27
    - Individuals, not a group
    - Diverse student population: Asian and Asian-heritage students ; Multilingualism common
  - Objectives
    - French as elective course
  - Blended instructional format
    - Weekly class meeting oriented toward communication
    - Weekly conversation meeting with peer tutor [insertion point for new tutoring experience]
    - Media-intensive interactive online courseware
-

# Breaking the ice

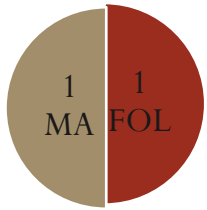
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23 September  
0-1am (Fr) & 6-7pm (Pit)



## Video-Conference

- Time difference issues
  - MA: 16
  - FOL : 8
  - 2 by 2 presentations
  - Important for setting up the MA community
-



skype + email 

1: End-Sept.      2: Mid-Oct.      3: 2<sup>nd</sup>-Nov.      4: End-Nov.

Tandem

FOL



Pittsburgh CMU  
Teacher

Face to face w1

Face to face w2



Group on cultures

...Face to face w10

MA

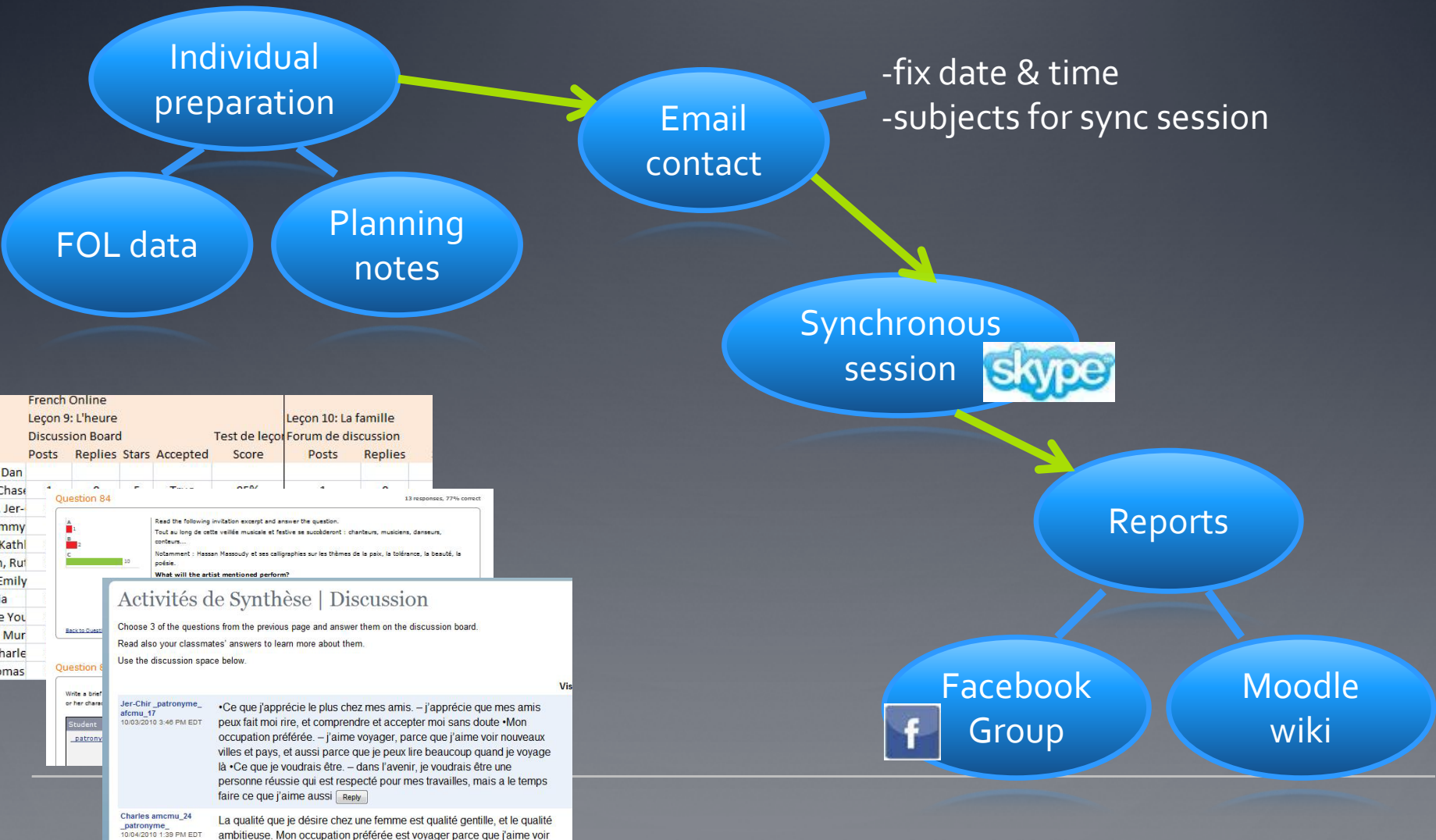


Clermont UB  
Teacher





# Synchronous activity (MA side)

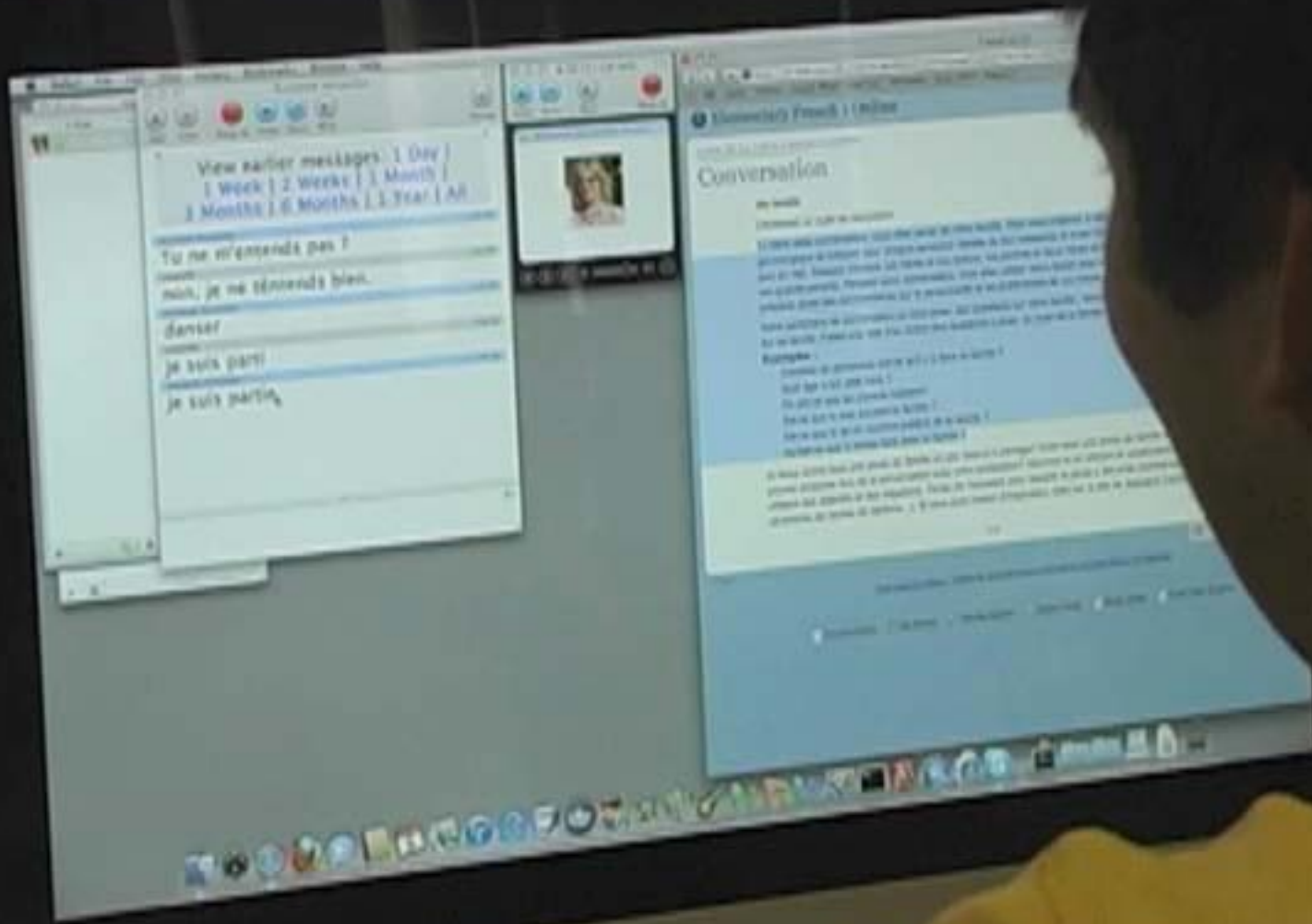


# (Usual ?) tandem difficulties

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- Rare exact correspondence between the number of learners on each side (manage drop out)
  - Important time zone difference (6 hours)
  - Different schedules in each curriculum
    - FOL started and finished their semester before MA
    - MA had not enough time for the initial Skype training
  - Unbalanced situation
    - FOL followed their own curriculum ; French as an elective
    - MA had to adapt to this situation where they were not the primary teacher and where they expected cultural exchanges
-





View earlier messages: 1 Day | 1 Week | 2 Weeks | 1 Month | 3 Months | 6 Months | 1 Year | All

Tu ne comprends pas ?

non, je ne comprends bien.

danser

je suis parti

je suis partie

Conversation

My name

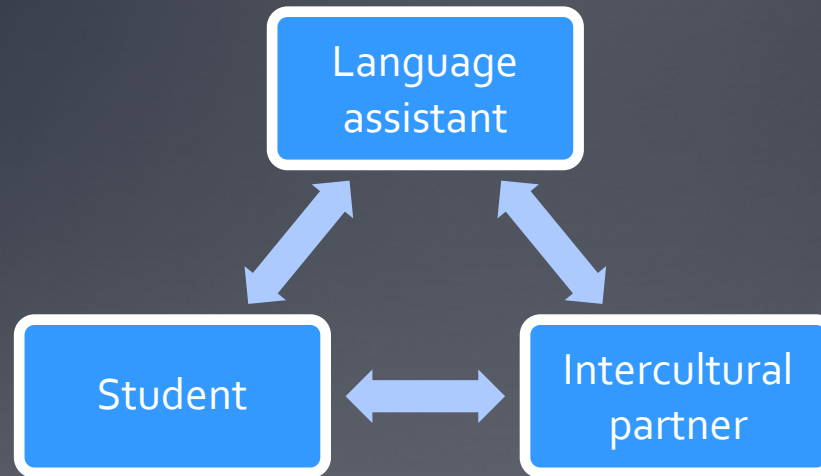
Example

Example

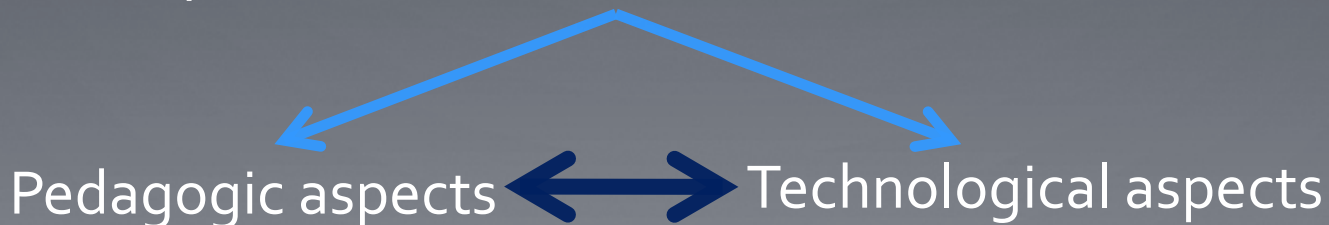
# Roles, positioning and representations– MA students

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Roles



Aspects of difficulties for MA students



# Pre-representation about being a teacher or a student

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- Stereotypes of pre-service teachers in the French system
  - Teacher has got freedom in her/his preparation
  - Language assistant in secondary school: devalued
  - Clear expectations about what to do
  - If I am a teacher, I cannot be evaluated
- No experience in distance teaching as a Teaching Assistant

*"Il me paraît nécessaire d'être clair dès le départ sur les rôles et les attentes envers les participants. A savoir si un groupe adopte une **position d'enseigner** " La position que l'on occupait, en tant que « teaching assistant » était assez mesurée ou difficile à délimiter, dans la mesure où nous n'avions ni le rôle ni le statut du professeur, mais que nous devions quand même les faire travailler leur [Marie, re français » [Annabelle, reflex. Report]*

# Evolution of perceptions / events

## Situation 2

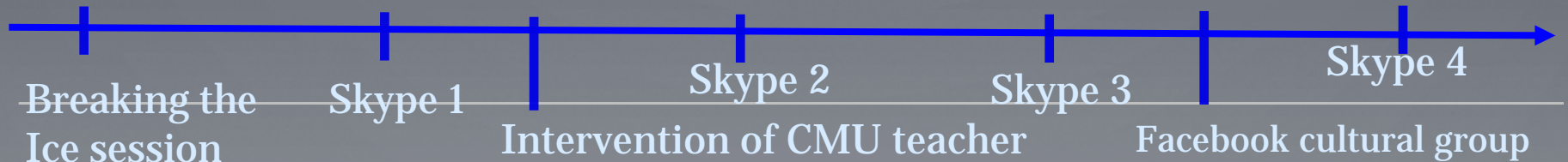
Cf. integrative profile

## Situation 1 (prototypical)

Less participation of Fol than expected ?  
'it is my failure' 'FOL not interested with sharing cultures and values'  
Rely on video & audio  
Expectations of clear instructions or resent lack of freedom

Willing to meet my partner  
Stress

Meeting delayed ?  
Facebook does not work  
Less interactions than expected  
Planning difficult to follow  
Lost in the use of modalities



Breaking the  
Ice session

Skype 1

Skype 2

Skype 3

Skype 4

Intervention of CMU teacher

Facebook cultural group

# Integrative MA profile

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- Control expectations, accept uncertainty / fuzziness during the first steps
  - Rely on preparation (negotiated)
  - Develop flexibility: seize every occasion for informal exchanges or linguistic ones
  - Understand different roles of modalities
    - **Video**: not essential for verbal constraint, once social confidence established and if FOL feel confident enough
    - **Oral**: accept silences, check with other modalities their reasons ; control my speed , linguistic difficulties
    - **Textchat**: support (vocabulary, recast), correction without oral interruptions, check (tiredness, comprehension, etc.)
  - Try to discover and understand reasons for lack of participation (exam, work overload, ...)
-



# Overall opinion on the project - MA students

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- 100 % of the students ready to repeat the experience
- Training: positive change of the opinion on CMC tools via the project (82 %)
- Language learning: importance of the communicative goals for 11 students out of 13
- Cultural aspects: contribution of the project seen as insignificant or inexistant (77%)

(Collected in the post-questionnaires)

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# In-process FOL comments 1/2

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- “I wish we could have made better progress and that the time difference wasn't so inconvenient.”
  - “It's been fun talking to Céline. We've talked about her life and my life. We used the conversation page in the lesson as a guide to start off the conversations and then we keep talking and she helps me say things in a better way. Our conversation lasted about an hour this time.”
  - “Again, it would have been nice to know what we were going to talk about ahead of time. Also, I preferred when the conversation was more informal, with general questions about topics we'd recently covered. I've felt like the last few conversations were more like interviews, with the pre-planned list of questions.”
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# In-process FOL comments 2/2

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- “Although I liked the experience, I felt that I liked working with Prof Jones and Cate better... I think Skype was just too remote of a forum and the personal meetings with them during the week are more helpful, especially when so much of the work is done online.”
  - “My conversation with Marie (my French partner) was great! We talked about movies and our families and cooking. She's so nice and I really enjoyed getting to talk to her. I'm beginning to understand her a lot better also when she talks faster..”
  - “This week our discussion focused on our families. Our discussion was very interesting and by sticking to the lesson plan, we were able to have a more productive discussion.”
  - “I will miss these meetings now even though at times it was a stress to prepare for meetings. Overall, it was a great program.”
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# Overall opinion on the project - FOL students

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- Generally positive response after MA students emphasized oral communication
  - Some question whether additional technical challenges are worth the effort
  - Most wanted alignment with lesson goals as point of departure
  - Many found the interpersonal component enriching
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# Questions?

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