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Edited by Mirjam Hauck and Andreas Müller-Hartmann

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Dr Bart Rienties is Professor of learning analytics and head of Academic Professional Development at the Institute of Educational Technology at the Open University UK. As an educational psychologist, he conducts multi-disciplinary research on work-based and collaborative learning environments and focuses on the role of social interaction in learning, which is published in leading academic journals and books. His primary research interests are focused on learning analytics, professional development, and the role of motivation in learning.

Keynotes

Rodrigo Ballester holds a Master in European Law (LL.M, mention très bien) from the College of Europe (2002). He started his career as an academic assistant in the College of Europe before joining the European Parliament in 2006 and the European Commission in 2008. From November 2014 to December 2019 he joined the Cabinet of Commissioner Tibor Navracsics where he was in charge of primary and secondary education. He developed an expertise in teaching common values as a vector of integration of migrants. In this context, he took the leadership in launching the Erasmus virtual exchanges. He is an invited professor in the Institut d'Études Politiques de Paris. He is currently on personal leave from the European Commission.

Barbara Moser-Mercer, professor emerita and founder of InZone (University of Geneva), is visiting professor at University of Nairobi, engaged in strengthening African solutions to higher education in emergencies. Following her initial training as a conference interpreter, she pursued her studies in psycholinguistics and cognitive psychology. Her research has focused on the development of expertise in complex cognitive skills of bilinguals, both from a cognitive psychology and a cognitive neuro-science perspective. These findings have been instrumental in informing the design and the development of student-centred multilingual digital learning environments in fragile contexts, which she has leveraged across several refugee camps in Africa and the Middle East.

Paige Ware is Professor of Education in the Simmons School of Education and Human Development at Southern Methodist University. Her research examines interactive technologies for fostering intercultural engagement among youth within local and international partnerships, and also mixed reality simulations for supporting teacher learning about language education. Her work has been funded by the National Academy of Education/Spencer Post-Doctoral Fellowship, the TESOL International Research Foundation for English Language Education, and the Department of Education.

Authors

Dr Melinda Dooly holds a Serra Húnter fellowship as researcher and senior lecturer at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. She teaches English as a foreign language methodology and research methods courses, focusing technology-enhanced teaching at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Her principal research addresses project-based language learning, intercultural communication, and 21st century competences in teacher education. She is lead researcher of GREIP: Grup de Recerca en Ensenyament i Interacció Plurilingües (Research Centre for Teaching and Plurilingual Interaction).

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Ivett Guntersdorfer, PhD, is Professor for intercultural communication at the Ludwig-Maximilans University in Munich (Germany), where she is currently leading the Institut für Interkulturelle Kommunikation and the Intercultural Communication Certificate Programme. She earned her doctorate degree from the University of California in Los Angeles. Dr Guntersdorfer's interdisciplinary research is about emotions, and she published in several fields of cultural studies. She focuses on the theoretical and practical implications of intercultural competence and empathy applying theories from psychology.

Angelos Konstantinidis is PhD Researcher at the Open University of Catalonia, Barcelona and Associate Teacher at the Master of Arts programme Digital Technologies for Language Teaching, University of Nottingham. He has been involved in numerous international school projects that foster the integration of digital technologies in learning. He is a core member of the ICT4ALL

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Dr Belén Labrador is Associate Professor at the Department of Modern Languages in the University of León, Spain. Her main research interests lie in English-Spanish contrastive analysis, corpus linguistics, English for specific purposes and teacher training in the area of teaching English as a foreign language to young learners (both in primary and secondary education), especially focusing on task-based learning, gamification, and intercultural communication.

Dora Loizidou teaches at the Department of French and European Languages of the University of Cyprus. Her research interests include hybrid education, online exchanges for teaching/learning foreign languages, and computer-mediated communication in general. She is a member of LIDILEM research laboratory (Grenoble Alpes University), as well as Méthodal OpenLab, an open, inter-university and interdisciplinary research laboratory (University of Cyprus and the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki University of Cyprus and Aristotle University of Thessaloniki).

Mary-Jane Radford Arrow has been teaching English for specific academic purposes for more than 20 years with a focus on discipline-specific communication. She is interested in digital and hybrid pedagogies and contributing to a better understanding of educational technology adoption. She is a doctoral candidate at the University of Liverpool's Centre for Higher Education Studies, her research focusing on the role of professional identity in technology use and adoption by university language instructors.

Dr Alexandra Reynolds is *Maître de Conférences* at the *Département Langues Lettres et Communications,* Bordeaux University, France. Her research interests include ESP, EMI, and identity in relation to the use of English within French higher education.

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Roberta Trapè is Honorary Fellow of the School of Languages and Linguistics at The University of Melbourne, Australia. Her research has shifted between theory – travel writing, notions of space and movement in contemporary society including the migration experience, notions of space in narrating history, and postcolonial studies – and close communication with contemporary Australian writers who have written about Italy in the last three decades. Her ongoing research explores transnational digital learning spaces and intercultural citizenship (gender equality) in foreign language education.

Introduction

Mirjam Hauck[1] and Andreas Müller-Hartmann[2]

1. Background

Virtual Exchange (VE) is a practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators (EVOLVE, 2019).

The Evaluating and Upscaling Telecollaborative Teacher Education (EVALUATE) project was a European policy experiment funded by Erasmus+ between 2017 and 2019. The EVALUATE consortium trained teacher trainers and organised VEs which involved over 1,000 student teachers at 34 initial teacher education institutions in Europe and beyond. The guiding research question for the study was as follows:

- Will participation in VE contribute to the development of competences which student teachers need to teach, collaborate, and innovate effectively in a digitalised and cosmopolitan world?

A full report (The EVALUATE Group, 2019a) on the participants, the methodological approach and the main findings is available here. An executive summary (The EVALUATE Group, 2019b) can be found here.

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The conference concluding the EVALUATE project took place in September 2019 at the University of León in Spain. A number of colleagues answered our call for submissions to the conference proceedings. The articles you find in this volume provide a window into the multifaceted contributions not only to the conference, but to the field of telecollaboration and VE at large. We hope you enjoy finding out about the many different ways in which our colleagues engage with this innovative pedagogical approach that combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology.

The contributions to the proceedings are subdivided into three sections starting with 'soundbites' from the keynotes by Rodrigo Ballester, Barbara Moser-Mercer, and Paige Ware, followed by research studies, and wrapping up with a number of practical examples from the field of VE implementation.

2. Book organisation

2.1. Keynotes

As you have access to the recordings of the keynotes and we are also making the full transcripts available to you here, we have selected a few pertinent quotes from each speaker to give you a flavour of what they said.

Rodrigo Ballester[3]

> "What about the 90% of students who do not benefit from mobility"?
>
> "In terms of digital skills we often point to the teachers […] The truth is that even the majority of the youngsters are not digitally competent".

3. https://videos.unileon.es/video/5d78eaa68f420872148b45ea

"Language is another aspect that we have to look at very carefully. The objective of 1+1+1 is to be able to speak your own language plus another European language plus another foreign language […] to make sure that people not only learn English, but also develop the DNA of the European Union, which is diversity; cultural diversity and linguistic diversity".

"Let me also speak a bit about teachers. […] Without motivated and acknowledged teachers […] nothing will happen, nothing will be different. […] There is also a problem of social acknowledgement, prestige, authority, and respect".

"Those problems […] social cohesion, common values, and a sense of belonging to teachers' training, all have a point in common with virtual exchanges. Their beauty is that if they are done well and are widespread, they can address partially every single big problem that I have identified in the European Education Area. That is why I think that we all have to see the future of virtual exchanges with optimism".

Barbara Moser-Mercer[4]

"If there's anything that you want to know about education in emergencies, INEE [International Network for Education in Emergencies] has an incredible number of resources for you to dig into especially for teacher training. They have a special group called Teachers in Crisis and Conflict with wonderful material all freely downloadable".

"Understanding humanitarian principles is your first obligation. It is being impartial, neutral; to do no harm. […] Every day our team needs to ask itself are we sure we are not doing more harm"?

4. https://videos.unileon.es/video/5d78f0948f4208775a8b4567

"The other network is a network that we co-created, with the support of various donors over the years, called the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium. […]It mostly brings together higher education in institutions, but the majority of members are NGOs [Non-Governmental Organisations] engaged in tertiary education".

" We are not in it for the short semester or less than a semester but really looking at building a community that hopefully becomes independent and more self-sufficient, looking first and foremost at the contextualised needs. What we have in Geneva is irrelevant. What they need is where we start. Then we go and see what we have that matches and how we adapt what we do. […] I hope I have given you a taste of what a virtual exchange can look like in the low level technology that we are trying to use".

"The solutions that we implement are through working with pedagogy. We do not offer a course on conflict resolution, but we have developed and adopted a pedagogical approach that forces and obliges students to work together in a non-conflictual way. It is incidental learning but not in your face".

Paige Ware[5]

"I would characterise the period in the 1990's as a period of high anticipation […] The period between the turn of the century and around the time that social media really took off was a period of collective creativity among researchers and teacher educators, and I would characterise the last ten years as one of rising stakes".

"To summarise the first act, we had a high anticipation for real intercultural interactions. Technology was basically a vehicle for contact at that point. It did not feel that complicated yet. It just felt really cool.

5. https://videos.unileon.es/video/5d791ea28f420872148b45f6

> Then the curriculum was focused upon exposure. Bring in cool stuff from other countries from other cultures or from sub-cultures within the culture. Start to juxtapose. It was a nice time.".
>
> "To summarise, Act 2 was a really exciting time and there was a major spike in research in and around telecollaboration. This period was characterised when we coalesced around certain core questions, certain core technologies, and it was exciting to be a part of that. We were looking at how to engage students more deeply, because early on we realised just enacting people is not enough. […] as researchers we are committed to understanding what is taking place inside those thousands of connections. […] That ushered in where we are now, where the stakes are rising".
>
> "We have several of you in this room who have insisted over the last 15 years that we have to have dialogical action […] it is not just about contact. It is about […] bringing people together and helping them act on the world in positive ways […] it is a little political.".

We hope these snippets from the three keynote presentations at the EVALUATE conference have made you curious and that you are inspired to find out more.

2.2. Research studies

The three research studies in this section focus on topics as diverse as the development of intercultural communicative competences with a specific focus on intercultural awareness, the issue of authenticity in VE for students using English as a lingua franca, and VEs' impact on teachers' pedagogical practice.

Dora Loizidou and Dina Savlovska explore the issue of positive and negative face in facilitating intercultural awareness in the context of a six-week VE project between students at the University of Cyprus and the University of Latvia. They used the frame of the Cultura project (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet,

2001) as a basis for task design. Being especially interested in students' public self-image, the results of their mixed-method research show that students do not express themselves freely in the discussion forums in order to protect their personal and perceived national image. Analysing forum messages on the basis of eight different categories the authors find that a majority of students posted in the forum without addressing their peers and/or commenting on earlier messages. In the course of the project, students developed different forms of politeness messages, with major politeness strategies being to avoid discussion of critical points due to cultural shock, a strategy which the authors explain by the fact that students used open public forums and that there was a lack of familiarity between group members.

Following an ethnographic research approach based on students' reflective journals, questionnaires, and interviews, **Alexandra Reynolds** looks at the issue of authenticity when using English as a lingua franca in a VE in opposition to a traditional English for specific purposes course format (the majority of students being chemistry students). Over the duration of a term, French-speaking students interacted in weekly webinars in English on the topic of *Newcomers and Nationalism* with non-native English-speaking students from other participating universities in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean. The research focus lay especially on authentic learner experiences, and data analysis concluded with a five-point model showing how authentic learner experience manifested itself in the VE, covering community formation, altered world views, pedagogical conditions, and an improved understanding of English language learning through the use of English as a lingua franca.

And finally a study by **Melinda Dooly** dealing with an issue in VE research which is still largely under-explored, namely the actual impact of VE on teachers' practice in educational contexts. Her work focuses on teacher education graduates, specialising in teaching foreign languages (French and English) in primary education, and coming from the Faculty of Education at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. The VEs, covering 14 years (2004-2018), were set up with a colleague at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign and prepared student teachers for telecollaborative teaching once they started

their professional life. The paper provides a clear and succinct insight into the methodology of surveying the teachers. Results showed that over 50 % of the graduates integrated VE into their own teaching, especially the younger teachers. Interestingly, quite a few of the teachers who said no in the survey to the question whether they had integrated VE, indicated that they intended to do so in the future. While task design did not pose a problem, external issues such as problems with technology and student-related and organisational issues created challenges for the teachers. Little support from school administration or colleagues constituted the main challenge for the younger and with that less experienced teachers. The study concludes that being able to fully experience a VE as a trainee, "sensitizes them [student-teachers] to those aspects of task design which are unique to online contexts" in an 'integrated and holistic' manner (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017, p. 8).

2.3. Practical examples

In this section on practical examples of VE we cover different course designs, one focusing on developing empathy, the other targeting knowledge and skills building in relation to organising VEs. We also present three examples of VE that report on instructors' collaborative reflection of their VE, the development of global citizenship through civic action, and on a rather innovative approach from the field of gamification working where digital escape rooms were being used.

In the context of designing a VE between students at Ludwig-Maximilians University in Germany and their peers at the University of Maryland Baltimore County in the United States, **Irina Golubeva and Ivett Guntersdorfer** have developed a preliminary framework for self-reflective meta-analysis tasks. The latter aim to foster empathy development alongside developing intercultural communicative competences in VE. While engaging with critical socio-political issues, the students carry out a number of meta-analysis tasks in the course of the VE. They complete several self-reflective survey questionnaires with items relating to the affective reactions of their VE partners, thus becoming aware of the emotional dimensions of intercultural encounters.

Angelos Konstantinidis presents a 12-week elective module in the online MA in Digital Technologies for Language Teaching programme at the University of Nottingham. Following the generic model for designing research in education by McKenney and Reeves (2012), which encompasses analysis/exploration, design/construction, and evaluation/reflection, the author describes the VE that focuses on knowledge and skills building and introduces students to the theories and practices of VE through a critical and multicultural lens. As a result, they develop competences in organising VE activities, and are engaged in research leading to the production of digital artefacts such as articles analysing VE projects and study reviews as well as video presentations on various topics subsequently published as open educational resources (http://telecollaboration20.pbworks.com/).

Mary-Jane Radford Arrow who at the time of the conference was based at the TU in Berlin, Germany presents her first VE, a 14-week collaboration with a partner from another technical university in Łódź, Poland, with engineering and natural sciences students, respectively. The exploratory practice approach chosen considered the on-going critical conversations and reflections between the two instructors. Their 18 weekly meetings, including sessions before and after the VE, covered four phases from (1) synchronisation of course matters, to (2) decision-making of tasks and choice of tools, to (3) looking at students' interactions in the VE, and to (4) final reflections and integration which included generating ideas for the following term.

In her contribution, **Roberta Trapè** takes the development of intercultural communicative competence a step further by focusing on the development of global citizenship through the facilitation of real civic engagement in student participants' local communities. In a 12-week VE, students at the University of Virginia, United States, worked with a group of students at an upper-secondary school in Pavia, Italy. Both English and Italian were used, and face-to-face foreign language lessons were blended with Skype-mediated digital learning in dyads or tryads. Real-life tasks following the so called progressive exchange model format (see O'Dowd & Ware, 2009) asked the groups to explore issues of gender equality, to plan, and eventually implement a civic action project in

their local communities. They did so by designing a plea for renaming a place or street in favour of a woman who was seen as especially relevant for the history of their community. Each dyad/triad chose a woman and wrote a proposal in English and Italian which was presented to the respective mayors of Pavia and Charlottesville.

With their innovative contribution on digital escape rooms in the field of gamification, **Julie Stephens de Jonge and Belén Labrador** present a motivating task concept for a three-months VE between learners of English (University of León) and learners of Spanish (University of Central Missouri). The challenges in form of various enigmas placed in a context of saving the world in a dystopian future and facilitated by a number of digital tools in the digital escape rooms led to various forms of collaboration between the local teams. Apart from practicing the target L2s, students developed intercultural communicative competence and critical thinking skills in the course of the project.

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Section 1.

Keynotes

1 UniCollaboration plenary session

Rodrigo Ballester[1]

https://videos.unileon.es/video/5d78eaa68f420872148b45ea

Virtual exchange is one of the programmes which really charmed me at the beginning and kept on growing. I work in the European Commission, in the close team of the Cabinet of the Commissioner of Education and Culture. The good thing about this job is that if you have the chance to meet the right people and you have enough energy, you can influence things. You can make sure that things that were more or less on the political agenda are finally up to speed and have a promising future.

To speak about virtual exchange, I can give you some key words which we are going to elaborate for the next 45 minutes: 'terrorist attacks', 'Bataclan', and other such words. I can also speak about the teachers' views, the fact that teachers today need more motivation, social acknowledgement, and prestige. I also mean to speak about digital skills and the myths around them, starting with 'digital natives'; an expression we use so quickly that falls short of our expectations. Virtual exchange is also about mobility.

Erasmus, the fantastic jewel in the European Union's crown, the best project we ever elaborated, is still a project for a happy few. We can speak about languages, intra-European cohesion, social cohesion, our ability for intercultural exchanges, and understanding with third countries; but do not forget that we also have many things to discover amongst ourselves as Europeans.

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However, the last five years in the Commission have been complicated. We are reaching the end of a mandate that started in 2014. Since then we have spent most of our time dealing with crises; Greece, migration, terrorism, the aftermath of the euro and the financial crash in the last ten years, and Brexit of course.

In the middle of a crisis, you do not really have time to think about long term projects, like education. We cannot really say it was on the top of the agenda in 2017. The Commission is a world that is very much dominated by economists and lawyers, and we had to deal with crises that were shaking the foundation of the European Union. In 2016 we were all scared, all those working there were wondering how long it could last; but this is far behind us now.

I just wanted to tell you that the first three years of this mandate were complicated because we did not have the visibility that a topic like education deserves. Adding to that the fact that the European Union is not the main player; the main players are the national and regional ministries. You draw up the curricular, you decide how you are going to educate your children. We are here for you guys to meet, to improve the European coordination. We are here also to set common objectives and more. One such objective is Erasmus, mostly devoted to mobility but not just. It has also served the purpose of actions like this conference.

This is our role, but again it was a bit frustrating that a topic that is socially so important could be omitted in the European agenda until 2017. Education is always among three or four main concerns. However, in 2017 everything changed for us because heads of states started to speak about education. With fresh news on Brexit, we realised what was the best plan to offer.

Remember in 2016 when everyone was criticising the Commission? Our last card to play was Erasmus. We could not solve the migration crisis, there was fear everywhere. Europe was considered a disaster, but we still had Erasmus. Suddenly, we realised we had something powerful that had become widely known. It is a big success, and we still have many things to deal with amongst us as Europeans. We have to discover each other, and also the course of policies that sometimes have a huge impact; for instance the Erasmus impact.

So you see from 2017, the next two years were busy for very good reasons. The Commission wanted to do more for education and culture. Now there was a clear objective which was largely shared by all the Member States; the European Education Area. That means, that from early child education and care, to skills training, to universities and PhDs, we would try to include all this in the European Education Area.

The European Education Area means more mobility. What do we mean by mobility? Not just physical mobility but also more social cohesion. We have a huge problem of social cohesion among our Member States and also with third countries, especially when it comes to the South Mediteranean area.

We also have a problem with digital skills. I speak about problems because sometimes we tend to have this messianic point of view. Firstly that digital technologies are going to solve all our problems in classrooms, and secondly that we can use them very well, especially youngsters.

We have to acknowledge that digital technologies, if not used properly, can be toxic. We have huge problems with addiction, a lack of concentration, and superficiality, not to mention problems of digital citizenship, like bullying, and a total lack of critical thinking. It is really very surprising to see how people can be totally manipulated with media; emotions manipulated within weeks, to the point where they turn against their communities. We saw it and again this is one of the things we have to tackle.

Even in terms of digital skills we often point to the teachers. This is the point of today's project. We often point at the older generations, and then we tend to assume that the digital natives, those who were born with a smartphone in their pocket, are fine. We do not need to care about them. Well it is one thing to be digitally confident, and another to be digitally competent. The truth is that even the majority of the youngsters are not digitally competent. It is one thing to watch a video on Youtube, or to send a Snapchat, another to write a letter in Times New Roman font size 12, and even another to be able to have the basics of coding and programming. On the basics of coding and programming, I think

that the vast majority of people are lagging behind, old or young. On typing a letter, I think my parents can do it better than many youngsters. So digital skills and digital citizenship need to be tackled.

Language is another aspect that we have to look at very carefully. We made a recommendation to the Member States for them to adopt – 1+1+1 – to be able to speak your own language plus another European language plus another foreign language, whatever it is and wherever it comes from. This might be a very ambitious objective, but ambitious objectives also have the advantage of lifting the level up, and this is where we are headed. First of all, we already have many people in the European Union who are trilingual or bilingual. The idea is to make sure that people not only learn English, but also develop the DNA of the European Union, which is diversity; cultural diversity and linguistic diversity. We have 24 official languages in the European Union, and hundreds of other languages. English is great but there are other languages in the world, especially in Europe.

Let me also speak a bit about teachers. We know it can get a bit frustrating because we often have very good ideas to implement in the European Education Area. Our pupils should be more entrepreneurial, they should speak languages, they should be trained in values, they should be so many things, and at the end we speak about everything but the teachers; the true cornerstones. Without motivated and acknowledged teachers, everything I am saying is premature, nothing will happen, nothing will be different. We do not speak about them the way we should. We also do not give them the funding. The results of a survey published in June recommended a focus on literacy. What are teachers' problems? Not just salaries, that can be a problem in some countries more than in others, but there is also a problem of social acknowledgement, prestige, authority, and respect. Four words I was not allowed to mention four years ago in the Commission because they were reactionary and conservative. So I say them again. Social acknowledgement, respect, authority, prestige – all very important. Teachers suffer from a lack of social acknowledgement, even when you look at the countries that are doing best in terms of teachers, mostly Finland. Finland is the best example we have in Europe, probably the best in the world.

Why are they so happy? It is because they have social prestige. So that makes a difference. I remember the first thing I heard when I joined the Cabinet of Education; in Spain, primary and secondary school teachers, even in crisis, were paid more than a Finnish teacher. So you see, salaries are part of the equation and we must look at them but we must also look beyond. One question is training; the continuous training of teachers, training in foreign languages, and training in digital technologies as well. Even if teachers think they know about digital technologies, some things cannot be improvised. Some things need to be taught. I would also say every teacher needs a degree of autonomy and the tools and keys to their own kingdom: the classroom.

So you see this is the landscape we have now. Those are the big problems we are looking at. We in the European Commission do not have burdens like you. We do not go into the detail of the curriculum, we do not go into the classrooms. I mean, we visit them of course, but it is true that most of the burden of education is more on your shoulders, not mine. It is more on the teachers, the school directors, the rectors, and of course on the universities and the national and regional ministries. Those are the main players, though we look at you, we help you, we advise you, and in many ways we support you.

It is very reassuring then to see that many people in the Commission are now speaking about education, especially prime ministers. Many of them are saying to triple Erasmus, which is easy to say, but we may need to curb some of their enthusiasm. It is true that in a period of economic uncertainty we do not know the budget for the next several years. To already fulfil the proposal of the Commission we would have to double Erasmus. We are going to cut European funding for almost everything except three things: defence, migration, and education. That is a clear sign. It is not that we are going to improve Erasmus, it means we are going to double it, and yes we still have not negotiated with the Member States yet – the people with the money. Erasmus is becoming the secret cow. Will we have less money then now? I do not think so. Will we have twice as much as now? I do not know, but I am sure we will have more, and education is very much at the top of the political agenda, which is very good news.

If I stressed all these problems first it is because they are the ones we see with a birds' eye view. From social cohesion, common values, and a sense of belonging to teachers' training, all have a point in common with virtual exchanges. Their beauty is that if they are done well and are widespread, they can address partially every single big problem that I have identified in the European Education Area. That is why I think that we all have to see the future of virtual exchanges with optimism. I think we can be very optimistic because the wind is at our back and we are all open minded, I do not think anyone is against them. I think that more and more people will be more receptive, more permeable to the beauty, the charm, and the efficiency of virtual exchanges.

Let me give you my personal version of it. For me the first contact I had with virtual exchanges was after the terrorist attacks of Charlie Hebdo. This is when it all started. I will spare you the details, you all know what happened. There was an education, security, and communication dimension. That is for example what the French said from the very beginning and what they tried to implement. We said, well we also have to replicate that at a European level. That is why, seven weeks later, the Commissioner called all the education ministers to Paris and we agreed on a declaration, a very consensual one. However, the European Commission also had some homework to see how we could support Member States in improving intercultural dialogue, a sense of belonging, and adherence to common values. It was not only about speaking about intercultural dialogue, but also about ensuring that within our societies we agreed on some unnegotiable sorts of rules. That was really part of the agenda. You might not like it, but this was the way the decision was taken. Of course, we also spoke about diversity, discrimination, and the third pillar of this whole declaration – critical thinking, which we have now. That was signed in 2015, very consensually, as I told you, and now we have to implement them, but implement them how?

Then I had a phone call from the counter terrorist team, from the Minister of antiterrorism in the European Union who said: "Have you heard of something called the Stevens Initiative?", to which I replied I had not, and they told me to look into it. So, what is a Stevens Initiative? Mister Stevens was a US Ambassador killed in Libya, and his family decided to add meaning to his

death. They created a platform for virtual exchanges between American and Middle East students. The resulting impact was measured by MIT, and this is where you say: "OK, there must be something serious behind it". When I started digging into it, I realised that what in the beginning looked like an utopian initiative, actually raised levels of empathy. It does not solve all problems, but the dialogue is welcoming and the exchanges are well done, increasing levels of empathy.

In 2015, we had Erasmus, a very powerful brand. We did not even need the funding of a foundation like the Stevenson Initiative. We had our own money, but what could we do with it? This is where Erasmus virtual exchanges started.

Of course in the European Union we were more or less familiar with virtual communication. There were some studies in 2011 and 2014, and also we had another jewel in the crown, one that I really appreciate: eTwinning, one of the largest teacher networks in the world. There are about 600 thousand teachers now signed up, and many projects. When we started there were 300 thousand, and five years later that has doubled. It is really growing like a mushroom, and I very much think that it has the potential of being the next Erasmus. It is a fantastic platform and it works extremely well. It is ten years old now, and in more than 40 countries, going beyond Europe; precisely one of the things we wanted to do, that is expanding to third world countries, especially the South and Middle East. That is why we managed to develop it even more in Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan. The charm of eTwinning is, first it belongs to the teachers, second it is free, third it leads to virtual exchanges among classrooms, and fourth, it is really one of the best intercultural dialogue machines I have ever seen. It starts very young, at 11 or 12 years old, which is even better than starting at 22. The earlier, the better.

I went to Tunisia to see the eTwinning team, and they showed me some video exchanges they were doing with Germany, Romania, Greece, and France where they were calculating the circumference of the room, according to the Earth, and according to an old Greek mathematician's formula. Even if it was mathematics, you could see that it was pure intercultural dialogue. If you do that from ten to

16 years old you can hardly get radicalised at 18. So that for me was a perfect situation and a fascinating project.

So you see, we are already familiar with this, and this came out of Erasmus in the virtual domain.

As you know better than me, virtual exchanges can serve many different purposes. They can be intercultural dialogues, languages, digital skills, teacher training, and soft skills, etc. We entered through the angle of intercultural dialogue, antiterrorism to be more precise. Giving life to this programme was very complicated; we had to convince many people, go through many layers, but in the end it was all useful because now the project is alive and kicking and has very promising results I am optimistic about, and they are very positive both for universities and for youth organisations. Another important aspect of virtual exchanges is the lesson we learnt that speaking to universities is fantastic, but we were already speaking to like-minded people. You have to go beyond, you have to reach the people who are likely to distrust you, as we are all a bit socially conditioned. That is why youth organisations are even more important. They are harder to reach out to, but are definitely one of the targets we have. We can say universities are even more optimistic because there is already a culture of mobility, there is already a cultural exchange. The way the Tunisian kids were doing maths with Romanian kids means they were having an intercultural dialogue. In universities one hint that is important for the future is that you can also mix it with physical mobility. This is what we mean by blended mobility. Can you combine both? Yes. The purpose of combining both was also to reach out to many more people. Erasmus is fantastic, we are all extremely proud of it, it is the best brand the European Union ever produced. It changed the lives of nine million people. We do not have a footnote to justify that but, it is really fantastic. At the end of the day it is only 10% of the students that benefit from it. We still have a huge margin of manoeuvre to extend to people who naturally are not interested in Erasmus. Those are not only students, but also teachers.

First we have to work on students who do not have such an international background, who do not speak languages, but we also have to make sure that

it benefits other categories. For instance, vet students, because of vocational education and training, are very important and we are already working on including them. We have invested hundreds of millions of euros to make sure that people who are doing professional training can benefit. It is more complicated to send Spanish 17 and 18 year olds to an industrial area, in Germany, where they are supposed to be operational after ten days and to speak German already than it is to send a German 23 or 24 year old student to the University of Leon with a very poor knowledge of Spanish. In three months he will catch up and at the end he will learn Spanish and be able to follow some lessons. It is a totally different setting and that is why I believe that university students will always be more receptive than those following professional training.

If there is one missing link in Erasmus, it is the schools. Fantastic things can be done with physical mobility in schools, sometimes two weeks of physical mobility at 13 or 14 years old can definitely change your life, though it is very cumbersome for teachers to go through 100 pages of bureaucracy which you are all familiar with, at least those of you who applied for Erasmus projects. There again this is also a fantastic example of blended mobility, if you are able to combine the fire power of Erasmus with this virtual mobility, you can improve intercultural knowledge, badly needed digital skills, and also improve soft skills. In other words, what youngsters are missing today. We heard from big companies who came to our offices and said: "You know what there is a lot of youth unemployment in Europe, and I have many vacancies that I cannot cover. What do we do about it"? They said it is not only a problem of aptitude it is also a problem of attitude. So these social skills, these soft skills some people call 21st century social skills, come from big companies. When you have CEOs saying they are looking for curious people able to work in teams, solve problems, and communicate in several languages, I think we should listen. Again, this is something that virtual exchanges can definitely tackle.

Another thing that I learnt from the beginning is that virtual exchange is not very easy to sell. When you see a newcomer and want to do an Erasmus virtual exchange, they look at you as if it meant not having a great idea so trying to make it virtual, and that is considered 'the wrong good idea'. Then virtual

became so trendy that in the end it did not mean anything. It is a word that today is devalued, as it can be a problem as well. Youngsters who live in a 100% virtual world today are sick. Is it so good to be so virtual, to be always sitting in front of your screen, on Facebook, Twitter, or WhatsApp, and then not even be able to say hello or engage in a conversation? Is that really what we want? Virtual is suspicious; it can be superficial, toxic, and cover the fact that you do not have the imagination to do something tangible.

At first I was a bit sceptical on the value of virtual exchanges. Then I saw that MIT was measuring its value in the US and that in Europe many people were already working on it and that it raised levels of empathy. It took me some time to digest and to understand virtual exchanges, and that is why I still remember the key things that made me change my mind.

You need to do a lot of pedagogy, so once you leave this conference in three days, remember that it is important, do not take it for granted. You cannot improvise virtual exchanges, it is very important and it is why teachers need to learn and get some type of academic acknowledgement for both themselves and their students. Call it credits, or call it initial teacher education. There are ways, this is also a message for national ministries: do not hesitate to put it in the teachers' official curricula. It helps a lot, and once it is structured, it attracts many other people because it gives the impression of officiality, in this case totally justified. For eTwinning for example, we already have two or three countries, Poland for example, that put eTwinning in their teachers' official initial training. Can we do something similar for virtual exchanges, either Erasmus or not? I think that it is one of the key questions that we may have discussions on. Please put it on the agenda, because it is very important. As is, of course, training the teachers.

Virtual exchanges that are not properly moderated can be totally counter-productive. Here are some concrete examples. If you put some Swedish and Palestinian students in a room and they start talking about 9/11 you know perfectly that the first comments are going to be offensive to both sides. Some will say that it is a plot, others will say "you are dangerous terrorists", things like that. If

you do not have someone who is able to moderate that, and to channel negative energy to raise empathy three months later, it is totally counter-productive.

Another thing that I learnt as well is that it has to also be labour oriented. If I went out tomorrow for example to Cairo University and said I had a programme that could prevent radicalisation, nobody would listen to me. However, if I say that I have a programme which is going to help them acquire social and international skills, improve their image, and look good on their CV could make a huge difference. Using this angle of labour market relevance is very important.

For the third part of my intervention, let us have a brief look at the future. First you have good reasons to be optimistic. I do not know if this Erasmus programme is going to be renewed, but I think yes. I think that now virtual exchanges are on the agenda and we have more or less the big structure of the next Erasmus on the table, which means seven years, which already gives some structure and stability. We are pretty sure that there will be some funding for virtual exchanges and we will do our best to mix them with physical mobility, because in the end if our aim is to democratise Erasmus, then virtual mobility must be part of this plan and it must not be done only through physical exchange. We also think that now education is much higher in the political agenda, at European and national levels, and they are much more open to this kind of programme as long as they are well justified and the results are measured and satisfactory.

I wanted to also say that this report is the most exhaustive study I have ever read on virtual exchanges. So congratulations, it is an excellent report which can be shown, do not put it in the drawer. We have good reasons to be optimistic as long as virtual exchanges are well explained and the value is clearly demonstrated to policy makers. Do not sleep now that things are getting better, because at the end of the day, even if the Commission puts millions in the Erasmus pot, most of the work is on your shoulders again. It is you who have to talk to directors, to universities, who have to make sure that those programmes get recognition at higher education levels. It does help you

because you get a sort of legitimacy with European support, but at the end of the day you are the main actors. Those things will be consolidated once the 25 universities have a consolidated programme on virtual exchanges. Are we there yet? I do not think we are, but we are on really good tracks. Let me also give you two or three pieces of advice.

The first is actually a thing that I did not find in the programme, which I actually think is relevant for virtual exchanges; rural areas. Do not forget rural areas please. When we speak about virtual exchanges we tend to look at the Middle East, at Asia, at Africa, at how wonderful it is to have our cosmopolitan conscience and state of mind. Yes that is part of the plan, but do not forget that even within Europe we have regions within our countries, and I think that Leon is a good example. In many ways, virtual exchanges can partially address the ageing of the population. I saw wonderful programmes of eTwinning at school level, but I also saw wonderful programmes in regions that are of villages that are still active thanks to eTwinning. Sometimes it is schools or universities which are the last barriers before a region starts to multiply. This is the only additional angle to the project you could find. All the others are exhaustively covered. You sometimes speak about this cosmopolitan state of mind that is very important, but do not forget that there are people who are very far from it. They simply do not want to become cosmopolitan and that is fair enough. They simply want to be themselves and be part of and be informed about the rest. Here again through virtual exchanges we can really do something.

Also do not forget intra-European cohesion. One of the things I loved most about this project is that you have different ministries involved. It is very geographically balanced within the European Union, which still has divides on topics like migration for example. There are many things that we do not know about our neighbours. We are 27, in a club. We share 30% of our national sovereignty. We do things that are very important that really impact our life yet we do not know each other at all. Is that sustainable? I do not think so.

We could do topics in the curricula, subjects of the European Union, many speeches, but if you take people from the rural areas in Portugal and send them

to Kracovia and the other way round, that does not cost so much because we are speaking of basically 30 days of mobility that can make a huge difference. We have already pre-empted four billion euros in Erasmus for that. It is another way of ensuring that we know each other a bit better.

Virtual exchanges even at university levels can also improve this knowledge because at the end of the day, the classical Erasmus students that we all like are here in this room, we are fine, we are all vaccinated, we do not need the European Union for that. What about this 90% of students who do not benefit from mobility because sometimes they simply do not want to? For some, virtual exchanges could do a bit more than for their neighbours.

Do not forget those aspects, the world is fine but we still have to do quite a lot of work here in Europe. With all that being said I must say that again, I do not know where I am going to be in two months but I am sure that in ten years I will hear good news about virtual exchanges. I am also pretty sure that my kids will go to university, some of them in ten years, and I trust that one third of the curricula might be already mobility blended, physical, or virtual. For them it would be as normal as taking a geography course or a mathematics course in a room like this one. So keep the faith please, the wind is in your back.

Q&A

Q. I thought your presentation was fascinating, it gives us heart in what we do and I would like to thank you for pointing out the issue of rural areas because I think that is something that has not come across my radar to speak of that we should be interested in looking at. You are probably right. When the Ministry of Education from Madrid came to talk about this project about a year ago, that was one of the first things they saw the potential of virtual exchanges having.

In Castilla Leon we have huge problems of empty villages and things like that. They talked about even internally in Spain virtual exchanges between cities and villages and stuff like that.

Could you tell us a little bit about examples of eTwinning that were doing things like that. Could you tell us a bit more about what is happening there?

For example there was an Italian lady who was teaching in a beautiful rural area but really 'lost from the hands of God'. Basically she was a teacher in several schools and some were about to close, and because she was a very motivated eTwinner, she started setting up ambitious projects with other countries. At the end, what she managed to do was to resurrect not only her school but three or four in the neighbourhood, so a region actually. A small region, but still a region. It had a great impact on the prestigious schools because if you are a parent, you do not want to play games with your kids' education, you want to get your kids the best school possible. So that one rural school is not going to offer not even a slight opening to the international world today in 21st century Europe. It is not necessarily attractive. You might even be tempted to send your kid 50 kilometres away or send them to a boarding school Monday through Friday. At the end of the day though, through virtual exchanges, you can keep your school alive which means your village alive, while having an opening to the rest of Europe and to the rest of the world. Today eTwinning is 40 countries as I said we just signed Jordan and Morocco. In Tunisia we have 200 schools for example so it is already at critical mass; it can have a crucial role.

That is the best example I can give. It takes a good internet connection and a motivated teacher; that is also very important, which is a big problem also, as well as some administrative problems like authorisations because you are reliant on your regional authority. Once you have a good connection, technology, and a motivated teacher, it can really have a revolutionary impact.

You see not only was it revolutionary in Tunisia, it was also wonderful to see the impact. It was very touching when I went and I saw the teacher doing this project with five other European countries. If that's not intercultural dialogue, then what is? It was wonderful. In Europe, once again those things can be used. Imagine now that a school in Leon is about to close because parents are not motivated to send their students there. Show them that there is a European programme and you have a 5G or 4G connection on a broadband, and on that basis you can make

sure that your kids are going to travel virtually before they travel physically one day. Again, coming back to physical mobility in schools, we put four billion euros on the table. I think that we will have at least three billions to invest. We can do something with that. There are only the high schools from Madrid, Avi, Budapest, and Copenhagen that are going to benefit from that. It is fine but I would much more prefer a school for example from a village in Leon going to meet somebody in the countryside of Budapest or Poland. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe have huge problems of de-population as well. If you go to the Baltic countries the countryside is dying because everyone is going to the capitals. This is really one common problem we have in Europe. There is not a European country that is not fighting de-population in general and the desertification of rural areas.

Q. I think one of the things that strikes me is that eTwinning has been around for a long time and for universities there was almost the assumption that people would get on mobility. The target has always been 20%, which we haven't reached, is that perhaps why virtual exchange didn't reach universities, because it was almost felt that there wasn't the need for it?

It could be, because some universities which are international teach 70% of courses in English for example and did not feel the need to do those things. I think that we have to do a lot of pedagogy on virtual exchanges. We still need to explain the virtues of the virtual better. At first sight it can be one of these 'uber' types of ideas. It is much better than that, much more than that. You just need some time to digest. Stick to the faith of the converted. I remember my scepticism the first month, how slowly this idea started to convince me. Good advocates and persons who come with Excel spreadsheets with results. Figures speak a lot in these types of cases, where you need to convince people of the benefits of virtual exchange. I believe that that is the key. This is what works for us, at the Commission at least, and having the energy to fight for two years to get this project on track, and it worked.

Q. For the Commission is there a priority of virtual exchange increasing or of physical mobility with Erasmus or are they seen as one thing?

The Commission sees it as one thing that complements the other. It is not two parallel streets. It is really one way to make sure that more and more people benefit from this international experience. At the end, and where universities are moving, is towards this blended mobility.

I can give you a very good recent example. This is a project that is going to change the way we study; the way my kids will study at European universities. We have the first pilot project, the results were published in June, three months ago. We had 1,000 students at 11 or 14 universities teamed up together in several projects of seven or eight, sometimes by faculties, sometimes by subjects. We put the money on the table, and in the end we are creating European universities. European in identity, not that we are replacing anything. It is just a way to physically create studies of four years of Erasmus. Instead of choosing one year of Erasmus it means that maybe my kids will be able to chose studies where they will study for one year in Budapest, one year in Madrid, one year in Copenhagen, and one year in Paris, and at the end they will get one single diploma during which the teachers will have been in touch virtually and physically. In the end it is as if you had one diploma from one university but you studied in four or five different ones. This is the trend though. We put this project on the table recently. The universities' appetites were so big that suddenly we had to find 20 more million euros to cover their appetite. We know that this is going to happen every two or three years because we have the impression there is so much appetite that it is going to be consolidated any time soon.

Those are examples of blended mobility. Those projects are built on blended mobility. Do we see it as two different tracks? Absolutely not, we see it as one blended track for sure.

Q. You mentioned the example of eTwinning and gave Tunisia, Lebanon, and Jordan as examples. As we know Lebanon is already a huge refugee hosting country in the region. How do you assess the potential of virtual exchange as an education in general as a policy tool in migration?

In many different ways. For example, both for the integration of migrants that come here and for learning the language, especially for a youngster of eight years old with parents of 40 years old; integration is better achieved in school.

Also in the case of Jordan and Lebanon for example, what do you do with the refugees that have been there for three or four years in camps? They have schools, it is not that they are totally abandoned in camps. You have examples of both. I know people who saw very good schools in camps. The problem is those teachers need to train another generation and therefore virtual exchanges with Jordan and Lebanon, especially with Lebanon, was of utmost importance for the Palestinian kids. The question was should it be open to the Palestinian kids and of course the answer was yes. You see how a central cultural dialogue can already be implemented there for populations that are in a difficult situation. Especially for pupils who already do not have a positive relationship with the Western world and might have many prejudices about us. Some prejudices that might end up very bad. I come back to the very first point of entry that brought us to virtual exchanges. My preference goes for programmes that start early. If you give a first touch at 11 or 12 years old, it is almost like a vaccination to me. At the end when you see communication at such a young age it can be very nice because first they can discover many things that they have in common. They probably listen to the same horrible singers and they can speak about football and things like that. I would prefer that they talk about things that are a bit more sophisticated that really create impact, but when you see in the classroom, even if they are dressed differently, if half the girls in the classroom wear a scarf but listen to Justin Bieber, it creates some affinities.

In the first talk I had about the Stevens Initiative, they were not very sure and they said it would solve all the problems, people are not going to understand others' point of views; yet it raises empathy. You start to have a natural respect for people who have very different points of view. That might be enough or not. At least it is a very good start. For Jordan and Lebanon definitely yes. The policy with longstanding refugees can make a difference, we are very positive about it, definitely.

Q. In Poland we have our problems, but one of the things that we are proud of is this huge impact of eTwinning partnerships at all levels starting right from kindergarten and rural areas and this introduction into the core curriculum; that was also something unique.

My question goes to the relations between the European Commission and the Council of European Languages Policy Division. Last year we saw a huge launch of the new common European framework of reference with the new scales for interculturality and negotiation, negotiating between languages. How are the two institutions cooperating? Are they hopeful?

Believe it or not we are good buddies! We have a different geographical scope. We also have a different relationship with our Member States which is often based on the conventions of the Council of Europe. There are some cases where we are not on the same track but normally we are. They do the international stuff and we try to make sure that the Member States follow those things. They do not have the power to have a recommendation. Member States say can you please teach three languages; 1+1+1 as I said before. The fact that we are doing this 1+1+1 totally matches their objectives. The Council of Europe is very keen on the minority languages and diversity and so are we. That is why one of the messages we are saying is that it is very important that everyone speaks English, but we also need to make sure that we promote other European languages. The minority languages are part of our agenda as well, not as the most important file on our table, but there is some work being done, very much based on the Council of Europe. In this way, in the majority of areas, we are on very good terms.

2 UniCollaboration plenary session: virtual learning goes to camp – online pedagogies in contexts of emergency and crisis

Barbara Moser-Mercer[1]

https://videos.unileon.es/video/5d78f0948f4208775a8b4567

Just by way of introduction, here are some of the far flung criteria we have to consider when we go to an emergency setting when trying to figure out how we can bring the university to a camp. A lot of people are going hungry where we work, and providing meals and transport in refugee camps so people can attend class is very much a part of what we need to think about. Equally important is to figure out how to get women into a classroom. Designing and locating a classroom in a vast refugee camp and close to where people fetch water might seem very strange to any university in our regular setting, but to us it is one of the variables that we consider. Fetching water is a woman's job and if women have to fetch water for five or six hours a day and your classroom is not near a water hub then they are not going to come.

So, what I would like to do today is to help you visualise where we work. It is very difficult to imagine if you have never been out there. That is why it is useful to have some visual impressions. What does it look like, what does it mean to live in a refugee camp? Is it as bad as they say or is it as wonderful as they say?

I would also like by way of an introduction to clarify that InZone is not a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO). It is an academic centre at the University of Geneva and I think you will know that the university's mission is to continue to be a critical observer of what happens in society. When I speak up and out that

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means that I would like to make sure that the university does not lose that part of its mission. We should be critical observers, but we then should follow up with the kind of research that allows us to create the evidence on which we can base that critique. If we need to be quiet, there's a special academic freedom in those environments, which I will touch on later. This is not about not liking the humanitarian system, but indeed it will be very much about a system that needs changing. We as universities have an obligation to contribute to that. Up until now we have not been part of it, and I think we have been kept out of it for a very long time partly because it is not safe to go there. If you really want to go there you have to fight your way in. We did that and it took many years and it is still a daily battle to go places where we are not welcome. It is going to take more than one university to do that, so I invite all of you in the end if you are not too frightened or too taken aback.

Where does my university see its place or where does virtual exchange see its place – how could we get them started?

I will divide up the talk into transporting you there as a humanist and sharing a five minute video. The video very much speaks to the virtual exchange idea and how students from our university in the Geneva campus are working together with students in Macau and how that could be developed and designed and what Kenya means to the students on both ends.

In the beginning we did not have any funding. This was a strategic initiative of the University of Geneva that I managed to get funding for, but our Rector always said there had to be something in it for our students, otherwise it was not going to be sustainable within the institution. I think that was the best piece of advice I ever got. Now that the funding picture has changed completely, and the university contributes only a fraction of what our donors are contributing, it is still an important reminder. The work really has to support learning at both ends and not just as an humanitarian project. We cannot substitute ourselves as humanitarian actors in the humanitarian system, that is not the role of universities. I think we would very quickly lose that very precious position that universities have as independent impartial scientific observers and actors.

Where does education sit in humanitarian action? Does it have a role, does it have a place? Who determines it, who runs it, and are those the same institutions that actually run education in our own countries?

Here is the humanitarian system showing you a little bit about how it has all been divided up, like a pie that has been sliced up. The main sectors are water, sanitation, and health. Clearly in an emergency that is what should be dealt with first; logistics.

According to this system, each part has been allocated to different organisations. The education sector, not unsurprisingly, is led by UNICEF (United Nations Children's Fund). Higher education however, within the UN system, is the mandate of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation), and there begins the turf war that plays out in the field as much as it does in Geneva or New York. Who is responsible, who is in charge? In many instances UN agencies have actually partnered with large NGOs. The education part is actually a cluster co-led by UNICEF and Save the Children. Save the Children is one of the world's largest NGOs in that sector. I am sure you are familiar with many others. They are big and they are big in education. When you talk about education, 'Save' is not far away.

I will use the word refugee a little bit loosely now, to basically cover all forcibly displaced persons, whether they are asylum seekers or migrants in general, not including economic migrants, although climate migrants might ultimately end up in that category. Europe has been a little more exposed to those kinds of discussions in 2015 when what is termed the refugee crisis broke out. Looking at the density or the ratio between refugees and any kind of refugee and host country population, Europe is doing really well. You look at Lebanon, every third person is a refugee, and that gives you a sense of the ratio between refugees and host country citizens. The country that is hosting the largest number of refugees today is Turkey, with 2.3 million refugees far outpacing Kenya which used to be the leading country and is still way up there. However, if you look at the density of refugees and you look at it on a world map, refugees are mostly found in countries that neighbour a conflict-affected country. Those countries

are mostly developing countries themselves and have a very hard time seeing to the needs of their own populations, such as Jordan or Lebanon. They have been at the receiving end of successive waves of Palestinian Iraqi refugees. Even Iraq is a refugee receiving country where Syrian refugees are found in fairly large numbers. The same is actually true for the North of Africa and Africa in general. They have a fairly large movement of refugees. So that gives you an idea of where education actually has to happen. Are not the countries themselves also equally affected? Is their education system strong enough to withstand the assault of second, third, and fourth shifts in populations for example? They do not even have enough teachers for their own population.

There is also a lot of tension between the humanitarian system and the development world. When you look at governments, budgets, they are usually very separate; there is the humanitarian budget and then there is the development budget. The two up until now have not really met yet and there is a big movement now called humanitarian development nexus. It has been going on for about a decade to try and see how humanitarian intervention can kick start development action. That puts a lot more responsibility on us. It also gives us a lot more justification at higher education institutes to start at the humanitarian intervention level, rather than waiting until the crisis is over. When you look at some of these crises, we are going into the ninth year. It is going on a decade and some refugees are in refugee camps for generations, and then the kids are born there and have never known anything else. Some of these so-called crises are really protracted crises. There is not much point waiting until you actually start an intervention. Clearly when you go and try and find money, you are going to have to come up with all these arguments. Why do you want to go there? What are you going to bring to solve the problem? Where do you fit into this particular system?

I will drill down a little more now into education in general, according to the 1951 Refugee Convention which is the United Nations High Commission for Refugees mandate, the only mandate they have is to protect refugees, though you would not know this when you look at what they do. Expansion of mandates in humanitarian contexts is quite current. There's often a turf war between the agencies, but every host country has the obligation to provide

primary and secondary education to refugees on their territory when they sign that convention. Some of the world's largest refugee hosting countries have not signed that convention but fortunately they still more or less abide by these rules. In a way interventions at the primary and secondary level have indeed characterised education emergencies as we know it. For the past 25 years this field has really grown.

The biggest organisation in that particular sector is the Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE). If there's anything that you want to know about education in emergencies, INEE has an incredible number of resources for you to dig into especially for teacher training. They have a special group called Teachers in Crisis and Conflict with wonderful material all freely downloadable. It is a wonderful website, full of resources. Over the years INEE also developed what are called minimum standards for education in emergencies. Anyone who is ever going to attempt working in a refugee context or in a crisis context has an obligation to understand those minimum standards. They are not intuitive. It took me a long time to understand all of them and to make sure that whatever programming you do meets those minimum standards in education and emergencies. It starts from data protection to protection of children. There's a whole range of standards we need to abide by. For instance, the university has just offered 30,000 dollars or euros, and being excited to do something in that sector is all very well, but you have not thought about what is going to happen when that money runs out. You may have hundreds of children or youth for whom you have raised the hope for an education. What you have not thought about is whether it is sustainable and how to make it sustainable. Indeed, you have already infringed on one of the key humanitarian principles which is to do no harm.

Understanding humanitarian principles is your first obligation. It is being impartial, neutral; to do no harm. There are several principles which you can find on the website. For instance, the International Committee of the Red Cross is a trustee of the Geneva Conventions. Understanding those humanitarian principles is our first obligation. Every day our team needs to ask itself "are we sure we are not doing more harm?". It should not constrain or interfere with your enthusiasm

to do something but in this field you really need to think long term, think about where your funding is coming from, and whether you can actually sustain a four year university programme in a refugee camp if you only have funding for one year. Just hoping that a donor is probably coming back is not good enough. The donor may have a totally different policy next year. It may be a big donor with whom you may not be able to negotiate being re-funded, so having a back-up solution is all part of education in emergencies, as you get into the field.

The other network is a network that we co-created, with the support of various donors over the years, called the Connected Learning in Crisis Consortium. It is led with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). We have about 23 or 24 members now. It mostly brings together higher education institutions, but the majority of members are NGOs engaged in tertiary education.

Global Health video presented about Kakuma Refugee Camp at this point.

The postscript to the project presented in the video is that the two winning projects are ongoing. One of them is geo-mapping snakes and scorpions in the Kakuma Camp. The first initiative has already been implemented and landed us a mention in the Global Education Report of UNESCO of which we are very proud. Basically, the students locally designed an information session for parents to help them chart the safest way through the camp to school avoiding the areas with a preponderance of snakes and scorpions.

The second project is being followed up with the International Rescue Committee who is responsible for health in the camp. The camp has basic medical training available. In that course what we learnt was that there was no funding for prevention. Epidemiological prevention is not funded in the camp. Basically, you have to catch malaria to get to enter the health system. Preventing malaria is not part of the humanitarian approach. So, students designed an approach. We delivered some microscopes up there. I think they have mapped about ten malaria laevae breeding sites. They have put it on a virtual map, and they have delivered it to the health system. They are interacting with the UNHCR database to try and see how that mapping can now become part of a prevention approach

in the camp to prevent malaria, unfortunately one of the most prevalent diseases when you go to the camp.

I think starting from the video and seeing what comes after is part of our approach. We are not in it for the short semester or less than a semester but really looking at building a community that hopefully becomes independent and more self-sufficient, looking first and foremost at the contextualised needs. What we have in Geneva is irrelevant. What they need is where we start. Then we go and see what we have that matches and how we adapt what we do. This health course is one of the interesting initiatives because the Master's students write their master's thesis on these changes. I hope I have given you a taste of what a virtual exchange can look like with the low level technology that we are trying to use. WhatsApp remains the one thing that is accessible to all refugees wherever they are. I think this is true for you as well in your implementations.

Having given you a bit of a visual image of where we work leads me to the long term impact, the long term change we want to see is: *inclusive and equitable quality education for sustainable development*.

It is very important to have your long term goals because we do get tired and frustrated. You bang your head against the walls every single day. There are incredible restrictions on everything you want to do. The first answer is usually no, then you need to backtrack and find out if there is another way that you can still do it. So, it is good for the team to also have this long term goal in mind. The roads to that long term goal can unfortunately be very windy; strewn with lots of obstacles. The problems that we encounter are fragility and conflict, low resources, and then language and cultural issues. There was one where all the students were speaking French and then there was no interpretation at that point. There is not a single course that we offer that is not at least bilingual. We make sure that we respect language when we get there, but again it is not straight forward.

The solutions that we implement are through working with pedagogy. We do not offer a course on conflict resolution, but we have developed and adopted a

pedagogical approach that forces and obliges students to work together in a non-conflictual way. It is incidental learning but not in your face. The medium has to be the message. People have to learn through that medium. I will give you a couple of examples of the outcomes that we see – indigenous knowledge.

Design solutions come from the ground up rather than from the North to the South. They are worked out together between the two. We have got learners who are empowered, and people develop livelihood skills. In one project, all 15 students in the course were immediately taken on as incentive-based volunteers by the International Rescue Committee. They had the skills that were needed in the camp and off they went. They did not have an academic degree, that was not part of what we needed as objectives. That is not the be all and end all of higher education. Ultimately the entire team is really building for sustainable development. It is a big agenda and obviously not one that we are able to implement very quickly.

So, what goes into our theory of change is resilience in communities that we are trying to build: there are 'pedagogy and learning' outcomes. I still have to use the old fashioned, condescending, and patronising term of Psycho-social Support (PS), but Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) has not really made the rounds yet. That is a big, big part of what we do with people who have really been through a lot of trauma and are continuing to go through a lot of trauma because the camp is not a safe place to be. The 'local knowledge production' is crucial to us. 'Social inclusion and development' is equally important to us but we are only just now beginning to build our inclusion pillar. That will include disability, people's different sexual orientations, and so on.

We want to be that critical observer out there – implementing humanitarian ethics – and see if the humanitarian system is doing what it is supposed to be doing and where its faults, difficulties, and issues are. There are unfortunately many.

We are very focused on 'refugee empowerment'; we do not have implementing partners which is the normal way of operating in those settings. You team up

with an NGO who will then implement what you are designing. From the very beginning we said that we would not want to have any implementing partners. We are entirely refugee managed where we are. That is the model we have developed under the radar for a long, long time and eventually it did win direct recognition and now we have been able to show it in daylight and say: "we are refugee managed – this is how we do it", but for a long time it was not accepted. When you go with an NGO you get into all sorts of issues of corruption and then you no longer run your own agenda. Somebody else is running your agenda for money.

We have been the subject of two theses, one Master's at Cambridge, one at SOAS University of London. Cambridge looked at the way we operate on the ground and adopted the theory of tempered radicals as a theoretical framework; meaning these are kinds of radicals in disguise, with the ability to be a chameleon.

Finally a word on 'social change'. These are the really big agendas. I will focus on a few of them; translation and interpretation. What really drove me into this agenda among other things was that for me this was the last frontier of learning. Understanding how people learn in those circumstances and in those contexts from a research perspective really was a main motivator and continues to be a main motivator. What can we as academic institutions and research communities do to understand learning in those contexts and how we might contribute to improving the ways in which learning happens in those areas?

We have put a lot of emphasis lately on social and emotional learning. We had an applied arts programme because it is part of our community outreach. Every course and every subject matter that we treat in camp also becomes content for our applied arts practitioners who we train. We then go out to the community and run programmes for example on children's rights; we go to a primary school and use arts to bring children's rights to that part of the community. Students have a civic engagement obligation as part of every single thing that we do, and they need to go out, they need to transmit their learning. We do not want to have an elitist system in the camp where only a few have access to higher education and get a degree. Higher education really needs to build that community and

so everyone has to contribute to it. This is really part of the social/emotional learning work.

We have recently started on a pilot project that surprised us with the rapid success that we had. We started it in Kenya and used sports, starting a running programme in one of the camps. We are just at the end now. I have just received the rest of the data on the pilot. This was the first time we worked with primary school children. We had 20 elite runners identified in the camp who would be the role models for 25 girls and 25 boys. The only thing we tracked was school attendance and school performance. We wanted to see how the regular sports programme would impact those two factors. Children would come to school three times a week in the morning which would mean they would immediately have to have had food for breakfast, etc. At the end of the pilot we now have the data superficially showing us: (1) compared to the rest of the primary school, children in the two schools that we were working with attended school more regularly; and (2) attending school regularly meant performance went up. By introducing and strengthening our social and emotional learning pillar, we automatically had found another way of improving learning and learning outcomes without even doing anything about the school itself.

However, what we did with the teachers was because we are also members of Coursera for refugees. We are one of the smaller programs, but we want to be one with the highest retention and completion rates. Every refugee learner can sign up for just about every course on Coursera and get a verified certificate without charge. We have developed a programme and one of the series of courses we are offering is a specialisation offered by the University of Colorado on social and emotional learning. There is not much out there on SEL yet. I am sure there will be, the more research we have. All teachers need to be involved in that series. It was arranged with Colorado that when they finished that series, they could obtain university credit.

All the kids go to school, the teachers get professional development, and the elite athletes have to be enrolled in education. We are not a sports organisation, so it all has to fit together. Until the big surprise came one morning when I was

running with the elites. We did the rounds and of the 20-year olds, 50% had not finished primary school, which was a big surprise and we made sure they had to provide evidence they were going to school and/or were involved in higher education courses. The intricacy of planning and ultimately what you want to achieve is important, but the social emotional pillar has become really important for us and we are testing different ways in which we are culturally appropriate with running in Kenya. We have a Kenyan coach, so we integrate refugees with Kenyans this way. Similarly, for the applied arts, music, dance, and story-telling in Africa, it is a no-brainer. We do not really want to export anything that we would do in Geneva because it is probably not going to work.

I think this is more at the theoretical level for us taking a very careful look at development theory and making sure of the parameters/criteria that we use to identify partners. Not all courses that we offer are offered by the University of Geneva. When we partner with another university, we first need to ensure that academic credit can be guaranteed and secondly that we share a world view. If their world view does not fit, then no matter what the name recognition of that university is, we would rather go someplace else. It is a big factor in who we partner with.

We do quite a bit of research in the camps themselves. The focus is really on human rights and human rights violations. It is a big pillar of our work and I will show you some examples later. For us we do not want to substitute 'Human Rights Watch' or any other NGOs that have this agenda, but nevertheless as a university we have an obligation to contribute because we work with these students on a day-to-day basis. We are at the receiving end of a lot of narratives and I looked carefully yesterday at some of the problematic examples that were mentioned, I could tell that we had those every day. Managing lots of conversations is a huge part of what all of us in our team do on a daily basis.

We are entirely refugee managed, which has been hugely important, and we are going one step further by starting to work with the Refugee Study Centre at Oxford. We are now looking at how our refugee management model, refugees setting up their own community-based organisation, is becoming more and

more independent of us. One of the things you need to understand is that you also need to have an exit strategy. You cannot really substitute yourself financially or otherwise for their own agency, especially with higher education that would be the norm. The logical conclusion is that they become independent actors with the competency to run their own campus, the University of Geneva Campus in the Kakuma Refugee Camp for example, which brings in other investors because they are developing livelihood opportunities based on what they have learnt.

Based on my own research, most of my academic career I have looked at the development of complex skills. The more complex they are, the more interesting. How does the brain cope with it? How do people develop these skills over time? How much time does it take? What are the ingredients? What is the optimal learning environment in order to do that? These questions led me from very early on to a theory developed by two Japanese researchers on adaptive expertise. The meaning of this is, yes you can have your routine plumber come in and fix your routine toilet. However, if your toilet is somewhat old fashioned and perhaps not necessarily produced any more, you need a plumber who can analyse the situation and come up with a solution that may not be in any textbook anymore. This ability to adapt is not something you can graft on after someone has become an expert. It really has to come right from the very beginning. People need to become familiar with uncertainty, with fuzziness, and with not using only the readymade solution. Let them struggle. Trial and error is a huge part of that learning process. This theory is really at the foundation of all that we do; recognising how learning happens and should happen and really optimising how the outcomes are going to be.

Routine experts, also called artisans, use their existing expertise to solve a problem. The adaptive experts are really the virtuosos. For them every problem is an invitation to explore and find new solutions.

A big part of learning is really about connections, because everything happens in a big feedback environment. We more or less use the six constructs of the Connected Learning Alliance, a huge McArthur Foundation funded project

initiated by UC Irvine. That agenda was very instructive and useful when looking at connections, so we developed a collaborative learning ecosystem. The students at the centre collaborate with peers. We cannot always be in the field. The lecturer plays a very minimal role. The course coordinator really oversees the whole environment and checks for humanitarian compatibility and acceptability. We have online tutors that we train, and onsite facilitators who are basically there all the time. They are alumni of courses we have run and we train them regularly with materials available on our public website that you can use. That is the ecosystem we have designed for all learning in the camp.

You will find some of our public goods on the website. You can freely use them. Our donors do require that we create public goods that do not hide behind the walls of usernames and passwords.

So how do we develop a course? We do the context analysis first. We look at the language needs. We look at the available capacity, what is already out there. Then, and this may not surprise you, as we come from humanitarian communication and interpreting, we immediately start interpreter training. None of our courses are monolingual and we do not want learners to wait for two years until they have a good level of English to access the course. We immediately create the capacity to run the bilingual course. That gives learners at least half a year or a year to simultaneously improve skills in other languages, for example English or French. All the learning materials are translated by the refugees themselves. They are revised by experts in the language, volunteers who help us revise material. Then the tutors are selected and trained, and we create mixed language groups, mixing speakers of the main course language that are strong and with those who are not. Then we implement the course obviously after which comes the research part. Every course has a research component to it. I have shared with you some of the results from ‘One Health’ for example. We train the researchers in mostly participatory research methods so that we can have ongoing data collection in the field, but our research questions are also informed by them and revised with their help. Data is analysed and we follow up with the community, going back and actively making them benefit from the results.

We connect with physical locations. At one camp we microfinance a refugee café where the refugees get their meals. In some cases, families survive because every class meeting comes with a meal and transport, which in turn helps the café survive.

Interest-powered is really important; an engineering course we ran resulted in a solar powered mosque; a trash truck with a sensor that signals whether the truck is empty or full. If empty, it should not be let out of the camp, as there were constant complaints that the truck did not pick up the trash. The refugees were the immediate victims. They had trash piling up, so they designed a sensor that was both a sound and light sensor so that the truck could no longer leave the camp. If it is full it is fine but if not, it sounds the alarm.

In terms of infrastructure, for example, Innocent, from Kakuma, is an IT expert who did an entire energy analysis of our learning environment and recommended the best possible information technology solutions for the new hub. Again, it does not come from Geneva, it comes from the ground up, they have the skills to do this.

We are production and human rights centred. The courses, for example in our human rights core, are another example of how the sequence plays out. In Kakuma, we run 'Introduction to human rights', 'Applied human rights', and 'Children's rights'. The 'Applied human rights' component comes after the 'Human rights' core and it is a collaboration between the law clinics of the University of Geneva and the Legal Aid Clinic of Kenyatta University, Kenya.

The students from Kenyatta also go to camp and work together. They design a project and then follow up with the project. Ultimately, one of the findings was that traditional forms of administration of juvenile justice in the camp were not very well known and the elders needed to be trained, so we developed elder training in three languages, English, French, and Swahili. All translations were done by refugees and they published a book which has just recently been distributed to all the elders. You can really see the whole sequence through.

The virtual exchanges are part of the production of human rights. Virtual and physical exchanges are part of the research component and the rest is physical, going to camp and delivering. We do this in different ways. We really try to optimise WhatsApp because it is fail-proof in the camp. We rely heavily on it. We wish there could perhaps be another tool, but for right now that is it. We are training our tutors and our facilitators to make sure they understand our pedagogy and they use WhatsApp to implement that pedagogy very carefully.

The local knowledge production, for instance analysis of malaria larvae, leads to students developing their own peaceful planet; they share purpose. Elsewhere, you see local projects leading to the publications on human rights with a shared purpose.

We also have introductory videos from the students in Geneva that go to camp and work with students, with a scripted welcome. We also have issues with things being shared outside of the learning environment, so we have a learning ethics document that every single learner has to sign. We follow up very successfully with people who violate the learning ethics agreement or flout it. There is no second chance with, for instance, plagiarism – it is out. Sometimes you have to be rather forceful, but if we lose that then we lose all our ability to operate in the camps, so it is also for our own operations to remain sustainable for all.

We are also peer supported; an example is an engineering session in the Azraq refugee camp where we work. Engineering is a big thing in the Middle-East, and we see a lot of women there wanting to study engineering.

Here is a graph [see video recording] that allows you to visualise how we go from the beginning to the end of a project. The needs analysis first looks at the way the project builds capacity, followed by the launch phase, and how the multilingual aspect gets implemented. Our learning materials focus on the public good. The introduction to humanitarian interpreting has now been localised in English (simplified), French, Italian (which is very much needed), and Arabic is coming soon. You basically have a translator for every refugee that goes out.

We also have learning pathways; we are not just about building communities. We do not wish to own any of the degrees. We go and begin to develop memoranda of understanding with the universities; in Kenya, Kenyatta University, and in Jordan, Yarmouk University and the German Jordanian University. We negotiate for credits attached to all the courses that we offer. This becomes part of the local armoury. We say we work in collaboration with the University of Geneva, but the programme is not part of the university; it does not go through the university's legal system at all so local campuses can benefit from capacity building, which is exactly what we want. Ultimately, they need to sustain the programme. It is difficult for countries to take on that responsibility.

We come up with some innovations, like bundling our 'One health' course with our basic medical training course and the engineering course, offering a certificate of open studies in medical engineering. We are developing tools for the camp; maybe they could be subject to reverse innovation or could be useful elsewhere one day, but the main focus is having tools that can be maintained. We have all seen those computers and water fountains that cost millions and a year later nothing is working because they cannot be maintained.

I will finish up by thanking the whole team. Obviously, there are many donors by now who have been supporting our work. I think the biggest donors we have are the Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, the Swiss Government and the Canton of Geneva's Solidarity Service in Geneva, and we have been experimenting with public-private partnerships. With Hewlett-Packard, we have a big partnership in the Middle-East, and with Raspberry Pi and Pi-Top for our engineering development.

Q&A

Q. I did many years' work in Reuse Fadallas and I have a question about sustainability. There are some times when we stop because of an escalation of violence. So, when there is escalation, we have to just wait for that escalation to subside. So, I wondered in terms of security and safety concerns, how is it in the field in the refugee camps?

It is a very pertinent question indeed and obviously you have some background. The security situation varies from camp to camp, as do the standard operating procedures, but our entire team is obliged to become zealots about security, so there are courses that we take. What do you do when you are kidnapped? It is not intuitive, believe me. It goes from that to cultural awareness to awareness of crisis, and identifying landmines. It runs the whole gamut. All our certificates are up to date. It is good that you have to do them every two or three years, because you can forget, and there are new ways of doing.

In one of the camps in Kenya, on the Somali border, we went in at the same time as in Kakuma, which is the other large refugee camp on the border of South Sudan. We started, we did exactly the same thing, and then came Westgate: a big terrorist attack in Nairobi. Two days later, no higher education for refugees; obviously, Al Shebab was all over the place. We know Al Shebab was in the camp, we had no illusions. The job can be particularly dangerous.

When we design programming, we make it very incremental. I can stop after four weeks and then I can pick up again if for any reason we will not be allowed in. In Dadaab camp there are only armed convoys; 25 United Nations vehicles, police up front, police in the back, military in the middle, and you are with your radio contacts and four security guards when you are out there. However, it is not as bad as Afghanistan, but you have to start teaching in that environment, running your programme, and be ready to stop at any moment.

I remember there was also that incident in Garrissa where 200 students were killed in a terrorist attack. I was on my way to the camp to deliver final exams. In the end, the final exams got truncated and I had to go back to Geneva with recordings that were incomplete and that is par for the course, just being able to interrupt but not giving up and letting interruptions happen. We then enlisted Kenyatta University because they had contacts with the government; you can work the political circuit and get back in again.

Q. I wanted to say thank you for introducing me to the concept of SEL. I had not heard of that before. I might be completely naïve, but I was reading

through this and it made me think; I am making a comment and I am hoping you can spin off it. I can see how this could be really relevant as a trainer of teachers through virtual exchange. It is also relevant to the university of Baltimore where we have a lot of displaced people as well, whose families move around quite a lot and English as a second language teachers that I work with often talk about how they wish they had more training on how to deal with these traumas in children. I am thinking in our own exchanges sometimes the students have trouble with their own stress, and they do not know what they are coming with and I see this as a really useful tool or as a topic for content within a virtual exchange. So, turning the question back to you. Based on what you have seen here, can you see ideas where we might bring your work more into virtual exchange teacher training focused for co-exchanges?

SEL is a field that is beginning to come into its own. There is not much training out there. I know that the one course that we have identified, the University of Colorado, is very American oriented. It might suit Baltimore quite well. It has things like: "Go to the local library and pick up 'this'". These are things that we obviously cannot do in a camp. I think it has allowed us to finally move away from what I consider a very patronising concept of psychosocial support. It is always almost like the white superior syndrome. We are coming in and we are telling you, like WHO telling you what resilience is. We do not really believe that that is the way to go so I think that you might wish to think about that when you are researching it. There is quite a bit of material out there now.

We are just validating some of the measures that are being developed for SEL; you will soon find information on the INEE website. You can access and measure social and emotional learning skills that are appropriate to your context but take it with a grain of salt. These measures are not standardised yet. It is going to take a while; I think we are slowly going in the right direction. We are very active in INEE and in the most recent meeting in Helsinki I really noticed that the moment we stopped talking about psychosocial support, people all of a sudden had a very different approach. The traumatising was no longer seen as something negative or something that you have to fix. There is this constant need to fix a problem to make them fit this framework, but how can you motivate and get people to

develop these coping mechanisms that are appropriate to their own persona? I think that is where the African context has taught us a lot, such as the moment I saw a refugee dance me a story as one of the coping skills that they were showing us. Another one was playing imaginary soccer with us. There was no soccer ball in the room, yet he said: "OK close your eyes. Let's all think there's a soccer ball in the room and let's all start to play soccer". After ten minutes we were all exhausted. We were all chasing this thought about the relief that it had provided. That is not in the WHO manual. The SEL approach allows people to dip into their own resources that they often underestimate. Giving them a few skills to find those resources in themselves and have them validated by 'One Voice' is important.

Q. You had a number of slides that showed the cognitive neuroscience investigations that you have also been using which I presume from an emerging scientific perspective is what is going on in these settings. So how can we as an academic research community get involved in various ways and do a good job of incorporating science research or neural science assessments you showed if we want to iteratively improve interventions we are engaged in. That was a connection I did not hear in your talk and if we have time, I would love to hear you talk about incorporating that basic and neural scientific research into improving the interventions that we care about.

I think we'll have to go offline about that in detail but quickly as a response the slides were not from interventions in a refugee camp, but they were from the long term research that we did on the complex cognitive skills and the values were from professional multilinguals. It is basically evidence that we want to create about the importance of letting people learn in their own language. If it is an English only approach it is extremely difficult to fight, and it is very neo-colonial. We are really alone in pursuing this line of thinking, but I always evoke our background in Switzerland where we are multilingual as a country. Our DNA is humanitarian communication; we do not do anything unless it is multilingual. Our hope is that we can make progress by using neuroscience evidence about the importance of brain plasticity in multilinguals and de-bunking some of the myths about English. That is really where universities can work together

hopefully and share their research results. We are not going to be able to bring an MRI scanner into the camp and we cannot get the refugees out because their host country does not allow them back in. What we can do is look at scientific evidence that is comparable and allows us to create an argument in favour of impacting policies. Impacting policy changes on the English only education is very important. Unfortunately, refugees are the product of the human internment system. For them too, the only thing they have in mind is needing to learn English because: “that gets me on the boat and then on I go”. If we can break that then we can make progress, and no one can do it alone, so generating interest is about possible collaboration.

3 UniCollaboration plenary session: teaching across cultures, reaching across generations – virtual exchange and teacher education

Paige Ware[1]

https://videos.unileon.es/video/5d791ea28f420872148b45f6

When Robert O'Dowd asked me to do this talk, these are the three things I told him I would do, and here they are.

I want to talk about how telecollaboration and virtual exchange has offered us this really creative space to animate as educators over the last 20 or 30 years.

Because the focus is on teacher education and because over the last ten years my focus has been on teacher education, I want to talk about some of the key takeaways that we can have and say that these are the things that make good practice in virtual exchanges.

Finally, I will bring along a new project that I am working on that I hope will tie together some of the themes that we are looking forward to in the future. Having been here for the last two and a half days, I realise many of you are thinking about the same types of themes.

I am going to start here with an homage to one of my amazing mentors, Claire Kramsch. We talked about this idea of an intercultural stance way back in about 2005. This was not a new idea, but what drew my attention when I was doing this retrospective was how analytical it was. It was just situated in the brain.

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So we had this de-centred perspective, logical, reflexive, with reasoning, and then it culminated in this kind of stance which made a lot of sense and was a really comfortable place to be. I am an academic; it is the life of the mind. I can remember Claire's voice saying she could teach it to me too.

Yet, in the early 2000's, we were also thinking about what that was. We were used to a world of face-to-face communication. In that same article we talked about computer mediated communication, (henceforth virtual exchange) but even then we were talking not just about the mind, but also about imagination, and how to close that gap in imagining the other, of embodying that kind of experience when you only have words on a screen.

Like word play, I started thinking that maybe it was not so static. Maybe it is not about a stance we take, an orientation, but maybe it is about the acts that we do. I would suggest that looking back over the last 20 to 30 years that one thing that unites us as virtual exchange researchers and teachers and teacher educators is that we want to act on the world. We choose to do more than stay within the guidelines of grammar and the guidelines of vocabulary. Every time we set up a virtual exchange project, we are making a promise that we will act to change the world and to change mindsets and to work harder to make this business of teaching foreign languages matter in a way that moves our collective goals of understanding and valuing difference.

In this talk I will draw a little on my own personal and professional trajectory and I would like you to do the same. If you get a little restless at some point and you need a brain break from my voice, there is a QR code on your table you can simply open up with your phone and type into a Padlet the year you did your first virtual exchange and telecollaboration, and what you hoped to get out of it.

I did my first one in 2001, and I very naively hoped my students would have the chance to have these deep intercultural conversations about current events in the media. I had a very specific focus and I was all about the written language because this was how it was going to be, and it would be asynchronous, and my

students were going to have time to think and process and dig deeper into the syntax. That was a long time ago.

The rest of the talk will be organised into three acts, loosely organising the last 30 years. We will talk about intercultural acts in the world and what we do as teachers, and I would characterise the period in the 1990's as a period of high anticipation, and I will tell you why in a minute.

The period between the turn of the century and around the time that social media really took off was a period of collective creativity among researchers and teacher educators, and I would characterise the last ten years as one of rising stakes. What is going to unite these three acts is looking backwards across two themes, because I would argue, and many have, that what we have here has been conceptualising and operationalising the intercultural for the last 30 plus years. A lot of these themes are not new themes, they are just re-packaged into new technologies, people, generations, and external pressures, but they have stayed with us. Also, themes as educators demonstrate how we have adapted to and shaped technologies. Both of these themes culminate in the acts that we take as teachers, because ultimately if we are going to generate the next generation of teachers who are going to want to do this work, we have to help them understand there is a movement forum in this space. I will also talk about what we designed and delivered in each of these acts.

Back in the 1990's, I fancied myself a European. I came here as a student and I lived in Europe for about six years. When I came, it was with the US Fulbright, and that was about two years before Erasmus started. It was a time of hopefulness. We were focused on multilingualism. I did my home language plus two and I went to Germany and learnt Spanish. I lived in Germany for three years and Spain for three years, so I was on my way to joining this movement. Politically, walls were coming down. It was a period of high anticipation. We were very excited about physical mobility. We were going to ratchet up those numbers of 3% of students that are studying abroad. We were going to get it to 20% and beyond. It was a really exciting time. Meanwhile, we were all coalescing around this model that came out about intercultural communicative competence that

Michael Byram and Genevieve Zarate were putting together (Byram & Zarate, 1994), and this became a common framework and a common language for a lot of us.

This is how we did it.

I did not own a computer as a graduate student; I would bicycle up to campus and have a key and go to the third floor and that would be where I would use a computer with a diskette.

In an inaugural edition of information technology, just to remind you that this was in 1997, and Godwin-Jones reminded me that for some of us the first time we got onto the internet was in the early 1990's, but we were enterprising. We were really excited because suddenly we had these computer labs. Most of what we did was text-based; audio streaming was more and more available even though to watch a video you would have to download an entire programme onto your computer, so there was no streaming happening at all. In this time what we designed and delivered as language teachers with these high hopes and anticipation was a way to use technology to give us access to something outside of what was in a given textbook. We were able to ask questions about the target language culture not just a target language speaker. There were speakers, texts, and newspapers. We could give our students access to the world. There was this kind of starry-eyed enthusiasm about bringing people together. We looked at things like output and innovation – they went up. We looked at affect – it went up. We looked at autonomy and reciprocity, because there was already a lot of work going on in the European Union around tandem networks. We looked at participation – it went up. We looked at authenticity – we said that it went up but that has been very contested over the years. We did a lot of little studies and they coalesced around these findings.

To summarise the first act, we had a high anticipation for real intercultural interactions. Technology was basically a vehicle for contact at that point. It did not feel that complicated yet. It just felt really cool. Then the curriculum was focused upon exposure. Bring in cool stuff from other countries from other

cultures or from sub-cultures within the culture. Start to juxtapose. It was a nice time.

Then Act 2 happened, it was an even better time. Twenty years ago, we were doing a lot of our initial studies, and telecollaboration became a term. It was a time of creative collectivity.

So how did we operationalise and conceptualise the 'intercultural'? Many of us were drawing on Michael Byram's model still. If you are not that familiar with it, the model has five domains. Several of us were also looking at parts of the model, not the whole. We looked at how you could operationalise specific aspects of the model. How do you become realistic as a researcher? You cannot really capture intercultural competence, but you can capture something like the skills of interpreting, the skills of relating.

Julie Belz (2002, 2003) did a lot of early work, she kicked off attention to the language of how we enact our understandings of other cultures. Robert O'Dowd (2003, 2006) did a lot of really interesting work talking to students. He brought in the student voice and he helped us understand the situatedness of the individuals who were involved, and so a lot of his early writings had these wonderful bullet lists of things to think about and do. Now I think we see this thread that is coming out of UniCollaboration in the series of training books that have come out since. There is this persistent thread of needing to give concrete advice, taking the research, even when it is preliminary, and saying do this over that.

I looked at a lot of interactional aspects with Rob, with Claire, and with other people. I think my first piece was all about missed communication. I was drawing attention to what was happening: it was supposed to be really cool and yet my students were not going very deep. This early work was brutally honest about looking at what was not going well and why. It was a theme we have talked about; we are very honest as researchers among ourselves. The rest of this presentation is a pep-talk because I have come a long way from my missed communication days.

We were looking at the varieties of technologies. We were pretty much only doing asynchronous technology at that time, with text-based interactions. Robert tinkered around a bit with video-based conferencing, but we developed some things for teachers to use – the progressive exchange model. You will know this as information exchange analysis and collaboration which kicked off a whole generation of teachers learning to use a model that was staged out based on a developed technology that mostly O'Dowd and Ware (2009) put together.

Belz and Müller-Hartmann (2003) did a lot of work on the instructor's role and how that was changing. Steve Thorne (2006) helped us think about looking at the technologies outside of the classroom because we were so anchored in how we were going to do this in an institutional setting. Steve's Thorne (2003) early work on cultures of use and looking at how technologies are used outside the classroom is something that seeded the current generation of looking at how technologies are developing their own genres and developing their own expectations; how our students react to that in the classroom.

What we designed and delivered back then was often this model of taking some kind of cortex like they did with the cultural model where you would take questionnaires, internet-based resources, newspapers, films, literature, and different types from different cultures and languages, and juxtapose them. Then you would debrief in the classroom so there was a rhythm of back and forth between a binary culture, your culture/my culture, your culture/my culture. Then we would debrief that in multiple forms. I started taking it into secondary schools and even with students who are just 13 and 14 years old and would give them a song to talk about music; the task was always layered, for example giving your partner a song that you like and telling them why. Then telling them why your friends might or might not like that song and giving them a song that friends in your school like that you really hate and telling them why. So it is trying to help them de-centre and see themselves as being part of an ecosystem and making sure they are helped to understand the complexity of their lived experience. These kinds of tasks became really cool.

To summarise, Act 2 was a really exciting time and there was a major spike in research in and around telecollaboration. This period was characterised when we coalesced around certain core questions, certain core technologies, and it was exciting to be a part of that. We were looking at how to engage students more deeply, because early on we realised just enacting people is not enough. If you can count how many people are connected is fantastic, but as researchers we are committed to understanding what is taking place inside those thousands of connections. Then we started seeing that this is pretty multimodal now and highly mobile. That ushered in where we are now, where the stakes are rising.

I think I would like to twist a little bit and go back to my miscommunication. Here is where I am a little more critical and also more hopeful. I would suggest that in the last ten years, the way we have been conceptualising and operationalising "intercultural" is on this balancing pad between quantitative inquiry and qualitative inquiry. I am an academic, so I am going to stick with methodology. There are lots of ways in which we can describe the tensions here, but I would argue that neither is better than the other, that both need to be happening, even though it is really hard to develop an expertise in both, which means we have to work together and with the public and private sectors.

On the quantitative side, we want to skill up, but doing so requires money, and getting money requires showing people what works and measurable outcomes; there are policy implications if you do not. On the qualitative side, our field, as any field should be, in my opinion, has been characterised by case studies, and it is important to do and believe in that research and do it very well and very accurately. We have had very theoretically rich conversations on the qualitative side for perhaps 20, 30 years. We have always looked at the context, though when you have thousands and thousands of students, you cannot always look at the context and so there is an inherent tension; so we have looked at case studies. If the scale tips too far in one direction because you are worried about sustainability or funding streams, then it feels lopsided. If the scale tips in the other direction because you are so interested in these other cultures of youth, then entrepreneurs are going to ask how this is relevant. It is not that we should

not be doing any of this, we should, but we have to understand the implications and we have to make some tie-ins. If we do not understand this (the qualitative side), we are never going to get this (quantitative research approach) right. Working across these streams will be increasingly important.

I am going to give you two quick examples to show you how I believe researchers can tackle this idea with randomised controlled trials; the type of evidence that often works in the quantitative world. I am going to try to inspire you into thinking that this can be done at a micro as well as a macro level. It is a shift in how we approach our work.

This comes from a piece that I did with secondary school students and, in Texas, you cannot get anything done in my context if you do not have proof that your idea is more powerful for their learning than what they are getting from their state and their curriculum. We basically worked with about 50 13-year olds. They communicated using multimedia, movies, and blogs with a group of students who were in a bilingual school in Granada, Spain. At the end of that project, we had our treatment group and our control group (kids who were not in the project) and we gave them all a home-made researcher derived questionnaire which asked them some open-ended questions with the types of problems which would come up in communication with partners from another culture. It was a hypothetical partner in this question: imagine that your partner asks you about some US stereotypes, for example is it true all Texans are cowboys, what would you write? We tried to create these little cases of typical things and what we are interested in: do students who participated for 15 weeks in these intercultural exchanges with partners have a better sense of how one enacts those skills of interpreting and relating? We took all of these handwritten responses and typed them up to ensure they did not conflate with handwriting. We had four external raters who were blind to treatment or control who scored these on a rubric on a scale of one to five. I am going to spare you all the details, but the rough cut is that this is a typical 13-year old's response that scored high; "no, not all Texans are cowboys", thus refuting the response, "that is just a stereotype which means something is not true or not necessarily true", thus trying to re-situate and validate the comment, before finally honours are acknowledged; "they share

these stereotypes because some people are cowboys and the theme is common". Kind of sophisticated for a 13-year-old. You could get a high score, but you also have a 13-year-old who says: "No, not everyone's a cowboy", which we also scored, and we found a really large effect size of almost a whole standard deviation. Now that was a small case study, but it was a quantitative study, and I think that gave us the ammunition that we needed to keep going.

The second example is straight out of your EVALUATE project. Your team has pulled off the impossible, which is to take how we enact telecollaboration or virtual exchange and actually do something quantitative with it with a randomised controlled trial design; very exciting work. If you look at the language of what you were trying to do to maximise this, it is all about these metaphors of efficiency and of practices that characterise the quantitative side of the puzzle. It does not mean that we are not simultaneously over here doing the qualitative inquiry, but it is wonderful stuff in my humble opinion, if you want to be part of policy work. To do that you have to have some trade-offs. You had to plan someone else as a reliable instrument. You did not have the money to go and ask every single one of those children to respond to an intercultural discourse questionnaire and then hire four people to score every single one of those items. You looked at their intercultural competence before and after you looked at their digital competence and you had mixed results, but I would still characterise it as mostly positive.

There is not a lot said about adapting to technologies, and if you are really excited about this, this group in UniCollaboration has developed a series of books. The main take-away for me here is that the beauty of mobility and variety is also creating a new tension, because we are not tracking the same types of questions anymore. I think I worry a little bit that we are getting a little tech-centric.

This last book ("Screens and scenes: multimodal communication in online intercultural encounters") was put out not by the European team but by Kern and Develotte, 2018, and Kern wrote a lot of chapters. What is interesting to me about this book is a lot of our work has previously been on text-based and then more and more on multimodality. This last book looks specifically

on the affordances and the challenges of video-based collaboration and other multimodal collaborations.

The rest of the talk is to focus on what we are designing as teachers and teacher educators today. From the abstract that I sent around, this is the last bit where I am talking about what we are doing now and what I think might project towards the future. We have this tension between how we balance the quantitative with the qualitative, how we have conversations with ourselves, or how we translate those conversations to a different audience that actually cares about what we are doing, which is a really important thing to keep in mind. All this energy, all the work that we have been doing for 20 or 30 years, matters because we have a community that allows us to have a collective voice. By the same token, there is a tension that is far beyond virtual exchange but directly impacts it; a tension that goes between wanting to study foreign languages, and wanting a connection with people to result in commonalities and affirmations of who we are and to care about each other and let everything else just slide away. There is a reason we want to learn a language, beyond a business proposition; we are also really different people. Right now, I think our political training difference is now polar, and it is not a healthy difference, it does not lead to debate and dialogue, it polarises. I think we have a generation of young people in secondary schools who do not know what healthy dialogue is, who do not know what healthy difference is, and who are scared of difference because it is polarising and it is scary and angry. I think that as virtual exchange researchers, we are acting on the world. This is the one key thing that I think is going to characterise the next wave in what we do; it is finding a way to ensure that as we build community we do not gloss over why we are different, where we are different, and how that difference is simply borne out of historical, cultural, social, and linguistic differences, and you can explain it and learn about it.

Rick Kerr has this lovely quote that technology defeats distance, you can grab this app, WhatsApp, and you can do things that are unimaginable with technology, but it is also squishing out the beauty of being different from someone. The beauty of saying: “Wow, that is interesting, tell me more about why you think that”. We have several of you in this room who have insisted over the last 15 years that we

have to have dialogical action; we have to go into those uncomfortable topics. We must, it is not just about contact. It is about learning, we are educators, and so bringing people together and helping them act on the world in positive ways is part of our job. So yes, it is a little political. If you study under Claire Kramsch it has got to be political. Now, if you study under Paige Ware, it has also got to be political. These types of changes that have happened over the last several years in technology have not necessarily changed our underlying beliefs about the intercultural, how we conceptualise and operationalise it. This shift in technology has acted on us in such a way that we have to be more reflective with our students and with our teachers who have to help them interpret the world around them. We have to know the history and we have to be politically engaged. It is a different type of call to action for us. It is not just about the contact, and I think we have seen in Barbara Moser-Mercer's work, her team acts on the world in very deep and interesting ways, and many of us in our own work are trying to move beyond just an exchange of communication.

Here are some ways in which you have all been doing this reflective and interpretive stance. Hot in the press coming up from Rob and Shannon and Elana is this lovely article (O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2019) about pedagogical mentoring that talks about the role of the instructor and all things students freely exert into the classroom over each other. We also have work done where students become miniature ethnographers where they code some of the transcripts and they analyse those in class. Rick Kern talks about video conferences where students review what they did with each other and then they reflect on that. Rob has talked about not missing out on these rich points that happen outside of the online exchange and letting them happen in real time with the students in their face-to-face contacts, often overlooked in research. There is also Francesca Helm's work with facilitated dialogue (Helm, 2015; Helm, Guth, & Farrah, 2012). These are why people are asking more and more to up the ante and bring in more of these reflection and analytical points. We have learnt that even the very concept of virtual exchange, the very nature of language learning, how they construct tasks, are all culturally related. Nothing is neutral; they are coming from a place. They are coming from a position, from a particular perspective with a goal in mind.

There was a period when it was so exciting, I was a facilitator, I helped my students reach their goals, which I needed to learn, and I needed to help them find the right technology, the right partner. I would argue that that is all well and good, but that takes the teacher completely out of the picture. What about learning? What is wrong with the life of the mind? We have to be fellow analysts with them. We have to be fellow interpreters. We have to not be afraid that they might know more about the culture and language.

As teacher educators and as someone who is a teacher educator, I have been more and more mindful of some of the pulse in my state. I say state because education in the US is state mandated; if you want federal money, you have to do a few things, but for the most part, each state is different and so I can only act on my level. I am not so worried because I speak English. I learnt my other two languages (Spanish and German) in my European studies, so they are kind of broken now, but I still get by. Yet a lot of these conversations are just bewildering to me personally when we do not question English as the lingua franca. We are talking about these cool exchanges across different disciplines, really interesting exchanges with businesses, and all the time the assumed default is English. As someone who is a dominant English speaker, it is incumbent on me to be that much more cognisant about what this messaging is about, because with English as the assumed language we export a certain pedagogical style. As a teacher educator I think a lot about the pedagogical style and the assumptions we make about which is the right one, whose voice counts, and the power dynamics inside these virtual exchanges.

The current project that I am working on is asking how we support teachers as virtual exchange designers. We invite teachers who are going to set up exchanges and help them create creative spaces that have characterised our own work. We bring them in as co-thinkers and co-designers who are thoughtful about some of these themes. We help them see that they themselves are always coming from a speaking position and from an historical place, with assumptions and biopsies, and help them develop healthier relationships with other teachers. In working with my students when I have post-doctoral students in China, I realised that we and our big team with our big grant from the federal government focused on

English language learners, never stopping to ask anything about teaching. We just continued in a US context and I thought what a missed opportunity in our own home not to understand more about what a doctoral student could bring to our pedagogy from her context in China.

Trying to get at some kind of different stereotypical pedagogy, we brought in teachers from Taiwan and teachers from the US and took the three-phase approach where we got to know each other with an asynchronous tablet. Teachers collaborated and created a lesson plan together and shared the materials before doing a presentation. We had this interesting software we were trying to test at scale on about 200 teachers on whether they were getting better at teaching. It was a wholly different project, using a virtual reality platform to actually teach avatar children. It was cool not just to have them create a lesson plan but to co-create a lesson and then co-teach the lesson to actual kids – they are avatars so are they really real? – but that is what we did. We had the teachers act out the lessons because what you do and what you say you are going to do may be different. It was so interesting, and the whole point was that nobody got to be right. This was not us hoping anyone got better at teaching, this was about knowing what informed their pedagogical decisions.

Using Zoom, the group watched someone teach the lesson, went home, wrote their reflections, had time to process – because I like the asynchronous time to process – and then got back together in Zoom a week later and talked about what they saw and learnt together as teachers. They were asked for example, "what do you see? Describe what you see. How might values and assumptions inform what you just saw? How might these be situated in what you just saw"? While the other students were watching, the first student tagged out after ten minutes before the next student tagged in and presented their lesson plan, so you saw different pedagogical styles. After this they had a really elaborate protocol where they talked together for half an hour on Zoom about these interactions. Their job was to share, describe, interpret, and reflect. Here are some of those reflections.

Jane, from my perspective, described what I feel in the classroom every day. Our job is to entertain and have these gimmicks to make it fun. However, the

Taiwanese students thought she was great and lively, but Jane felt like she needed her gimmicks,that students in the US were more entitled, and she wondered if students in Taiwan were more respectful.

We saw a more stereotypical teaching approach, but there was an opportunity for her to take the conversation to a different space and ask another teacher in Taiwan who talked about trends changing and why there was still traditional teaching in Taiwan in other classes but there was pressure on English teachers to be like that. It opened up a new space for them to see each other as something other than caricatures of a teaching style.

Brandon's style of teaching, talking the entire time and not letting the students say anything, contrasted and juxtaposed with Jane's. They really dug into their differences and he explained his pedagogy as giving the students details and evoking their imagination, getting them ready and warmed up to hear English. He started by asking them a question and putting them on the spot, needing to evoke the text for them; to honour the text for them. There was this back and forth between Jane and Brandon where they were unpacking the why and how of what they did.

Another student in the project was so surprised because she did not ever think anyone would care or value how they teach in Taiwan. She would be asked what it was like there, and that changed her mind; her culture was also a precious culture. It was also a treasure, not a stereotype. That felt poignant to me, because if we are in 2019 and we have young teachers across the world who still feel that their pedagogical styles are not valued and not part of the game, then that is something we can work on in virtual exchange, the rarefaction of those stereotypes, instead taking on a questioning stance and letting people, teachers, talk about who they are, and why they do what they do.

So, my call to you is for continued action. I hope that you keep your anticipation high. It is really good work, important work. It is valuable, fun, and creative. Let us seek opportunities to collaborate with the creativity that characterised Act 2 where we worked together. We created this upwelling of research around

particular questions. We can meet these high stakes head on by both creating community and engaging with difference. As I began with Clare, so will I end with a quote from Clare; we want to do this because diversity can be non-committal and difference requires putting yourself on the line.

Q&A

Q1. Thank you so much, that was awesome. You suggested that you might like to talk a little bit more about – I am not sure if you were going to describe it as technological determinism – when you talked about appeasing and you wanted to expand on our focus on technology within virtual exchange.

Sometimes I wonder if when we talk about technology and apps, we are deflecting the argument and talking about what is easiest to talk about; instrumental things to solve when we need to be talking about the industry about how to solve its problems. It reminds me about when I was working with my teachers and they were bringing video clips of their teaching and I wanted to talk and wondered why a student would shut down on them. They would say it was because the principle had just come in or because of this or that, and I would ask what they were doing.

It is complicated yes, it also matters, but I would like to hear more about our end goal, because technology will always be new and developing. We saw that today. It is going to be a problem tomorrow. I do not know how to get beyond that question, although I do think it is going to require partnering more, because technologies are so constantly evolving, and having worked with secondary schools, I know exactly what they are talking about in terms of getting your research done. I think it is exciting that we have all of these technologies, but they also derail us because we get so focused on what we cannot do – because we do not have this, or we do not have that platform – when we should be thinking of a way to theorise what is happening inside the technology. When I said technocentric, it was more about maybe too much on the platform and not seeing similarities because it is exciting to get so granular. I like to take a couple of steps back and say these types of apps tend to elicit these types of themes, like

a typology piece. Some things do stay the same, so I wonder. You are the expert here so maybe offline you and I have to figure out what a message could be, but I tend to worry about the conversation tending to be more about the technology than about the learning. That theme came up in the round table discussion and I appreciate that it continues to come up in this conversation.

Following on from that, I think there are very useful conceptualisations of what you speak of, if you continue to do that in a very intense way. There's quite a lot of research from Australia looking at pedagogy, technology, and space, how one enables or makes possible or modifies, empowers, or enlarges the mutual relationship between the three. I think if you always have that triangulation in mind, you are avoiding the focus on just the technology and you are really becoming humbler. I think it allows you to re-balance the contribution that space, pedagogy, and technology are making; what you are trying to reach. I am happy to share research on that, I think it is a very good guideline to follow. I had it on one of my slides and I can share the slide. It was a very small element; it was not the focus of my talk, but I would be happy to share it.

Q3. I would be very interested to hear more about the intercultural questionnaire and what you found out with the data.

It is in CALL 2016 if you want to read about it. The gist of it is simple: it is a pen and paper 30/40-minute questionnaire which we developed based on pulling out instances where miscommunication had happened or where students were presenting themselves for the very first time. It has items such as: "you are meeting your partner for the first time, what are two opening questions that you can ask them?", to which some of the students would talk about names or how they were. Other students would ask what they hoped to learn by being in this with them, so even at just that very basic development level, when you look at Byram (1997), everything was an environment type model, a willingness to discover the skills of curiosity – how to even ask a question? If you want to discover something about someone, you do not say something like: "Are you glad to work with me in this exchange?", you would ask a more open-ended question. The idea being that these are teachable skills. I definitely have

a teacher educator US perspective that there are certain skills that you can teach because you have to.

Another example was a partner sending a picture of a kangaroo (because our partners were hypothetically Australian). In terms of the skills of discovery and interaction, we asked what they would write back to a picture with no context. Some kids would ask what was with the kangaroo, while others would write things like: "Oh I notice the kangaroo, I know that is a stereotype but why would you send me that picture? Do you have a lot of kangaroos?"; basically elaborating and showing an interest, the idea being that they can imagine someone on the other side of the world who might need a little more language to fill in the gap. We were pretty excited when we analysed the data on a five point scale and saw there are actual differences in the students who had participated. What was not good about the research was that the idea came to us during the project, so we did not have pre-data. We had a control group, but we did not have their pre-data. It could be that all 50 kids were just great in intercultural skills when they started the project, though highly unlikely. It was intense, and thank you for asking about it.

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Section 2.

Research studies

4 Taking care of their positive online face? Reasons and strategy development

Dora Loizidou[1] and Dina Savlovska[2]

Abstract

This paper examines a peer virtual exchange project between students at the University of Cyprus and the University of Latvia. The main purpose of this project is to develop intercultural awareness. Through telecollaborative tasks, students are asked to interact in a common discussion space around elements related to their cultural values. The aim of this paper is to discuss students' strategies for these online exchanges. The hypothesis this paper seeks to examine is that students do not express themselves freely in the discussion forums in order to protect their personal and national image. We are thus interested in the public self-image of the students, known as 'face'. Our findings identified politeness strategies and we are interested in the main reasons for their acts towards positive and/or negative face.

Keywords: intercultural awareness, intercultural exchange, negative face, politeness strategies, positive face, virtual exchange.

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1. Theoretical background

One of the main areas of research in virtual exchange is the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence (Müller-Hartmann, 2000; O'Dowd, 2003; Thorne, 2006; Ware, 2005). This article analyses a telecollaborative intercultural exchange at the university level between Cyprus and Latvia.

The studied telecollaboration is a Cultura-inspired project, based on the confrontation of cultural representations of foreign language learners from different socio-cultural backgrounds (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001). The particularity of the analysed project is that the students do not study the native language of their partner; in fact, both groups study the French language as the main subject and we used French as lingua franca. Therefore, there is a mixture of at least three different cultures: French, Cypriot, and Latvian. The goal of this project for students is to practise the French language while interacting on intercultural issues. The approach used in learners' task creation is focused on the analysis of different reactions toward intercultural communication situations. According to Furstenberg et al. (2001), the contrastive approach helps learners to realise the link between culture and language as well as to better understand another culture. The project involves two countries, one from the south and another from the north of Europe, which traditionally do not have bonds, and they do not regularly have fixed representations of one another.

Intercultural dialogue through virtual exchange projects has been pointed out by many researchers (Belz & Thorne, 2006; Helm, 2018; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). However, to achieve intercultural competences and awareness, practitioners need to be aware of some aspects. First, for disagreeing, debating, expressing feelings, and engaging in in-depth discussions with the partner, students need to feel comfortable and therefore activities to break the ice are considered essential (Helm, 2018). Second, the teacher's role is vital as they need to help learners identify cultural similarities and differences and guide them to reflect on their outcomes (Furstenberg et al., 2001). Thirdly, conflicts and cultural

miscommunication are expected (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006; Schneider & von der Emde, 2006; Ware, 2005).

The theoretical background on current research relies on the notion of 'face' (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1974). We take as a premise that

> "members of a society have […] 'face', the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself, consisting in two related aspects: (a) negative face: the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, rights to non-distraction […], (b) positive face: the positive consistent self-image or 'personality' (crucially including the desire that this self-image be appreciated and approved of) claimed by interactants" (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61).

We also use the notions of *face-threatening acts* and *face-flattering acts*, as well as negative and positive politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61; Goffman, 1974; Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1996, 1997). In previous virtual exchange projects, researchers have shown strategies adopted by the participants on linguistic matters in order to protect their face (for example exposing themselves only in the chat) or their partner's face (such as pinning the miscomprehension on poor quality audio – Helm, 2018).

In our context, partners exchange in online forums on crucial topics regarding their culture and/or their country. We are interested in examining if students took care of their positive face during these online exchanges. We hypothesise that students do not express themselves freely in the discussion forums in order to protect their personal and national image. The research questions we attempt to answer in this study are as below.

- Can we observe in some students a partial or total dissimulation of their opinion on crucial topics (xenophobia, migration, cultural identity, hospitality, etc.)?

- Those who dissimulate, how do they do it and why?

2. Methodology

The project, called *French language and intercultural exchanges*[3], lasted for six weeks during the spring semester of 2019. Students at the University of Cyprus had Greek as a mother tongue and students at the University of Latvia had Latvian and Russian as mother tongues. In both groups, students were pursuing their Bachelor and were covering similar studies (*French language and literature*). The French language level of both groups was heterogeneous, from A2 to B2, according to the European framework of reference for languages.

Both groups were coordinated by their teacher in face-to-face classes, and the whole process was integrated into both curricula. On a weekly basis, peers worked on crucial topics related to their cultural values and associations, like cultural identity, hospitality, xenophobia, and migration. Moodle forums were the main communication tool. In total, four tasks were proposed. Each task had the following steps:

> *Step 1:* Students had to complete online questionnaires (word associations and sentence completions). The results were provided anonymously per country.
>
> *Step 2:* Students had to react to situations in the forums[4] and discuss all the online activity in class (regarding Steps 1 and 2). To promote a clear peer to peer interaction, teachers did not participate in any of the online discussions. Nevertheless, students' online interactions were discussed on site and teachers coordinated the discussion.

3. In French: Langue française et échanges interculturels.

4. Here are two examples of the proposed situations. Example 1: You are a volunteer in a humanitarian association that hosts refugees. Last week the refugee camp was flooded which caused major damage. The state announced that restoration work was needed and the camp would be liveable again in 15 days. Refugees are left homeless for two weeks. What would you do? Would you offer them help? (Task 2) Example 2: Your country has hosted a number of refugees. Your university, which plans to welcome young people between the ages of 18 and 25, decides, out of respect for the Muslim culture, to impose a certain dress code (prohibition to wear mini-skirts, shorts, low-cut clothing, transparent clothing, etc.). What do you think? How would you react? (Task 3)

Step 3: Students had to express their opinion based on the findings of the week.

Step 4: Students had to keep a journal of astonishment (shared only with the teachers), a tool used to increase satisfaction with exchange programmes (Reinhardt & Rosen, 2012).

Peers worked weekly on the topics mentioned above. The exchanges began with ice breaking activities and ended with reflecting activities on the virtual exchange. Our data corpus consists of:

- online interaction between peers for four different tasks (n=269 messages posted in 16 discussion threads);
- students' journals of astonishment (n=54 journals for 14 students); and
- teachers' on site observations (n=2, Nicosia and Riga).

Our methodology relies on a qualitative and quantitative cross-analysis of the above data (content analysis). We used a bottom-up/top-down approach to classify their forum messages and journal texts. For our analysis, we proceeded as follows: we first examined the forum messages, and then compared the students' face, exposed in the forums, with their private messages in the journals of astonishment. We used Nvivo 11 to code our data. In our research, we identified politeness strategies and examined the reasons for their acts towards positive and/or negative face in the journals.

3. Analysis and results

3.1. Students' forum interactions

Regarding the forum messages, in order to better understand the intention of students' contributions, we analysed the content of each message in its context,

and we identified its purpose in relation to the previous messages in the forum. Therefore, the forum messages in response to the proposed situations – in which every student needed to react – were classified into eight categories as follows:

- *first*: first to respond, message posted before any other contribution;
- *repetition*: say nothing new, just repeat the statement of existing messages;
- *new ideas*: introduce new thoughts regarding existing messages;
- *agreement*: express agreement with existing messages in the forum;
- *disagreement*: express disagreement with existing messages in the forum;
- *comment*: make comments, remarks, etc. on existing messages;
- *questions*: ask questions on other participants' messages in order to clarify an idea or statement; and
- *response*: reply to another participant's question.

Looking at all the categories, a general striking observation is the high proportion of messages in which students posted their message without addressing any of their peers and/or commenting on the previous messages (82.2%). Each one replies to the initial situation without expressly referring to the already existing reaction of their peers in the online discussion forums. In the following we are focusing on the categories that reflect issues of positive/negative face.

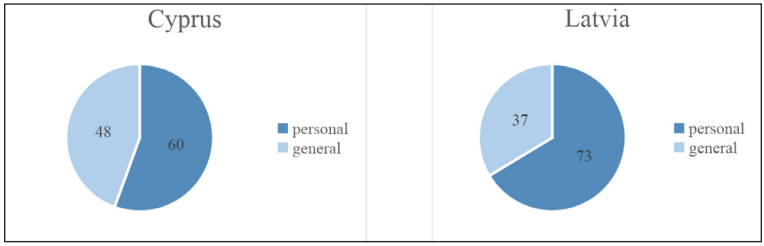
Another observation is the very low number of *agreement* or *disagreement* messages (7.1% of which 6.7% were *agreement* and only 0.4% *disagreement* messages). Even though we observed a high number of *repetition* messages (49.8%), students do not use any wording that shows that they agree with the forum's existing posts. Only in the third task, in the discussion thread "*Yes or no*

to a miniskirt?" did we observe a high number of *agreement* or *disagreement* messages (64.3% of messages in this forum).

A final finding is the *questions* to peers' messages. Only Latvian students asked questions to Cypriots (7.4% of messages), some of which replied (*response*); 25% of replies asked for more information and/or clarifications. We observe that most *questions* to peers' messages were posted at the beginning of the project and showed a progressive reduction from the first to the third task (50% of messages for the first task, 45% for the second, only 5% for the third, and no message for the final task). In regards *comment*, we identified only two messages (1.5%) in which students made a remark on existing contributions in the forums (the first from a Latvian student in Task 1 and the second from a Cypriot in Task 3).

Apart from the eight categories above, we also classified their messages in all the discussion forums into two types according to the content of the contribution: we identified messages with personal or with general content. We observed that Latvian students posted more messages with personal content than Cypriots (see Figure 1 below).

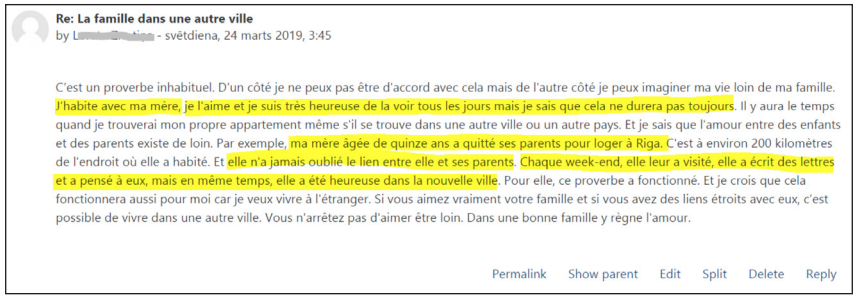
Figure 1. Messages content



In the messages with personal content, students tended to give information about their life, such as the example below where the student explains her bond with her mother[5] (see Figure 2 below).

5. Translation of the highlighted text in French: I live with my mother, I love her and I am very happy to see her every day but I know that it will not last forever. […] My 15-year-old mother left her parents to stay in Riga, […] she never forgot the bond between her and her parents. Every weekend, she visited them, wrote them letters and thought of them, but at the same time, she was happy in the new city.

Figure 2. Example of message with personal content



All of these observations point to a high degree of reticence in online interaction with other participants in this project. Learners seem to step back from potentially conflicting situations, to seek some distance, and do not enter into a direct discussion on intercultural issues.

3.2. Face developing strategies

The analysis of each student's activity in discussion forums and journals allowed us to identify different strategies adopted by the students. According to the classification used by Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 2), we classified them within three main strategies of politeness:

- positive politeness: the expression of solidarity ("Now I can say that I put myself in their place and I think differently, I can understand them", journal of astonishment, Cyprus-A11);

- negative politeness: the expression of restraint ("I didn't want to answer these questions honestly, because I thought it would be a little nasty", journal of astonishment, Latvia-A13); and

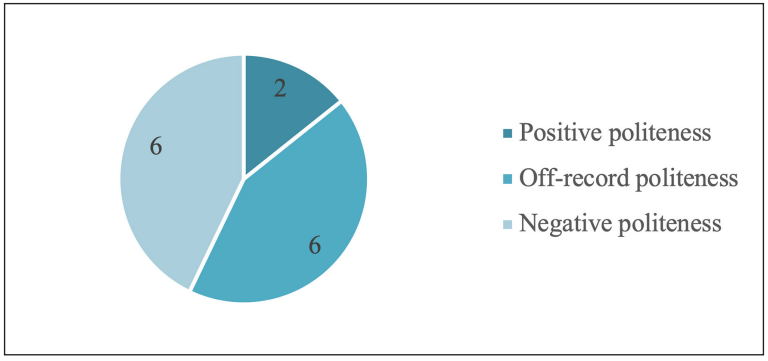
- off-record politeness: the avoidance of unequivocal impositions ("Something that surprised me was some answers regarding a homosexual couple who wants to adopt a child because some people

said that it was weird for them and not natural", journal of astonishment, Cyprus-A9).

More precisely, positive politeness strategies refer to the following: *having identical positioning in forums and journals*, *respecting others' opinions*, *and discovering others*. Negative politeness refers to *dissimulating the truth in the forums*. Off-record politeness concerns the following strategies: *being honest in the forums*, *being surprised but not reacting in the forums*, and *understanding others better*.

We observed that only two students (level A2) adopted the positive politeness strategies. The rest of the group is divided into off-record politeness and negative politeness (see Figure 3 below).

Figure 3. Politeness strategies



We also identified in our corpus two 'super-strategies': reflecting on oneself in positive and off-record politeness, as well as having nationalist and/or xenophobe behaviour off-record and negative politeness. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), strategies "can be mixed in discourse […and] we may obtain, for example, positive politeness markers within negative politeness strategies" (p. 17). For example, a student expresses her solidarity to refugees in the forum ("It's a horrible situation! I would like to help them, I think it is

my responsibility if I am a volunteer", forums, Latvia-A13), but for the same topic she clearly states in the journal of astonishment that she is hiding the truth, revealing a nationalist attitude ("I didn't want to say everything I believe […]. Not because my opinion is negative, but just because I was a bit afraid of what others might think. […] A lot of people come from these countries just to benefit even if they are not victims. […] I am worried about the culture and language of certain countries in Europe... It would be very sad if a culture disappears as time goes by", journal of astonishment, Latvia-A13).

A final point we examined is the reasons for their acts and strategies. We were particularly interested on the one hand in investigating the lack of reaction despite their surprise, and on the other, in hiding the truth in the forums. Therefore, we set up an inventory of reasons (see Table 1).

Table 1. Inventory of reasons

Positive face	Negative face
• Afraid of what others will think about them • Not feeling competent to talk about the topic • Not willing to express themselves because the topic is not interesting, is a very personal issue, or is not a topic suitable for public discussion (preferring anonymity)	• Not willing to argue, debate, and/or fight • Afraid of offending the other party

We are entitled to wonder if the reasons for the non-expression of the opinion found in their journals of astonishment corresponds to their real reasons for not taking a position on the issues discussed.

4. Discussion

Through these online exchanges, our results showed in some students a partial or total dissimulation of their opinion on crucial topics. Our analysis revealed

that the cultural shock for some topics did not lead them to face-threatening acts in the forums; we found that they adopted the technique of "avoidance" (Goffman, 1974, p. 17) and they used a "cultural alibi" (Dervin, 2011, p. 46) to justify the improper behaviour of their partners. We suppose that they avoided direct discussions on the proposed topics mostly out of politeness. Other critical research showed that "exposure and awareness of difference seem to reinforce, rather than bridge, feelings of difference" (Kern, 2000, p. 256). These online exchanges also allowed them to identify some differences not only with their partners, but also with members of their own group and culture. As some students stated, it is not a matter of culture, but it depends on the personality of each person:

> "in my opinion, it is absolutely possible to get along really well with someone from another country, because I think we get on well with people because of their personality and not their nationality. Moreover, I think that nationality does not determine personality" (journal of astonishment, Task 4, Latvia-AI).

Therefore, students seem to develop some intercultural competences: capacity for curiosity, interest in others, and openness to otherness. Our results align with previous research that telecollaboration "gives learners the opportunity to reflect on and learn from the outcomes of this intercultural exchange within the supportive and informed context of their foreign language classroom" (O'Dowd, 2011, p. 342). We may assume that this has been reinforced by the teachers as they discussed online interactions with students to help them better develop their reflections and findings.

Our study also showed that peers were not engaged in a conversation that may have allowed them to express themselves more freely in the discussion forums with their partners. We assume that this is due to various factors, such as the public (open to all members) character of the forums and the lack of familiarity with the members of the group. According to Marcoccia (2000), the forum's public character might cause face problems because this impoverishes some aspects of the relational dimension, like norms of politeness or emotional expression. In

our project, even though the first exchanges were dedicated to breaking the ice, our analysis showed that there was no discussion between them. We estimate that students' intentions were more educational than personal; in other words they were more interested in accomplishing the task, than creating any socio-cultural bonds. The Latvians' attempts to get into a conversation with the others were unsuccessful, probably because Cypriots rarely responded to their messages, something that maybe discouraged Latvians. Besides, our analysis also revealed that Latvians posted more personal messages than Cypriots. We presume that this different attitude is due to the familiarity with the communication tool, because Latvians were more familiar with computer mediated communication in discussion forums on Moodle than Cypriots. However, we may also consider that a forum is a slow communication tool for interaction and, despite the discussion in class with the teachers, the time allocated to discuss a topic on a weekly basis may not have been enough.

Finally, we estimate that not only the direct and personal interest of the proposed situation, but also the feeling of belonging to a community could be a key element for reaction in the forums. A previous study on virtual exchanges between two different cultures revealed that a micro-community could be established among its members (Dolci & Spinelli, 2007). In our study, the exchanges following the dress code, a provocative subject, where students unanimously reacted strongly (Christians against Muslims), showed that they felt they were in a comfort zone where they did not get into a debate against their partners alone to defend a nationalist issue, but shared the same values and had a commonality in protecting their national interests.

5. Conclusion

In this project, students were challenged to reflect on their own and their peers' culture. In the current study, we confirm our hypothesis that students do not express themselves freely in the discussion forums in order to protect their positive face. Nevertheless, they show honesty not only in the journals, but also during the discussion in the class. We have revealed some politeness strategies

and explained the reasons for these acts. However, the findings of this research cannot be generalised due to a small sample of participants.

In future research, we would like to examine through discourse analysis the linguistic expressions students use to express and/or dissimulate their opinion. We assume that it could be interesting to compare the expressions appearing in the forums and in the journals.

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5 Erasmus virtual exchange as an authentic learner experience

Alexandra Reynolds[1]

Abstract

This small-scale study draws on a higher education context where French-speaking students, *in situ* at Bordeaux University, participated in the Sharing Perspectives Foundation's flagship *Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange* (E+VE) program (2018-2019). French-speaking students interacted in English on the topic of *Newcomers and Nationalism* via weekly webinars with non-native English-speaking students from other participating universities in Europe and the Southern Mediterranean region. Authenticity is a complex concept involving the degree of implication and meaning speakers give to their interactions (Gilmore, 2007; Pinner, 2016; Widdowson, 2003). The study therefore addresses the question of how participant feedback can help us to assess E+VE in terms of authenticity. The methods used to investigate this research question were the qualitative analysis of the French students' reflective journals, questionnaires, and interviews. The results show that E+VE is conducive to authentic learner experiences. This study has also enabled a definition of 'authenticity' as a transformative language learner experience in virtual exchange.

Keywords: France, higher education, English, Erasmus virtual exchange, authenticity.

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1. Introduction

Authenticity is a positive concept involving meaningfulness, credibility, and individual fulfillment (Bialystok, 2017; Sartre, 1946; Van Lier, 2014). An *authentic learner experience* is understood as a positioned stance a learner gives to his/her actions in relation to others in a specific educational context (Yanaprasart & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019). Authentic learner experiences have been used as markers of success in virtual exchange projects (Kohn, 2018; O'Dowd, 2016). Virtual exchange affords opportunities to engage in meaningful communicative situations which are intercultural and intense (on a one-to-one basis or in small groups). The research question of whether E+VE is considered as an authentic learner experience is addressed through the ethnographic study of students who participated at Bordeaux University. The paper begins by outlining the context of E+VE with a brief overview of the literature in relation to authenticity and virtual exchange, after which consideration is given to the relevance of E+VE in relation to English for Specific Purposes (henceforth ESP) learning practices.

2. E+VE program context

E+VE started as a two-year (2018-2020) pilot scheme funded by Erasmus+ (Helm, 2018; Helm & Van der Velden, 2019). It involved 19 universities from 13 countries, including the University of Bordeaux, and gave students the opportunity of participating in a mobility project without having to leave home by interacting in English as a lingua franca on a topic related to cultural perspectives.

During the first year of the pilot, the E+VE program, piloted by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation[2], focused on the theme of *Newcomers and Nationalism*[3]

2. https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/

3. https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/programme/newcomers-and-nationalism/ and https://3q6kbg2hbxl2qgocu3s6kvhk-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/NEWCOMERS-AND-NATIONALISM-Assignment-Manual-Autumn-2018.pdf

through ten related themes (for example *migration*, *membership*, *globalization*, and *Brexit*) as a basis for facilitated dialogue with a group of eight participating students from the partner institutions. The E+VE learning objectives involved a better understanding of *Newcomers and Nationalism* through sustained synchronic dialog in association with asynchronous tasks. The skills gained included how to accommodate to and empathize with other young people through respect and tolerance. Using technology to communicate and learn, the students developed a variety of transversal skills such as academic literacy. Permanent validity Erasmus+ digital badges rewarded these skills, accessible to future employers. At the end of the course, the students were evaluated on their participation during the webinars and project work (based on the reflective journals and filmed interviews they made of other students from their local community in Bordeaux).

3. Theoretical framework

Authenticity is a complex issue regarding whether a speaker considers oral and written discourse as 'meaningful' (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017; Van Lier, 2014; Widdowson, 2003). Meaningful discourse expresses what a person genuinely feels and believes to be purposeful to his/her intrinsically motivated actions (Van Lier, 2014). Authenticity is also an existential position of focusing on gaining meaning from the present and not 'playing roles' (Sartre, 1946). Virtual exchange therefore contrasts with the possible (in)authenticity of simulated talk (Stokoe, 2013) which may occur in the ESP classroom, for example. The ESP classroom in France enacts English-speaking encounters among French speakers who share the same first language (French). Participating in English as a lingua franca (virtual) exchanges with other speakers of English (who do not share the same L1) therefore heightens the impression of authentic talk, rather than simulated talk (Helm, 2016; Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017; Pinner, 2016). In addition, current research discredits the notion of native speaker authenticity (Bolton & Kachru, 2006; Helm, 2016; Jenkins, 2015; Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017; Pinner, 2016). E+VE therefore validates English as a lingua franca discourse as being representative of most of the speakers of English worldwide.

Authentic talk, rather than simulated talk with other L1 speakers, is made possible due to the 'intercultural' aspect of E+VE, which is also a stated objective of the E+VE program. Interculturality is understood as an interactive relationship between people from different cultures when they come into contact (Botero, 2019). E+VE's stated objectives are in line with research which recommends a pedagogical approach to studying culture and interculturality (Kerzil, 2002).

The focus of this study is authentic learner experiences through intercultural virtual exchange. From a pedagogical perspective, Kreber et al. (2007) define authenticity around nine central tenets, of which three can be identified as relating to understandings of authentic learner experiences in E+VE (points one and three are closely related because a criticism of normativity has transformative potential):

- authenticity as a path to transformative learning;
- authenticity in relation to learner autonomy; and
- authenticity as a criticism toward normativity.

Transformative learning is key to understanding manifestations of authentic learner experiences through E+VE when learning English (Kreber et al., 2007; Yanaprasart & Melo-Pfeifer, 2019).

4. Methodology

The methodological framework used for this study consisted of an ethnographic study of E+VE students conducted by the author. Ethnography applies a mixed approach to data collection, including the interaction between the researcher and the participants (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The data were collected from questionnaires, email correspondences, interviews, and reflective learner journals. As in Hall's (2008) study, the journals were used as the basis for further discussion with the researcher, either in person or via email exchanges.

4.1. Research context

Twenty-one undergraduate and postgraduate students from science and social science disciplines[4] at Bordeaux University participated in E+VE on a voluntary basis in 2018. The average age of the participants was 23 and the participants' first language was French. The small number of participants can be explained by the pilot nature of the program. The specificity of Bordeaux University is that it has no arts faculty and so the students therefore study ESP as an obligatory module to develop skills related to their major discipline, and English as a global language of communication. Each discipline has their own ESP course where students discuss their specific issues; for example the chemistry majors will discuss issues relating to chemistry with their ESP teacher. In these respective ESP courses, students with L1 French will communicate in English.

High English proficiency level students were given the opportunity of taking part in E+VE instead of attending their mainstream ESP courses at Bordeaux University. Although the objective of E+VE is not to provide students with English language training, this was nevertheless how the educational managers of Bordeaux decided to use this opportunity provided by E+VE. The rationale for Bordeaux students to participate in E+VE instead of attending ESP classes was based on a combination of reasons. Firstly, E+VE estimates 130 hours of student work time (including 20 hours of facilitated dialogue). The Bordeaux educational managers decided that in addition to the typical 20 hours ESP course, the E+VE course in parallel would be too time-consuming for the students in terms of workload. Secondly, it was felt that students with high English proficiency would benefit more from E+VE (than ESP) because they could practice speaking English with students who did not share the same L1 (French). The possible benefits of interacting with students who were not enrolled in the same disciplines were also considered. This objective meant a new challenge in terms of content learning. Through E+VE, students could go beyond English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and ESP by learning about topics which were outside of their own discipline.

4. Distribution of students per discipline: chemistry (8), anthropology (5), psychology (2), education (2), sociology (2), health sciences (2).

4.2. Data analysis

The data consisted of a post online questionnaire sent to all the participating students, to which the response rate was 71%. The focus of the questionnaires was on how the students had responded to the novelty of interacting in English with other students from other universities online. The students were asked if the course had met their expectations and whether they felt any of their English skills had improved thanks to the E+VE program. Post course on-site interviews were conducted with the researcher with five volunteer students. All the students provided a copy of their E+VE reflective journal, describing the key stages of the exchange with question prompts focusing on the exchange, such as 'Week 3: How are you settling into your group?'. The focus of each journal entry was on the weekly webinar meeting. The learner journal therefore provided most of the information regarding how students had experienced interacting in live group meetings. The chronological aspect of the learner journals, as well as the retrospection of the post course interviews, guided the readings of authentic learner experiences to be understood as a process, with a chronology from beginning to end. Throughout the duration of the E+VE course, students also corresponded with the researcher via email. The emails contained questions about the course, technical issues, and student anxieties about public speaking or thanks in relation to a positive E+VE experience.

Understandings of authentic learner experiences were accessed through the qualitative analysis of the data. The data were collected into one textual corpus and read for repeated themes. Conventional content analysis was used and the coding categories[5] were taken directly from the text data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Pre-existing deductive hypotheses were not used as a top-down basis for analysis, instead, emergent themes were grouped according to keyword frequency and then into a number of areas related to authentic learner experiences. The themes which were identified as being representative were then mapped onto a table containing E+VE's pedagogical conditions (Table 1). The aim was to

5. Keywords and phrases identified in the data such as 'different opinions' and 'point of view' + 'change' + 'evolve' were categorized as being representative of the code 'altered worldviews', for example. Whereas keywords such as 'feeling shy', and 'feeling more confident' were categorized as being attributes of the code 'community formation'.

gain a better understanding of how authentic learner experiences related to the pedagogical activities the students were involved in.

5. Results and discussion

The results showed themes relating to authentic learner experiences in terms of being part of a group. The codes relating to being part of a group were coded as 'community formation', and 'altered worldviews'. As one of the main objectives was that the Bordeaux participants should also practice and improve their English, a code was created for student experiences in relation to English language use, and coded as 'English language learning'.

The study revealed that 86% of the Bordeaux participants were 'satisfied' to 'very satisfied' with the E+VE program. The high satisfaction rate can be explained by the thematic analysis of the data which showed that the E+VE was reported as an authentic learner experience on two levels. Firstly, because the pedagogical setting of the E+VE course enabled authentic interactions and a heightened sense of learner autonomy, and secondly because of what the students experienced as learners within a defined group.

5.1. Authentic learner experiences and community formation

The results provide evidence of how the participants situated themselves as members of a group. All of the journal entries revealed a process of authentic learner experiences in terms of emerging community membership within the E+VE group. The journal entries recorded feelings of shyness and hesitancy in the first journal entries, to more confident statements about group membership in the final entries. Subsequently, becoming a member of an E+VE community of practice (Wenger, 1999) involved a shift from an initial position of isolation toward a position of cohesion. Group cohesion can be understood as a collective approach of 'open-mindedness', 'respect', and 'listening'. The process involved gaining confidence during meaningful and interesting interactions with others. We remind the reader that meaningful interaction is key to understanding

authenticity, as discussed in the literature review. The interactions draw on the affect in relation to the participants' cumulative and shared identities.

5.2. Authentic learner experiences and altered worldviews

In addition, the participants experienced 'epiphanies' about their worldviews, which further reinforced their confidence within the group:

> "**I think my point of view has been altered** by our debates, I have found myself trying to see the bigger picture more often than before in my everyday life" (E+VE participant A, ninth journal entry).

> "**I think the way in which my thoughts have evolved** from the beginning of the program has surprised me the most (E+VE participant B, seventh journal entry)".

By epiphanies, we understand a sense of meaningful self-awareness accompanied by a change of worldview. This included increased tolerance and inter-relational sensitivity (Helm & Van der Velden, 2019). Kreber et al. (2007) would refer to such epiphanies as being representative of authenticity as a path toward transformative learning. This process culminated in the participants describing being better prepared to engage on the topic of immigration in the future, for example.

5.3. Authentic learner experiences and English language learning

As E+VE was offered as an alternative to ESP classes, the students were invited to make comparisons between the two programs. Overall, the participants positioned their attitudes to E+VE in relation to their past English language learning experiences as ESP students because that was what they had experienced before. The E+VE online facilitated sessions were different to the ESP classroom. Firstly, in a French higher education ESP classroom one can expect to find one teacher and up to 36 students. In E+VE facilitated

sessions, there were up to eight students and two facilitators who did not act as either ESP or EMI teachers, but as prompters to further talk. Secondly, each participating student was from a different higher education setting, and the students did not share an L1. Finally, the students did not overall discuss their specialized academic topic of study, but a more general and topical subject of international and political interest (namely *Nationalism and Newcomers*). The only 'frustration' (see Table 1) related to not being able to have physical contact with the members of their E+VE group.

The differences between ESP and E+VE are reflected below.

> "I did virtual exchange this semester. It was a very enriching experience and a good change from our normal classes" (E+VE participant, questionnaire responses).

> "I would like to say that [E+VE] was an excellent experience. Because we were really immersed in a social context with people of different nationalities, it was easier to progress in our language skills. And this is different from traditional classes that seem quite repetitive (presenting an article orally or a scientific subject)" (E+VE participant, questionnaire responses).

> "In [E+VE] you are on your own, but you have to do it. You cannot hide. You owe it to the other people to participate" (E+VE participant, questionnaire responses).

All of the students claimed E+VE had helped them to improve their English skills. This is because they could interact more with non-French speakers, and in smaller groups than in their ESP classroom.

> "In class there is always someone who can speak for you. In class, there is one question [from the teacher] and one answer. In the virtual class there is one topic but lots of questions" (E+VE participant, interviews).

"I feel I made a lot of progress. My English improved a lot" (E+VE participant, interviews).

5.4. Authentic learner experiences and pedagogical conditions

The pedagogical conditions of the E+VE program, summarized in Table 1, are recognizable to those already familiar with virtual exchange projects.

Table 1. Setting the pedagogical conditions for authentic learner experiences in E+VE

INTERACTION (SYNCRONOUS)	AUTONOMY and RESPONSABILITY	NEW COMMUNITY	PEDAGOGY	THIRD PLACES	HOMEWORK (ASYNCHRONOUS)
Use English	"The program requires a lot of investment and commitment. There is no teacher to check up on you "	Gain confidence	Student-led	Staying at home	Interviewing a peer
"Speak more openly "		Make friends: "I met people I would never have met"	Topic-focused	"No other environment"	"The diary is something you do to get grades"
Small groups (8)		Greater diversity of members	L1 not spoken	Frustration	"The content was excellent"
"Putting my English into practice"	"I want the others to feel that I am listening to them and that I care about what they are saying"	Personal histories	Project based	Neutral meeting place	
"Speaking with a button"		"The video interviews brought other people into the project"	"My English improved a lot"		
		"You can feel really close to someone without ever meeting them"	Good grades		

The course provides moments of synchronous interaction and moments of quiet asynchronous study. As in other telecollaborative work, the pedagogy is driven by a motivation to encourage student autonomy and responsibility. The exchange should also result in meeting new people and therefore give learners access to a new community. The specificity of the E+VE program is its strong topic-focused content (here *Nationalism and Newcomers*) which the students are invited to focus on at all times. The 'third places' refer to both the online meeting place but echoes the notion of 'third (language) space' (Kramsch, 2006), as the language used during these moments is a shared, but new and evolving, English as a lingua franca. The themes deduced from the data analysis were mapped onto the E+VE pedagogical model (in Table 1). For example, the students focused on language learning especially through synchronous interaction, and referred to a sense of community without physical closeness in the categories labeled 'new community' and 'third place'. The E+VE pedagogical conditions which are associated with authentic learner experience themes are summarized in Table 1.

The alignment of authentic learner experiences with the E+VE pedagogical setting therefore shows that E+VE is consistent with other virtual exchange programs which have proven to facilitate authentic learner experiences (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2017). These themes were identified with a five-point model through which authentic learner experiences manifested themselves through E+VE.

- engaging in meaningful and transformative interaction using English as a lingua franca;
- topic-focused study on a theme which is relevant to students as global citizens;
- learner autonomy and responsibility;
- an emerging sense of belonging to an online E+VE community; and
- interacting in a third (neutral) place.

As a result, authenticity in E+VE can be understood as a positive, existential, and positioned learner experience. In this case, authenticity, as an E+VE learner experience, was positioned against other learning environments, such as ESP and disciplinary EMI, which may involve simulated and teacher-led contexts (Helm, 2019). It must nevertheless be stated that this project involved invested participants, who enrolled on a voluntary basis. It was these students who described their authentic learner experiences as involving meaningful online interactions with other invested students from diverse backgrounds.

5.5. Subsequent ongoing studies in E+VE at Bordeaux University

Eight of the participating students of this present study were Chemistry majors. There had been initial concern that stepping so widely outside of their disciplinary field would be challenging for these students. On the contrary, the results of this ethnography study revealed that the participating students welcomed the opportunity of widening their English language competence to English for sociocultural purposes (Master, 1997). The interest of widening the scope of English language skills to beyond the scope of ESP has been the basis for subsequent ongoing studies at Bordeaux University[6], specifically in the field of ESP (Hoskins & Reynolds, in press).

6. Conclusion

The current findings of this small-scale study are in keeping with the general findings of the E+VE impact report (Helm & Van der Velden, 2019). Most of the Bordeaux participants were satisfied to very satisfied with the E+VE program. This positive result can be explained because E+VE was found to be an existential learner experience involving new and meaningful exchanges with other students online.

6. The second study of E+VE Bordeaux participants is currently underway (2019-2020). In the second year of this pilot study, 45 science majors have enrolled on the programme.

The study results in the development of a five-point model which identifies the conditions through which authentic learner experiences can be accessed through E+VE, namely: (1) meaningful and transformative interaction, (2) topic-focused and student-led pedagogy, (3) student autonomy and responsibility, (4) developing a sense of community, and (5) interactions which occur in a third (neutral) place. The questions arising for future research are based on better understandings of the relationship between E+VE and Erasmus exchanges, but also of the added attraction of E+VE (in relation to ESP and EMI) where students are seeking more authentic contexts where they can improve a variety of language skills.

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6 Virtual exchange in teacher education: is there an impact in teacher practice?

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Abstract

This text presents the results of surveys and interviews of Former Students (FSs) who have taken part in a teacher education course that began in 2004 (still on-going) and that includes Virtual Exchange (VE). The study aimed to look at the impact of two teacher education courses, imparted collaboratively between geographically-distanced universities for over a decade. The course design aims to introduce VE, both theoretically and empirically, as an approach to foreign language teaching in primary and secondary schools. The data are drawn from an online survey as well as in-depth interviews with FSs enrolled in the course between 2004 and 2015. The findings indicate that a significantly high percentage of the FSs who had been exposed to VE had been involved in or intended to implement VE in their own teaching and that the course had provided them with the knowledge and confidence to do so.

Keywords: virtual exchange, telecollaboration, teacher education, applied learning.

1. Introduction

VE, (also widely known as telecollaboration or Collaborative Online International Learning, or COIL) has been extensively defined over the past decade (cf. O'Dowd & Dooley, 2020; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). In the barest of terms, VE

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aims to involve students in digitally-supported collaborative learning processes with transnational[2] partners from different geopolitical and sociocultural contexts through a series of sequenced activities (in or outside class), usually under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators. While the practice is not new to educational contexts (see Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Warschauer, 1995), it has gained significant impulse in the past decade and is now increasingly common in different subject areas such as business, science, and social sciences (although admittedly it is still predominant in foreign language education, Dooly & O'Dowd, 2018).

Moreover, VE, while still not mainstream, is increasingly more evident in teacher education courses around the globe (Evaluate Group, 2019). In pre-service and in-service teacher education, this type of learning design, in which communication technology is used to create 'digital spaces' for collaborative learning, has been promoted as a means to ensure that teachers are introduced to cross-cultural peer reflection and dialogic learning, and to ensure they are empirically exposed to new approaches they might then apply to their own teaching (Dooly, 2013; Dooly & Sadler, 2013, 2020; Fuchs, 2019; Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017). It should be noted that *collaborative learning* is the operative word as VE is understood here in this text (Dooly, 2018), in comparison to more self-directed or teacher-student interaction that often occurs in completely autonomous language learning sites or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Following this brief definition of VE, the historical progression of the course which involved an uninterrupted years-long collaboration between two teacher educators, one in the USA and the other in Spain, is explained, finishing with an outline of the current telecollaborative program as it now stands. This is followed by a description of how data from the fourteen-year cohort of FSs were compiled then analyzed using an interpretive and qualitative approach. These sections are finally followed by a discussion of the main outcomes of the study.

2. I have chosen the term 'transnational' rather than 'international' because there are cases of VE that take place within national boundaries although most often exchanges are between different countries.

2. Contextualization of the study

The data were collected from graduates from teacher education specializing in teaching foreign languages (French and English) in primary education, specifically graduates from the faculty of education, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (herein UAB). The survey aimed to draw as many samples as possible, starting with the first year that VE was introduced into the program (2004) until recent iterations (see Marjanovic, Dooly, & Sadler, forthcoming for a more detailed discussion of the study). Over the 16 years of continuous collaboration between the author (at UAB) and a colleague at the University of Illinois Urbana Champaign, the format of VE has changed, as have the courses in which the VE was implemented. In the first years, the courses at the UAB were more linguistics-focused (morphosyntax, semantics) rather than applied linguistics. The exchanges used relatively simple technology by today's standards (synchronous audio and text chat meetings via Yahoo messenger), and the activities were somewhat peripheral to the main course content (discussion of intercultural topics and general reflection on how this might be replicated to some extent in their own teaching). In the year 2009, a new teacher education program was introduced into the UAB and the courses the author taught were much more focused on applied linguistics (language teaching methodology). The aim of the VE increasingly focused on preparing the student teachers for telecollaborative teaching once they had graduated, and by 2013 the two partner courses held identical core course programs, with ten to 14 weeks of VE between groups of students each semester, depending on overlap in their academic calendars. The planning of the course was based on what the teachers call the FIT model, which emphasizes the interaction between the use of flipped materials, in-class activities, and telecollaboration (Dooly & Sadler, 2020; Sadler & Dooly, 2016). In this educational design, the knowledge and insight from individual (flipped) work and online meetings are activated in-class with their peers from their own university and vice-versa.

For example, in the 2018-2019 program, students were asked to view a list of recommended technology individually to then present to their online

partners. The groups chose one in order to develop an in-class tutorial. The telecollaborative groups then discussed, evaluated, and chose different content from the tutorials to integrate into the design of teaching projects. The groups also elaborated posters to present to 'external experts' (faculty members, teachers, graduate students), resulting in feedback that could be re-integrated into the digitally-collaborative group work.

Simply put, the shared course program aims to promote "tightly structured telecollaboration tasks and task sequences which are constructed to enable each task to build on the outcomes of the previous one" (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017, p. 7).

3. The study: data compilation and data management

In order to gather input on the impact of the sustained VE, a 'master database' was created from an online student registration file of students who had been enrolled in the course from the years 2004 to 2015. This corpus contained 453 FSs' names and contact details (later, more recent graduates were added to the database from the years 2016-2018 for a grand total of 517). However, a majority of the contact information in the student registry from the earlier years was out of date, so other recruiting strategies were employed: student names were searched on common Internet media (Google, LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube channels, etc.). Results from this search were compared with the information from the master database whenever possible (e.g. comparison of photos or place of residence) in order to confirm identities before approaching any potential survey informants. After having culled the database to leave only individuals positively identified as having been enrolled in the course in question, the database was then more finely profiled to only include potential participants who appeared to be currently teaching, somehow involved in education, or had taught/been involved in education at some point after graduation, resulting in 164 potential data respondents.

These FSs were contacted with an initial online survey to confirm that they were indeed or had been involved in teaching and to request their interest and consent to participate in the study, following research ethical guidelines set out by the author's research group and submitted to the university research ethics board. A total of 65 FSs responded, all of whom gave their consent to participate in a first survey regarding any experiences they had had in VE after having graduated from the course. This general survey was followed by a more detailed online survey related to their experiences, to which 52 FSs responded. Of these 52, 14 of the FSs had studied abroad for part of their final year and therefore did not participate in the VE carried out in the course in question. Finally, after the second survey, 19 respondents agreed to participate in more in-depth interviews.

The data were stored and analyzed with an online qualitative data management platform called Dedoose. From the first and second surveys, each respondent was recorded as an individual entry with the answers as a binary descriptor (yes/no). For the open-ended responses, the affirmative multiple choice answers were recorded as 'yes' and any unselected alternative answer was marked as 'no', resulting in 53 descriptors.

The written and audio materials corresponding to the 19 respondents who took part in the more detailed interviews were thematically analyzed using the following broad categories: (1) attitudes and opinions toward telecollaboration and implementing it (again) in the future; (2) challenges and dealing with them; (3) project descriptions and telecollaboration materials; and (4) autonomous teacher behavior, a notion understood here as the teacher's capacity and willingness to be involved in and take ownership of a change process that leads to self-directed professional development and an ability to apply critical reflection and analysis on their own teaching process (Chylinski & Hanewald, 2009). This process of categorization resulted in 161 coded excerpts.

Storing and organizing the data in this manner allowed for navigation through each respondent's descriptor profile (yes/no answers), as well as the coded

excerpts (written/audio answers) linked to the 19 in-depth respondents and to cross-compare descriptor to descriptor, code to code, and descriptor to code, and thus look for potential correlations between variables (for a more complete description of the data management process, see Marjanovic, Dooly & Sadler, forthcoming).

The 52 participants who responded to the second more detailed survey all graduated with a teaching degree from the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona in the following years in the order of the highest to lowest number of participants:

- 2015 (10)
- 2008 (10)
- 2010 (7)
- 2014 (5)
- 2012 (4)
- 2005 (4)
- 2007 (3)
- 2006 (2)
- 2013 (2)
- 2009 (2)
- 2004 (1)
- 2017 (1)
- 2016 (1)

There were no participants belonging to the years 2011 or 2018 in the more detailed survey. There were also three additional FSs who came forward voluntarily after the survey to share information, one from 2004, two from 2015. Many of the FSs from 2017 and 2018 indicated that they had not found teaching jobs yet and were pursuing further education or working in other professions on a temporary basis and therefore did not take part in the more detailed survey. Out of the 52 detailed survey respondents, 38 taught in primary schools, and 12 taught in kindergarten. One respondent was teaching adults, teens, and children in a private language school and one was involved in therapy and education and was

not teaching. On average, they had 7.14 years of teaching experience. The three 'informal' interviewees were all teaching in primary education.

4. Results and discussion

First we will look at the number of respondents who answered affirmatively regarding VE experiences since graduating (these totals are based on the responses of the 52 respondents, plus the three additional informants).

- Out of the 55 respondents, 20 have used telecollaboration in their own teaching and on their own initiative.

- Of the 20 who have implemented telecollaboration, 11 have less than five years of teaching experience.

- Four FSs stated that they have helped other teachers set up telecollaboration programs but did not answer 'yes' to the question of whether they had implemented telecollaboration in their classrooms. One of them had less than five years teaching experience.

Now we consider these numbers more analytically. Twenty out of 55 FSs who have carried out VE since graduating from the teaching degree is far below 50% (it is an average of 36%), but if we add the four respondents who had indicated they had not participated in VE but then went on to explain experiences of helping out other teachers or having tried VE and failed, the total number rises to 44%. Additionally, if we exclude the 14 respondents who had been abroad and had not actually experienced VE while studying, the number of FSs who have demonstrable empirical knowledge (through the course) of VE before graduating and who then participated in some form of VE once teaching reaches 59%. Significantly from this total, half were teachers with less than five years' experience. It is worth parsing this statistic more thoroughly: these young teachers graduated from the course in its most recent configuration of

fully integrated, regular, and intensive use of VE. Finally, taking the cross-comparison of descriptor to code that allows for potential correlations between variables, the descriptor of 'yes I have participated in telecollaboration' was linked by 52% of the respondents to the code "feelings inspired by previous participation in telecollaboration as a student" and "based on own experience believed it would be beneficial for my students".

We now look at the numbers linked to participants who stated that they had not taken part in any form of VE after graduating from the faculty of education:

- sixteen of the respondents who said 'no' indicated that they plan to try VE in their teaching in the future (nine of these 16 have less than five years' experience);

- five indicated that they had tried to implement a telecollaborative project but could not do so for varying reasons (lack of resources, funding, or support). Of these five, three have less than five years teaching experience;

- two negative respondents said that their students were not interested in VE; and

- four indicated that they did not feel confident enough to try VE.

Again, we can deconstruct these numbers more closely. Removing the 14 who were abroad and did not take part in the course, we have 39% of the FSs from the course who have not taken part in any type of VE indicating that they plan to do so in the future; 56% of these teachers correspond to the more recent years of the course where VE plays a vital role in the program. The cross-comparison between the descriptor of 'no, I have not participated in VE' and the code "lack of confidence to try it" shows that less than ten percent of the teachers who have participated in VE stated that they did not feel sufficiently self-reliant to try it with their own students.

Finally, there are some leitmotifs to highlight when returning to the FSs who specified in their survey answers that they had participated in some type of VE once working as teachers. Regarding the first question, it is encouraging to note that of the participants who had experienced VE as professionals, all 20 indicated that they were planning to do it again. Of the FSs who had carried out telecollaboration, slightly over half of them reported feeling inspired to carry out VE in their teaching due to their own experience in the course, because, as one respondent put it, "I learnt from it as a student so I felt that my students would too". At least one of the exchanges was set up between FSs who had been classmates.

None of them reported any difficulties with task design when asked about the implementation of their telecollaborative project and all of them indicated that they felt they had sufficient knowledge regarding telecollaboration: lack of know-how was not a challenge for them when carrying out the VE. However, they did report other challenges, most of which could be classified as external issues (e.g. technical problems, lack of administrative support, problems with teacher-to-teacher relationships), student-related issues (e.g. lack of interest, skills), or organizational issues (e.g. insufficient resources, scheduling, curriculum pressures, etc.). Nevertheless, the FSs demonstrated resourcefulness for finding creative ways to resolve their difficulties, particularly having a Plan B (e.g. the use of their cell phone when problems with the Internet emerged). Specifically, the key challenge mentioned by the younger, less experienced teachers was 'feeling alone' in their endeavors in VE, with little support from the school administration or other teachers (perhaps in part, due to their colleagues' lack of familiarity with VE in general). In their descriptions of the projects they had carried out, there was a wide array of configurations, from rather simple one-class to one-class exchanges of somewhat straightforward, practice-related language exchanges, to much more complex, year-long content and language integrated projects with longer, more spontaneous language use. Finally, the respondents conveyed their convictions that the telecollaborative experience had contributed positively to both their own teaching as well as their students' learning and, as previously mentioned, they felt confident they would carry out VE again in the future.

5. Conclusions

As Lawrence and Spector-Cohen (2018) point out, there are many potential benefits stemming from the integration of telecollaboration into teacher education. There may be gains in digital literacies and 21st century skills (Dooly & Sadler, 2013; Hauck, 2019), increased teacher and learner autonomy (Kramsch, A'Ness, & Lam, 2000), and gains in intercultural awareness (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Müller-Hartmann, 2006; O'Dowd, 2018). Research indicates that teacher education which focuses on both the subject area taught and its pedagogy can have a positive impact on education outcomes as well as reduced anxiety in novice teachers (King Rice, 2003) and these results corroborate this argument. Moreover, the results of the study seem to indicate the course program provided "a viable pedagogical model [that] sensitizes [student-teachers] to those aspects of task design which are unique to online contexts" in an "integrated and holistic" manner (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017, p. 8). The VE in the course appears to have been more than mere exposure, it served as a platform for a full exploration of the learning potential of VE, culminating in the collaborative authorship of educational telecollaborative projects that eventually led to over half of the FSs implementing similar projects in their teaching. As Mammadova (2019) states,

> "[t]eachers are the individuals that prepare the future work-force. High caliber teachers that conduct high-quality teaching by integrating their skills and knowledge into instructional time are central to improving student outcomes. However, the key challenges start when teachers are asked to put theory and innovative ideas into practice without getting much guidance on how to do it. […] Without a well-prepared instruction process and strong support, quality teaching is impossible to achieve" (p. 25).

According to Schwartzman and Henry (2009), pedagogical learning can be enhanced through what they call 'applied learning', implying that student teachers should be empirically engaged in activities similar to how they might be expected to teach. This study, which tracks 14 years of student teachers who have been experientially engaged in VE during their teacher education period

(in increasing percentages as the program developed), implies that the teacher know-how gained through intensive immersion in the principles and practice of telecollaborative project design has made an impact on their teaching behavior, helping them gain the confidence and skills needed to carry out VE in their own practice.

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Section 3.

Practical examples

7 Addressing empathy in intercultural virtual exchange: a preliminary framework

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Abstract

Empathy is widely perceived and understood as an unquestioned component of Intercultural Competence (IC). The authors see the ability to empathise with others and to see their point of view as an important condition for developing an ethnorelative viewpoint, and therefore consider it important to incorporate activities into the intercultural communication curriculum that addresses the affective side of IC (Calloway-Thomas, Arasaratnam-Smith, & Deardorff, 2017; Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018). In their paper, the authors discuss the importance of meta-cognitive tasks by creating opportunities for students where they can describe, share, and evaluate emotions. Based on the recommendations made by O'Dowd (2016), Byram, Golubeva, Hui, and Wagner (2017) about designing and implementing virtual exchanges (VEs), the authors present a preliminary framework, i.e. a sequence of self-reflective meta-analysis tasks that they developed for the intercultural VE between students at Ludwig-Maximilians University (LMU) in Germany and their peers at the University of Maryland Baltimore County (UMBC) in the United States. This framework can be adapted to a variety of online teaching contexts.

Keywords: empathy, intercultural competence, critical (self-)reflection, virtual exchange.

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1. Introduction

In this world of intensified global mobility, international exchange, and multicultural exposure, IC has become a necessary competence for mastering every-day life. Typically seen as a set of components related to knowledge, skills, and attitudes, IC is slowly becoming an integral part of the curriculum, not just in westernised societies, but also all over the world. Regardless of which intercultural model you find most plausible and practical, or which model fits into your theoretical understanding, the elements of IC listed and defined in most frameworks suggest only 'positive' personal traits, attitudes, and skills. Among these normative attitudes are components which refer to the emotional set-up of people, such as flexibility or tolerance for ambiguity, to mention the two most cited elements (e.g. Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). Knowledge about other cultures' languages, values, norms, rules, and strategies of communication is necessary when people want to understand other mind-sets and try to act accordingly in order to achieve their goals. However, for appropriate actions and reactions, people need more than that. For a successful intercultural encounter, or a mutual understanding between individuals from different cultural backgrounds, the affective side of the interaction, i.e. emotions, plays a crucial role.

Critical research in psychology discusses empathy as a rather multifaceted phenomenon with its positive and negative sides (i.e. Bloom, 2016; Breithaupt, 2017b). Nevertheless, it is listed in most IC models as one of its essential components (e.g. Bolten, 2007; Deardorff, 2006; Fantini, 2009; Gudykunst, 1993; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). Understood as a Janus-faced emotion with a good side and a bad side, empathy has been analysed by scholars from different fields as one of the essential topics in the social and behavioural sciences (see e.g. Bloom, 2016; Breithaupt, 2017a, 2017b; Calloway-Thomas, 2009; Epley, 2014). Indeed, empathy can be considered as a very important attitude and skill when it comes to teaching and learning because it helps to 'feel with', or to co-experience with another person. For leading class discussions and facilitating learning successfully, teachers need to be able to relate to their students' emotional situations, and it is extremely difficult for students to learn

in a classroom setting when they do not cognitively understand their teachers' intentions and emotional set-ups. Despite this axiom, there is a significant gap in pedagogical practice with regard to hands-on tools for developing empathy in a systematic way, and not just as an additional outcome of IC development, which may either happen or not while engaging students in intercultural classroom activities. The authors of this paper are making an attempt to develop a sequence of tasks for developing their students' empathy through transatlantic intercultural VE.

2. Theoretical framework: why empathy is so important for someone to become interculturally competent?

The ability to interpret and understand others' emotional cues through mindful practices plays a determining role in interpersonal interactions, particularly when interlocutors come from different cultures (e.g. Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018; Ting-Toomey & Dorjee, 2019). If such an ability is missing and one fails to 'read' emotions in either verbal or nonverbal communication, it may lead to misinterpretations with or without different cultural values and perspectives (Breithaupt, 2017a).

From the angle of IC, empathy is "the ability to regulate emotions, cope, and react appropriately in an intercultural encounter" by understanding and interpreting the feelings of the communication partner, who has a different cultural background and mind-set (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018, p. 57). Besides that, there is a certain reciprocity – a 'feeling with' (German *Mitgefühl*) – which is based on a mutual perception of the emotional state of the other person (Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018, p. 57). According to Byram (1989), empathy is more demanding than tolerance in that "it requires understanding, *an activity* rather than a passive acceptance; *it requires change of viewpoint, which has to be worked towards, engaged with*" (emphasis added, p. 89). Therefore, when intercultural trainers and teachers aim at the development or at the enhancement of IC, the topic of empathy can provide a valuable teaching objective.

3. Methodology: developing a preliminary framework for teaching empathy in intercultural communication classrooms

The main goal of the students' activities the authors have designed is to build (intercultural) empathy through participation in a transatlantic VE. Ideally, following Byram et al. (2017, p. xxxviii), this collaboration will meet the criteria set for a 'good' intercultural VE, that is to:

- create a sense of international identification with learners in the international exchange;
- challenge the 'common sense' of each national group within the international exchange;
- develop a new 'international' way of thinking and acting (a new way which may be either a modification of what is usually done or a radically new way); and
- apply that new way to 'knowledge', to the 'self' and to the 'world'.

Besides these principles, there is also some criticism regarding VE that should not be neglected when setting up a VE (see O'Dowd, 2016, p. 275), as enumerated below.

- There is a danger for lack of authenticity when learners interact with each other in such settings (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009).
- VE can involve a false impression of universality in online communication (see Kramsch, 2009, 2014).
- There can not be enough opportunities for participants to reflect (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

All three of these potential dangers can become critical when teachers think about building an emotional relationship between students, who have never met in person and may never see each other. Therefore, as suggested by Richardson (2016), the authors have carefully planned the collaboration, laid out on the theoretical overview of the issue of empathy and emotional intelligence (see Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018).

In the proposed activities, students from LMU and UMBC will be involved in a series of (self-)reflective meta-analysis tasks, i.e. they will be provided opportunities to become skillful at describing and expressing their emotions by spending more time on personal reflections (see for more details and ideas Guntersdorfer & Golubeva, 2018, p. 59), and they will be prompted to focus their attention on the affective reactions of their VE-partners by regular survey questions.

Given that both classes (at both LMU and UMBC) are multicultural, students first have to share within their own class their diverse views on a selected critical issue. The topic can be a current socio-political event, or an international turmoil that has been in the centre of the social media attention in both countries. Currently, for example, there is an extensive discussion of the COVID-19 pandemic: how different governments deal with this situation and how people in different cultures react to this. Also, the topic can be a significant historical event in which both countries were involved, preferably on opposing sides (e.g. World War II). Other interesting ideas can be found in Byram et al. (2017), Lantz-Deaton and Golubeva (2020), and Porto, Golubeva, and Byram (forthcoming). Choosing an emotionally loaded critical issue is crucial for VE because they prompt students to express their feelings. Before interacting with their transatlantic peers, students will be involved in group work at their own institutions. The sequence is based on class discussions, virtual presentations, and, most importantly, on four critical self-reflection surveys that are done after each step of the sequence. The framework may include the following stages below:

- **setting small groups** within the 'country' class and choosing the topic (see for examples of such topics in Byram et al., 2017); and

- **analysing the selected historical or socio-political event/situation and presenting the results of the analysis within the 'country' classes**. This can be done in two steps, as explained below.

In the first step, facts of the historical event are be collected. What is important is that students find articles and/or film materials (on YouTube and social media) that reflect diverse (political and/or cultural) points of view. Students collect the requested information as a home assignment, and based on that, prepare a 'fact sheet' as a small group assignment. They are explicitly requested to include in this sheet only facts and description of the event/situation, and avoid any interpretation or evaluation.

In the second step, they share opinions and interpretations of it, followed by a description of the emotional reactions that people participating in that event might have experienced (or are experiencing). This approach is based on the famous Describe-Interpret-Evaluate (D-I-E) exercise by Janet Bennett et al. (1977). The main challenge students might encounter here is working with biased presentations of realities in the media, but the authors hope that collecting material from diverse sources can develop their students' critical thinking skills.

- **Completing the critical self-reflection survey #1** with the following questions: *Describe the emotions of the people who participated in this event. How do these emotions affect you? What is the most applicable emotion you feel? How do you feel during the small group work? How did other students feel during the small group work?* The questions here should be open-ended, and students are requested to describe the involved emotional states in their own words. The expected outcome is that through completing this and other surveys, students exercise self-reflection and thus develop their empathy.

- **Comparing different interpretations and evaluations** by working on a 'shared consensus' within the 'country' class. This might be a challenging task for students because they are requested to present the

opinions of others – even if they differ – in a respectful way and find ways in how these diverse opinions can be presented in the form of a 'consensus' (i.e. a page-long summary).

- **Completing the critical self-reflection survey #2**, which contains these questions: *How did you feel working in the 'country' class? What do you think other students felt during the group work? Can you remember your emotions well? Do you think you can recollect well the emotions of other students?*

- **Presenting the 'country' class view on the historical or socio-political event to their transatlantic peers**, by sharing with their transatlantic peers project products developed in Phases II and IV, before a video conference meeting is organised. Students from two 'country' classes are matched in teams of three to five students, so that everyone is provided with an opportunity for active participation.

- **Reflecting on others' views, and suggesting a consensus**: after video conference meetings, the collaborating classes have to reflect on the project products of their transatlantic peers. Students can be provided some prompt questions such as: *How is the presentation of the VE-partners different from yours? Which details of the event are presented very similar to yours and which differ from our/your point of view?*

- **Completing the critical self-reflection survey #3**, which focuses on the emotional affects during and immediately after the presentation. The students have to describe their emotions and the emotions of their transatlantic peers during the presentations and explain and reflect on what was the most problematic in describing (verbalising) emotions. *Have your emotions related to this event changed during this project? Why, or why not? Do you think that after having completed this project you better understand how others feel about this historical event? To what extent do you think your empathy has been developed as a result of participating in this VE? How do you know it? Please elaborate.*

- **Suggestions for a 'consensus' document jointly created by the two classes**, as both classes work on a joint document (a Google Docs), which represents their diverse views on the discussed event. Although it can be a challenging and labour-intense exercise, it teaches students how to include alternative interpretations into their descriptions. The main idea of this phase is to learn to value diverse perspectives.

- **Debriefing and evaluating the VE**; after the 'consensus' document is created by the VE partners, students can question and evaluate the activities in an online class forum discussion.

- **Completing the critical self-reflection survey #4**, which asks students about their overall impressions about the VE and draws their attention, as in all the previous steps, toward the description of the other students' emotional reactions. Important questions of the survey are: *How do you feel about this exchange in general? What do you think other students felt about this VE? What did you learn about your emotional mind-set?*

4. Conclusion

In this very short paper, the authors made an attempt to briefly address the issue of developing *empathy* in intercultural virtual classrooms. The authors argue that more attention should be paid in the field of intercultural communication to this very promising topic. Developing exercises which promote explicitly the development of emotional intelligence, in general, and empathy, in particular, would not only enrich the repertoire of intercultural training but can also serve as useful tools for the training of perspective taking. The authors' primary research objectives with this intercultural VE are (1) to adjust the already existing training methods in order to fit *empathy* into the curriculum of intercultural education; and (2) to investigate and try out the 'cultural fit' of these new teaching methods (i.e. teaching *empathy* within different cultural groups, contexts, and settings). The authors also plan to verify the usefulness and the effectiveness of this

preliminary framework by conducting pre- and post-VE assessment of their students' empathy. The points mentioned above show the scope of the questions which should be targeted by intercultural education researchers and practitioners in the future.

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8 Developing an online course on virtual exchange for teachers: a reflection on the design and implementation

Angelos Konstantinidis[1]

Abstract

Virtual Exchanges (VEs) are flourishing yet there are still few courses in higher education that offer in-service teachers the fundamental theoretical and practical knowledge necessary to organize and conduct a telecollaborative project in their own educational settings. This paper aims to provide a resource to teacher educators and course designers who seek to design a course on VEs in higher or post-secondary education. Through reflective practice (Bolton, 2018) and adhering to the principles of educational design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012), the process of design and development of an online master's course for language teachers is described. The article begins by describing the context and discussing the underlying rationale and principal course aims and learning outcomes, and the syllabus and assessment tasks are then reviewed. Course evaluation throughout the years is briefly reported as well as other outcomes. The results are positive overall both in terms of how students evaluated the course and the competences they acquired, although a couple of limitations are recognized. The study concludes with a reflection on the process of course design and the challenges faced.

Keywords: online course design, reflective practice, virtual exchange, educational design research.

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1. Introduction

VE (also known as telecollaboration) has been flourishing (O'Dowd, 2018), yet there are still only a limited amount of professional development courses in higher education for teachers interested in acquiring the fundamental theoretical and practical knowledge in the field. Apart from a few exceptions, the vast majority of the courses on VEs are offered at undergraduate level. In addition, studies in the field focus on issues associated with the VE per se rather than on topics related to the curriculum of the course, which makes the design of a course on VEs an even more challenging enterprise. Taking into account the variety of tasks and the diversity of challenges that teachers have to address in VEs (Helm, 2015) as well as the attitudes, skills, and knowledge they need to establish (O'Dowd, 2015), further training opportunities on VEs should be offered.

The present study will attempt to bridge this gap by providing a resource that focuses on the design of a course on VEs and discusses in a reflective way the underlying rationale.

2. Teacher training courses on VEs

The vast majority of the empirical studies in the field of VEs adopt an "experiential modeling approach" (Luo & Yang, 2018, p. 561) by involving undergraduate student-teachers in a VE project as students (Baroni et al., 2019; Rienties et al., 2020; Sadler & Dooly, 2016). The underlying rationale of this approach is that prospective teachers should experience themselves the processes and tools that they will use in their own classrooms and telecollaborative projects in the future (Ernest, Heiser, & Murphy, 2013).

While the experiential modeling approach is also adopted in the few studies that concern in-service teacher training on VEs, due to the different needs and competences of in-service teachers, alternative organizational schemes are established. These are briefly reviewed in the next paragraphs.

In a way that appears to be quite close to the experience of organizing a VE in the real-world, Whyte and Gijsen (2016) engaged two classes of language teachers who were attending a postgraduate blended-learning course in their respective institutions into a VE. The trainees were put into small intercultural teams and each team organized a VE project that involved team members' own classes. The results were mixed: some VE projects were more successful than others in terms of pupil satisfaction and task effectiveness, whereas in less successful projects trainees mentioned difficulties in coordination and a limited interest in VEs in general.

Hauck, Müller-Hartmann, Rienties, and Rogaten (2020) engaged two classes of teachers who were attending a masters training program in their respective institutions in a VE. During the exchange, trainees worked both locally with their classmates and online in intercultural teams on tasks related to the design and peer evaluation of VE activities. The study reported a substantial increase of the digital and pedagogical competence for the majority of the trainees, though not all of them benefited equally.

Without involving trainees of a fully online master's program in a VE, Vinagre (2017) focused on building their skills and knowledge on VEs through a series of collaborative tasks that included article reviewing, case-study analysis, and the design and hypothetical organization of a VE. The trainees were teachers with diverse professional backgrounds working in different countries, and had no previous experience in VEs. Although not all trainees succeeded in developing specific competences, the outcomes of the approach were overall positive, demonstrating that it has the potential to enable teachers to acquire the required competences for organizing VEs.

A similar approach, though not specifically focused on the development of competences on VEs, was followed in an online professional development program for academics by Rienties et al. (2013). Trainees worked independently and collaboratively on a range of assignments on topics related with web 2.0 educational applications, collaborative knowledge building, measuring knowledge and understanding, and supervising students in distance learning (Rienties et al., 2013). Although nearly half of the trainees dropped out, the

majority of those who successfully completed the program reported substantially higher pedagogical and technological competences.

3. Course design methodology

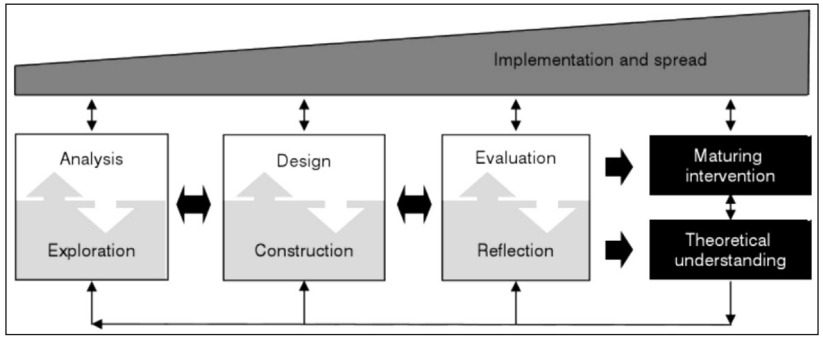
3.1. Context

The context of the study is the Telecollaboration in Language Learning (TLL), a twelve-week module in the online Master of Arts in Digital Technologies for Language Teaching (MA in DTLT) program, University of Nottingham. The TLL module has been delivered five times in total until now; it is elective and, on average, four students select it each year. Students in the course are experienced language teachers who work around the globe.

3.2. Course design and development process

The process of designing and developing the TLL course is based on the generic model for designing research in education by McKenney and Reeves (2012).

Figure 1. The model for conducting educational design research (McKenney & Reeves, 2012, p. 77)[2]



2. From McKenney & Reeves (2012). Copyright © 2012 Authors and Routledge. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Group.

The model (Figure 1) comprises three core phases: analysis/exploration, design/construction, and evaluation/reflection. Bidirectional arrows between these phases indicate that the process is both iterative and flexible, while bidirectional arrows between each of these phases and implementation depict interaction with practice.

3.3. Analysis and exploration

The context and the potential students were considered to specify the teaching aims and learning outcomes of the course. A research-based approach (Munthe & Rogne, 2015) was adopted for providing both theoretical and practical knowledge in the area of VEs, building up students' skills in organizing VE activities, and cultivating an inquisitive attitude in students toward teaching and learning.

After determining the overarching course aims and learning outcomes, an open-ended exploration started to gather material that would be part of the curriculum. Relative keywords (telecollaboration, VEs, tandem language learning, etc.) were used in journal databases as well as in web searches. Platforms that support VEs, such as UNI-Collaboration, iEARN, and eTwinning were thoroughly searched to discover material.

3.4. Design and construction

First, a list was created with the potential topics that would comprise the syllabus. The potential topics were evaluated based on criteria related to importance for achieving the course goals. Next, a few ideas for the sequence of topics in the syllabus were generated and considered before selecting the ones which would be eventually put into practice. The design of the activities was based on the COMP-PLETE model, which identifies eight ingredients (community, openness, multimodality, participation, personalization, learning, experience, and technological enhancement) as fundamental to provide distance learners with a learning experience that is motivational and empowering (Goria & Konstantinidis, 2018).

The rationale behind COMP-PLETE is the attempt to address and resolve issues common to distance learning, such as the feeling of isolation, balanced workload, and the move toward 21st century open learning in an institution-based context. COMP-PLETE does so by leveraging the affordances of participatory pedagogies in motivating students and strengthening their commitment to the distance learning program. Table 1 presents a brief overview of the eight principles of the model.

Table 1. The course design principles

Community	Tasks should support the development of an online Community of Inquiry.
Openness	Tasks should cultivate openness in teaching and learning.
Multimodality	Tasks should allow and encourage the use of multiple modes in students' work.
Participation	Tasks should encourage student participation in the assessment.
Personalization	Task design should cater to students' needs and preferences by allowing them to select from a variety of tasks.
Learning	Assessment should be aligned with the teaching aims and learning outcomes of the course and should serve a triple duty: formative, summative, and metacognitive.
Experience	Assessment should encourage students to bring their experience into the course.
Technological enhancement	Tasks should support students in both engaging with digital technologies and adopting a critical understanding of their role in learning.

3.5. Evaluation and reflection

Four different sources of data are employed for the evaluation of the course: students' engagement with the course activities, students' final artifacts for the assignments, students' formal evaluation of the module, and, students' answers to open questions related to their overall course experience. Reflection is based on the outcomes of the evaluation (reflection-on-action) and creates new theoretical understanding about the design of the course.

4. Course design

4.1. Teaching aims and learning outcomes

Three overarching aims were set: to introduce students to the theories and practices of VEs through a critical and multicultural lens, to build up students' competences in organizing VE activities, and to engage students in research.

Initially, it was considered crucial that students would acquire a hands-on experience of organizing and conducting a VE activity in their own educational settings, yet soon I realized that not only is it particularly challenging for students to set up and conduct even a simple VE in such a short time frame, it is not always possible either due to institutional restrictions or other reasons. Therefore, it was considered more appropriate to change the focal point of the learning outcomes toward empowering students with knowledge and skills that are essential in VEs, yet without necessarily engaging them in the complete process of organizing and conducting a VE project.

4.2. Syllabus

The course syllabus is divided into three sections: the first section introduces students to VEs, the second deals with more practical issues in the organization of VE projects, while the third section presents a few additional topics on VEs.

4.3. Assignments and assessment

There are three assignments distributed evenly throughout the course. The first engages students in a collaborative analysis of an empirical study on VEs and a presentation of the results to their peers. In the second assignment, students work together to contribute a text to a Wikipedia article related to VE (see more details in the 'Course Evaluation' section) and then write a reflective essay about the online collaboration with their peers. For the third assignment, students can either design and conduct a VE project and reflect on its outcomes, or propose a topic related to their studies in the course and their professional context. The

design of the assignments is grounded on the principles of the COMP-PLETE model (Goria & Konstantinidis, 2018), as below.

- **Community**: the collaborative character of the first and the second assignment further cultivates the community in the course.

- **Openness**: all assignments are accompanied by rubrics, while exemplars are also offered. Additionally, the second assignment engages students in adding content into a Wikipedia article.

- **Multimodality**: students have to deliver a presentation to their peers for the first assignment; in the second assignment they have to connect their work with other Wikipedia pages; in the third assignment students can freely select the delivery mode.

- **Participation**: students can negotiate the assessment criteria with the tutor and they are engaged in a peer- and self-assessment process.

- **Personalization**: in the last assignment, students are free to select the topic and the mode of representation.

- **Learning**: the assignments are in alignment with the learning outcomes of the course and support the assessment's triple role (formative, summative, and metacognitive). The formative role is achieved by encouraging peer feedback as well as by providing tutor feedback in students' drafts before final submission, while there is also provision for providing purely formative tasks during the course. The second assignment builds students' metacognitive skills by engaging them in reflection about their learning in the first two assignments.

- **Experience**: assignments are distributed evenly throughout the course period, allowing adequate time for students to study and act upon the formative feedback toward improving their performance in the assignments that follow.

- **Technological enhancement**: students are encouraged to use their preferred digital tools for collaborating with their peers to develop the first two assignments and they have to reflect on how the selected digital tools might have facilitated or constrained their efforts for communication and working together as a group.

5. Course evaluation

5.1. Students' engagement with the course activities

In all five deliveries of the course, participating students showed an increased engagement with the assignments as demonstrated by an increased number of posts and questions about the assignments on the course forums. Nearly half of the students' products were evaluated as first class, one-third as second class, and one-fifth as third class.

5.2. Students' final artifacts for the assignments

The high quality of students' assignments has two concrete outcomes for the wider educational community: the creation of an open educational resource with students' digital artifacts, as well as significant content enrichment of related Wikipedia articles. The open educational resource is hosted on a wiki (http://telecollaboration20.pbworks.com/) that lists students' digital artifacts on the course. Students' selected assignments are published on the wiki after requesting their consent. The wiki was initially created at the third delivery of the TLL module and since then it has been enriched yearly. The digital artifacts are grouped into categories for easier use and search. The wiki currently contains 25 digital artifacts, including articles that analyze VE projects and study reviews, video presentations on various topics, dissertations, online booklets, and self-reflections.

Until now, nearly 5,000 words in total have been added to the respective Wikipedia articles by the students. Table 2 shows the total number of words added to each

Wikipedia article, the total number of words that each of the articles currently have, and an estimation of the proportion of students' additions to each article. The estimated percentages do not accurately reflect the proportions of students' additions to each article, since over the years other users may have changed some bits of students' text. Nevertheless, it is still a measure that shows how significant students' contributions have been to the growth of each article.

Table 2. Students' contributions to Wikipedia

Wikipedia article	Total amount of words added by the students	Total words of the article (June 2019)	Percentage
Digital literacy	500	2,700	19%
Tandem language learning	1,700	1,900	89%
Telecollaboration	1,600	2,200	73%
VE	1,000	2,400	42%

5.3. Students' formal evaluation of the module

The course has been evaluated very positively by the students as regards the teaching and assessment methods. The student evaluation of the course is not obligatory and thus far two students (from the total 20 students who participated in the course) did not fill in the evaluation form. The vast majority of the respondents (N=16; 89%) agree or strongly agree that the teaching methods helped them to learn, while all respondents perceived that the assessment methods allowed them to demonstrate what they have learned and declared that they would recommend the course.

5.4. Students' answers to open questions related to their overall course experience

Lastly, two students (Sophia and Irene; pseudonyms) who participated in the last course delivery were requested to complete a short questionnaire with a few open questions as regards their overall experience on the course. Both students had no previous experience in VEs and they started the course with a few preoccupations. As Sophia stated: "I began the module deeply skeptical about

the utility of telecollaboration and consequently not particularly interested". However, they recognized the value and potential for VEs by attending the course. Irene's answer is indicative of this change: "in all the years I have been teaching, I had not heard of telecollaboration so, for me, this course opened up a whole new world".

In terms of the assessment design, it appears that the students had mixed feelings. Sophia recognized "the richness and variety of the assignments" as the greatest strength of the course because she "was given a chance to try alternative approaches to the classic essay assignment". However, she perceived that the collaborative assignments of the course did not work out well resulting in a "limited and stressful" personal experience of online collaboration among peers. Similarly, Irene perceived that the "experiential collaborative experience" she had helped her to acquire "a better insight into what [her] own students experience", yet, she too questioned the design of the collaborative assignments.

6. Discussion

Six years ago, I set out to design an online course on VEs. The endeavor has been challenging from the beginning, yet through reflection I acquired a holistic understanding of the situation and I started thinking of ways to address the problem at hand. I dismissed the idea of organizing a VE project as part of the course and instead focused on ways that enable the acquisition of the knowledge base on VEs and cultivate digital, collaborative, and intercultural competences. I decided to adhere to the principles and processes of educational design research for the design of the course, as they offer a rigid yet flexible framework that can guide both the practice of and the inquiry into course design and development.

Throughout the whole procedure, my practice has been reflective (Bolton, 2018). I have been critically questioning the outcomes of the designed course as well as my attitudes and beliefs as regards what knowledge I deemed fundamental and how this knowledge could be acquired by others. I have been making efforts to comprehend the complex political, social, and cultural dynamics of the modern

world and to recognize my own share of responsibility for which *knowledge* is valued and what is considered *learning* by society. Enriching articles in Wikipedia and publishing students' work online are two of the most prominent ways that the course creates beneficial outcomes.

I have designed the course based on principles of the research-based teacher education approach, for I firmly believe that teachers should adopt an inquiring attitude to teaching and learning in order to prepare themselves as well as their students for the challenges of the digital and highly interconnected world. Hence, the syllabus comprises research articles in the field of VEs and one of the assignments requires students to critically review an empirical study. Thus, there is much emphasis on the research content and students are engaged in reading and writing research (Munthe & Rogne, 2015).

The course aims to nurture related competences, help the students acquire the knowledge base on VEs through studying the syllabus, and develop their organizational skills by collaborating with their peers. They are also offered the opportunity to acquire hands-on experience by devising or conducting their own VE project. Finally, the course activities cultivate attitudes and values related to online participation and collaboration, which are essential for teachers who are engaged with VEs. On the whole, the course outcomes are positive both in terms of how students evaluated the course and the competences they acquired, as demonstrated in their assignments.

7. Limitations

Although the results of the several evaluation methods are overall positive, the particular effects of the course on trainees' competences in VEs are not examined through, for instance, a pre-post survey as in recent studies on VE (Hauck et al., 2020; Rienties et al., 2020). In addition, the results should be approached with caution as participants in the course are probably competent learners and have, at least some, interest in the practice of VEs, since, after all, they are in-service teachers and the course is elective.

8. Conclusion

How could an online course on VE be designed? In this article I tried to demonstrate the design procedure that I followed while also providing the underlying rationale and my reflections along the way. The process is far from being straightforward and there were several challenges that I had to address; however, after five deliveries of the course, it has been demonstrated that the course design approach discussed in this study can yield promising results. Although I do not purport to have a definite answer to the question above, this article can be a valuable resource for educators and instructional designers who wish to embark on a similar endeavor.

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9 Our maiden voyage: implementing virtual exchange as a collaborative professional development

Mary-Jane Radford Arrow[1]

Abstract

Undertaking a Virtual Exchange (VE) project for the first time is supported by introductory online training and mentoring offered through the European Commission's Erasmus+ programme, and can be a source of teacher Professional Development (PD). This study based on Exploratory Practice (EP) describes aspects of the planning and implementation of an initial VE by partners from technical universities in Łódź, Poland and Berlin, Germany, who completed the online EVOLVE training in October 2018. The current study offers a basic framework of four distinct phases of the VE as a collaborative PD project. This novel framework can support teachers engaging in their first exchange as well as contribute to an understanding of VE adoption and implementation for mentors, trainers, and researchers.

Keywords: virtual exchange, teacher professional development, critically reflective teaching, exploratory practice.

1. Introduction

This VE maiden voyage began at an educational technology conference in September 2018, where the partners met and agreed to participate in the online

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EVOLVE (2019) training in order to implement a VE together. Both are lecturers in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) at technical universities in Łódź, Poland and Berlin, Germany, teaching courses for students of engineering and natural sciences at the same proficiency level. By focusing on the PD aspects of this shared experience, it is hoped that insights into how and what was learnt through implementing a first VE might be useful to other teachers, as well as VE mentors and trainers.

Just as the courses we were teaching were similar and therefore lent themselves to such an exchange, we also began our collaboration from a shared teaching philosophy and a technology-adopting mindset. Research indicates that technology-adopting teachers have a more learner-centred, constructivist approach (Tondeur, Van Braak, Ertmer, & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2017; Trautwein, 2018), which was borne out in our collaboration. In addition, the EVOLVE training itself, which takes place entirely online and with a far-flung virtual cohort and instructors, can be understood as a self-select filter for educational technology adoption; only teachers open to integrating technology into their practice would take on such a training.

In developing and implementing a VE, teacher collaboration is a prerequisite to the learner collaboration that is at the heart of the VE. Son (2018) describes teacher collaboration in the context of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) as "the process of working together while sharing experiences, ideas, information and resources" (p. 61), which describes the experience of our first VE. An important aspect of an initial VE is mentoring by an experienced practitioner after the training has been completed, which played a role in the early stages of our exchange.

2. A critically reflective teaching approach

There are any number of PD frameworks that might be useful in describing teacher collaboration in the VE. Brookfield (2017) describes the four lenses of the critically reflective teacher as students' eyes, personal experiences, theories,

and colleagues' perceptions. I have chosen the latter here. Brookfield (2017) is concerned with questioning habits and assumptions in order to shape our teaching and make it transformational for learners. One means of gathering our colleagues' perceptions is through peer observations and discussions where teachers come together to interrogate their practice. I propose that VE collaboration can be understood as a radically immersive and sustained form of peer observation in that it involves immersion not only in a colleague's teaching practice, but in a particular course with particular students and tasks, all within a specific project with its own learning goals over an extended period of time. This is a powerful lens when it is accompanied by an on-going critical conversation between committed colleagues.

What differentiates critical conversation from day-to-day talk with colleagues is that it is both sustained and intentional, conditions offered by a VE. From the teacher perspective, VE is potentially one long critical conversation that "helps us to notice aspects of our practice that are usually hidden from us" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 8). During our first semester long VE experience, this critical conversation was enabled by a total of 18 regular weekly meetings, including before and after the teaching phase. In these conversations, we discussed logistical and organisational aspects of the VE, we talked about what our students were doing (or not), and how to better engage them. We asked questions about what did not seem to be working as expected, and we rejoiced in the shared successes. The second column of Table 1 summarises the main content of our critical conversation throughout the phases of the VE.

3. A framework for teacher collaboration in VE

Beginning with the four-week online EVOLVE training and throughout the VE experience, an EP approach (Allwright, 2005; Hanks, 2017) was taken, involving an on-going cycle of observation, note-taking, and critical reflection (both collaboratively with my VE partner and individually), followed by actions and plans for future action. The EP approach to PD is appropriate as it offers a form of classroom-based inquiry for language teachers informed by action

research methods and centred on teachers becoming learners about their own practice.

Table 1. A framework for teacher collaboration in VE

Phases of the VE collaboration	Critical conversation content	Teacher communication
Phase 1: Synchronisation	Calendar, schedule, learner characteristics, class profiles Group formation? Topics? Tasks?	5 Skype meetings (4 with mentor)
Phase 2: Decision-making	Learning objectives, tasks, materials, online tools, implementation issues	5 Skype meetings (1 with mentor)
Phase 3: VE	What is happening? What are students doing? Articulation of philosophy and approach	5 Skype meetings + 6 VE synchronous sessions with learners during class times
Phase 4: Reflection and Integration	Preparing collaborative presentations, incorporating learner feedback, ideas for the next semester	3 Skype meetings and counting …

Table 1 offers a structure for teacher collaboration in a VE based on the content of the 14-week semester of this initial VE experience, seven weeks of which comprised the VE itself, and the weeks leading up to and following the teaching semester. There were four distinct phases of the VE. The first phase, synchronisation, was the most mentor-intensive and included creating a shared calendar in Google Docs so that we could schedule the VE and see where it would fit into our respective courses. In Phase 2, decision-making, discussion of our teaching practice became more salient as we delved more deeply into designing tasks, setting learning objectives, and choosing appropriate online tools. Phase 3 was the seven week VE in which we also offered students support during 45-minute synchronous sessions during our class times. During this phase, we articulated our approach to not only the VE, but to our teaching practice more generally, and as we entered Phase 4, reflection and integration, we began to draw lessons and insights for the following semester.

At the end of this maiden VE voyage, we found that for each of us our teaching practice had been impacted, and not simply by the many small changes and moments of insight during the experience. The most global change was that even coming from a shared pedagogical philosophy, the critical conversation enabled us to perceive and discuss our differences; my approach being more focused on providing structure and my partner's more on learner self-sufficiency. We were able to articulate how we had each moved closer to the other's approach, transforming our practice through the collaborative PD experience of the VE.

4. Thoughts about this study and conclusion

This study suggests two basic considerations that teachers undertaking a VE either for the first time or who are continuing to develop their VE might find useful. First, the time commitment is considerable and sustained even outside the parameters of the exchange itself, and may be most productively met if a regular meeting time is set up in advance. The second consideration demonstrated by this study and reinforced by the EP approach is that the VE offers a valuable source of on-going and collaborative PD that can enrich the participants' teaching practice. Based on these conclusions, further research on what impact incorporating VE into one's teaching practice might have on the pedagogical approach, philosophy, and other specific practices would be useful. Such research could make a contribution to the literature of VE and educational technology, as well as teacher PD more generally. Finally, additional qualitative research into the lived experience of teachers engaging in VE could add to an understanding on how VE gets implemented, as well as possible directions for the development of PD to support teachers in educational technology adoption.

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10 Developing global citizenship through real-world tasks – a virtual exchange between North American university students and Italian upper-secondary school students

Roberta Trapè[1]

Abstract

This paper concerns a virtual exchange project between the University of Virginia (UVa), United States, and an upper-secondary school in Pavia, Italy. Centred on the question of gender equality, the project has been designed to take place over three years (2018–2021) with a direct reference to Robert O'Dowd's transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education, proposed in 2018. As an integrated part of the language learning curriculum, the project creates a virtual space which parallels the space-time of traditional class tuition, and which students can inhabit with a significant degree of autonomy. More specifically, this paper gives an account of how students, through real-world tasks, could develop global citizenship.

Keywords: virtual exchange, intercultural competence, intercultural/global citizenship, active citizenship, gender equality.

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1. Introduction

We designed a foreign language acquisition project focused on cultural learning, namely 'Language Forward Initiative', based on virtual exchanges between students studying Italian at UVa, and students studying English at Liceo Adelaide Cairoli, an Italian upper-secondary school in Pavia. The project was co-designed by this researcher and Francesca Calamita (Italian studies, UVa, the coordinator of the research group on the 'Language Forward Initiative', Institute of World Languages). Eleven language programmes, including Italian, are involved, and each programme has designed a unique virtual space in which to develop students' cultural and linguistic fluency. Our course design is based on the recommendations made by O'Dowd and Ware (2009), O'Dowd (2017, 2019), and Byram, Golubeva, Hui, and Wagner (2017) about factors that educators should consider when designing and implementing tasks for virtual exchange.

The structure and scope of the course aim to not only foster the development of foreign language skills, but also intercultural competence and global citizenship through the intercultural analysis of the cultural practices and values of the groups involved in the virtual exchanges.

Being realised over three years (autumn 2018/spring 2021), this project consistently blends face-to-face foreign language lessons with Skype-mediated digital learning. As an integrated part of the language learning curriculum, we have created a virtual space which parallels the space-time of traditional class tuition, and which students can inhabit with a significant degree of autonomy.

In the project's second academic year (autumn 2019 and spring 2020) a challenging objective has been the development of virtual exchange focused on intercultural citizenship. For this, both groups of students are required to plan and carry out a civic action in their local communities; they are encouraged to become global citizens ready to interact effectively in multilingual and international contexts through active citizenship (Wagner & Byram, 2017, p. 3). "[Intercultural citizenship] integrates the pillar of intercultural communicative

competence from foreign language education with the emphasis on civic action in the community from citizenship education" (Porto, 2014, p. 5).

This is done by taking students past their comfort zone and engaging them in real-world tasks through a project that has direct relevance to their own communities.

> "The essential difference between global competence and global citizenship or intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship lies in the importance attributed to active engagement in society. […] So, while intercultural or global competence refer to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to communicate and act effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts, global or intercultural citizenship borrow from models of citizenship education to refer to the application of these competences to actively participating in, changing and improving society" (O'Dowd, 2019, p. 17).

As such, the objectives of our virtual space are learning beyond the classroom walls through virtual exchange, intercultural communicative competence, working in a transnational team, motivation and engagement (meaningful learning), community engagement, and active citizenship. In our project, we have chosen to address a civic action centred on the question of gender equality.

2. Project rationale and outline

Intercultural or global citizenship approaches "involve learners […] actually working with members of other cultures as a transnational group in order to take action about an issue or problem which is common to both societies" (O'Dowd, 2019, p. 22). In designing the virtual exchange project, we referred to the transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education proposed by O'Dowd (2019), which "engages students with difference and alternative worldviews within a pedagogical structure of online collaboration, critical reflection, and active contribution to global society" (Leask, 2015, cited

in O'Dowd, 2019, p. 4). To lay the foundations for his transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education, O'Dowd (2019) used the two main models of interpretations of intercultural or global citizenship education: the Council of Europe's (2016) framework of competences for democratic cultures and Byram's (2008, 2011) framework for intercultural citizenship.

Specific attention will be drawn to the project's second academic year, during which a virtual exchange focused on intercultural citizenship was organised. The project was developed in 12 weeks from October 2019 to February 2020, and each semester included six Skype meetings. The main aim of the project was to plan a civic action to foster gender equality in the students' respective communities. The action in the community involved research, reflection, and co-creating a formal proposal.

Thirty North American students were partnered with 20 Italian upper-secondary school students to discuss (in dyads or triads) via desktop videoconferencing the theme of gender equality. Using the synchronous video communication tool Skype, students met weekly to speak for 20 to 30 minutes in Italian and 20 to 30 minutes in English. The students did the Skype component privately (tandem learning set up) using both languages, and chose their favourite day/time within the week.

To begin, before students introduced themselves to their partners, they engaged in pre-virtual exchange activities which guided them in the discussions that could then commence. For example, to activate students' prior knowledge of the theme, 'ice-breaker' and brainstorming activities centred on gender equality took place in face-to-face lessons and on the university/school platforms. They were targeted to introduce key vocabulary items and/or concepts necessary for students to discuss the theme in Skype meetings, which were introduced by means of matching activities implemented through digital noticeboards (Padlet). Students were required to match vocabulary with definitions and images presented in sticky notes on a wall-like space. Secondly, articles and short authentic videos between five and ten minutes long on the question of

gender equality were made available on the university and school platforms, for instance articles about the imbalance in main European cities between numbers of streets named after men, and those named after women.

In their first Skype meeting, students introduced themselves and their school/university to their international partners in North America or Italy in the target language. As Carloni and Zuccala (2018) point out:

> "task-based learning seems especially suitable to online intercultural exchanges (Hampel, 2010; Hauck, 2010; Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017). […] In screen-based learning environments, tasks (such as problem solving, decision making, opinion-exchange, and jigsaws) can thus promote dialogical interaction focusing on real-world issues effectively" (pp. 419-420).

Consequently, three main types of tasks were used in the virtual exchange:

> "information exchange, which 'involves learners providing their telecollaborative partners with information about their personal biographies, local schools or towns or aspects of their home cultures' (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009, p.175); comparison and analysis, which 'requires learners not only to exchange information, but also to go a step further and carry out comparisons or critical analyses of cultural products from both cultures (e.g. books, surveys, films, newspaper articles)' (p. 175); and collaboration and product creation, which 'require […] learners not only to exchange and compare information but also to work together to produce a joint product or conclusion (p.178)'" (Carloni & Zuccala, 2018, p. 424).

In their second online meeting, students discussed articles and videos uploaded to the university/school platforms. The task was to read and watch the materials individually, and to discuss them within the class face-to-face and with the students' respective international, online partners.

In the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth Skype meeting with their international partners, students reflected on the creation of a transnational group, whose aim was to consider the issue of gender equality and plan civic action. To begin this phase of the project, the student dyads/triads planned to seek information about a woman who is not well known, but relevant for the history/life of their town and its community. Each dyad/triad chose a woman in Pavia and one in Charlottesville. The students then planned to organise a written proposal to name after these women new or unnamed streets/places in their respective towns. The last phase of the project consisted of writing down proposals in English and Italian (in dyads/triads) to be presented to the mayors of Pavia and Charlottesville.

During the Skype meetings, the students, in dyads, discussed and made plans to collaboratively create a multimodal presentation on how they were developing their civic action. Communication and collaboration among the students led to the creation of a product planned and realised by each dyad of students. Students selected the digital technologies they wanted to use to create their multimodal presentations, and once they were finished, they uploaded them onto the university/school platforms. All the learners involved in the online intercultural exchanges watched the presentations created by the other students which had been made available on the project website. The presentations were also discussed in face-to-face lessons. The students' final presentations and the discussion were assessed.

The final discussion of the content of the students' presentations uploaded to the platforms and of the civic action was organised in the form of a group-to-group video conferencing session (the whole group of students respectively in Italy and in the USA were involved). Learners asked questions on the other teams' presentations, answered questions about their own presentations, and managed turn taking. Through this group-to-group discussion, the Italian and North American students narrowed the final selection to six women, three for Charlottesville and three for Pavia, and to a final version of the written proposal (in English and Italian) to be presented to the respective city mayor. The development of this intercultural citizenship-focused exchange in the final

phase of the project took students out of their comfort zones and engaged them in real-world tasks.

Seeking others' perspectives and advice, the students proposed change, and finally acted together to instigate change in their local communities (Byram, 2008; O'Dowd, 2019). The objectives were to promote the analysis of the chosen issue, in this case gender equality, but also to enhance dialogical interaction in the target language and foster intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship. We assisted students during in-class face-to-face activities in considering the value systems underlying the Italian and North American cultural practices in relation to gender equality. To foster intercultural competence in the digital learning environments, we worked in class to "involve […] learners in moving between cultures and reflecting on their own cultural positioning and the role of language and culture within it" (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013, p. 117). Students' voices, experiences, and background knowledge are central to discussing topics within an intercultural framework. As mentioned by Carloni and Zuccala (2018), students are encouraged to "examine phenomena and experience their own cultural situatedness while seeking to enter into the cultural worlds of others" (p. 436). It requires an act of engagement in which learners compare their own cultural assumptions, expectations, practices, and meanings with those of others, recognising that these are formed within a cultural context that is different from their own (Scarino, 2014, p. 391). "Video conferencing [was] seen as developing students' abilities to interact with members of the target culture under the constraints of real-time communication and also elicit, through a face-to-face dialogue, the concepts and values which underlie their partners' behaviour and their opinions" (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 11). However, emails and WhatsApp were employed to both send and receive much more detailed information on the two cultures' products and practices as seen from the partners' perspectives. In the classroom, the students' learning was continuously supported by guided reflections concerning the intercultural encounters and questions made possible by the virtual exchange. The Skype meetings and other means of exchange and collaboration increased the students' exposure to spoken Italian/English, which fostered the development of their speaking, interactional, and fluency skills in the target language, allowing them to experience authentic language use, enabling

access to meaningful interactions, fostering their active learning, increasing their motivation, agency, autonomy, and cultivating active citizenship.

3. Conclusion

Our project aims to create a virtual space where students' global social participation and engagement is stimulated, facilitated, and formally valued. Facilitated by Skype, regular virtual exchange between transnational teams allows the students to address a socio-political issue that has urgency in today's world, and that can be brought to the fore in their foreign language learning. Thus, in the context of their language studies, the young people are empowered to actively reflect on their role in a democratic society as active contributors: that is, as intercultural and global citizens.

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11 Fostering critical thinking and motivation through digital escape rooms: preliminary observations

Julie Stephens de Jonge[1] and Belén Labrador[2]

Abstract

This paper reports our preliminary observations of a pilot project carried out from February to April 2019 with a group of students learning Spanish at the University of Central Missouri and students learning English at the University of León. The project combines challenging escape room activities with intercultural and interlinguistic interaction in a virtual exchange. Students learned of the premise of the activity through a video that set the context in a dystopian future with an authoritarian dictator who had hidden and controlled access to knowledge. The contextual narrative also explained that a hacker was leaking information that the students could retrieve. Therefore, they needed to collaborate with their partners in order to save the world by solving different types of enigmas that involved knowledge about geography, culture, and language. In addition to these problem-solving activities, they were also required to discuss cultural topics and comment on different habits, traditions, and stereotypes. This combination might enhance the students' motivation, foster their communication skills, and help them develop critical thinking skills and learn more about each other's language, country, and culture.

Keywords: virtual exchange, escape rooms, interculturality, gamification.

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1. Background

The aim of this paper is to present a pilot telecollaboration project between Spanish and American university students: a group of 24 third year students learning English as a foreign language in the degree program of primary education at the University of León (Spain) and a group of 27 undergraduate students learning Spanish at the University of Central Missouri (USA), communicating in both languages to solve enigmas in digital escape rooms specifically designed for them. This English/Spanish tandem project took place in the second semester of the year 2019, during the months of February, March, and April, the overlapping time in the teaching periods of the Spanish and American university systems. We integrated two broad teaching approaches: telecollaboration and gamification. A digital escape room was the bridge between the two methods. This paper describes the overall structure of the telecollaboration, provides an overview of the pedagogical benefits of gamification, and explains the basic features of the escape room activities.

The purpose of the project was to engage our students in a motivating activity where they had to cooperate and learn about each other's language and culture. Telecollaboration undoubtedly provides huge benefits in foreign language learning and contributes to building on a number of key competencies (Duffy, Stone, Townsend, & Cathey, 2020; Fuchs, Hauck, & Müller-Hartmann, 2012; Hauck, 2019; Hauck & Satar, 2018) such as (1) teamwork competency: students learn about how to deal with peers, participate actively, and share responsibility, ideally empathizing and creating an atmosphere of respect and cooperation; (2) linguistic competency: in a bilingual project, language learners receive exposure from authentic materials and native speakers in the target language; (3) cultural awareness competency: students learn from a foreign culture since the interchange of ideas usually includes topics dealing with different aspects of the other group's traditions, routines, lifestyle, or even music, movies, geography, and gastronomy; (4) digital and multimodal competency: students get to use different tools for communicating, such as video-chatting and texting; (5) critical thinking: they reflect on the things they hear from their international partners and may change their stance when they are interpreting the other culture

– what they may usually regard as 'weird' at first simply becomes 'different' after gaining a deeper understanding of their partner's culture; and (6) learner autonomy: they need to be responsible, well-organized, and be able to work on their own and arrange virtual meetings with their partners.

Gamification constituted a major building block in this project. The term, 'gamification', first coined by Pelling in 2002, refers to "the use of game thinking and mechanics in a non-game context to inspire employees and students to get engaged in the learning process" (Pappas, 2014, p. 3). Pelling (2011) explains

> "[s]o at some point during late 2002, I put all these pieces together […] and began to wonder whether the kind of games user-interface I had been developing for so long could be used to turbo-charge all manner of transactions and activities on commercial electronic devices – in-flight video, ATM machines, vending machines, mobile phones, etc. Unsurprisingly, this was the point when I coined the deliberately ugly word "gamification" (n.p.).

This ties in with other related concepts such as 'edutainment', 'learning by playing', 'game-based education', and 'serious games'. Engaging games are a form of play that should be absorbing and fun: they should promote relaxation and motivation (Prensky, 2001). Prensky (2001) argues that computer games are so popular because in addition to involving 'play' and being 'fun', which give participants pleasure and involvement, they include the following additional essential ten elements: rules (structure); goals (motivation); interaction (doing); adaptation (flow); outcomes/feedback (learning); winning (ego gratification); conflict, competition, challenge, and opposition (adrenaline); problem-solving (creativity); interaction (social groups); and representation/story (emotion).

Escape rooms represent a clear example of gamification, where students are engaged in a quest to solve a number of enigmas and use the solutions to unlock locks and move on to the next activity. Although physical escape rooms are popular forms of entertainment around the world, educators have also found that many digital tools can replicate the experience online. The increasing

availability of learning environments made of hybrid spaces, both physical and digital, facilitates both virtual exchange and gamification. Whereas some digital games may foster a more solitary experience in which the learner works alone, the escape room model assumes a team-based approach to a problem or mystery. As such, it is a pedagogical tool that shifts the focus from a narrow academic task to a more human-centered, and thereby holistic, experience (Clarke et al., 2017).

2. Description of the project and preliminary observations

For our project, first, students were asked to introduce themselves in a short video and reply to their partners' videos using Flipgrid, and they also paired up in small groups (two Spanish students and two or three American students in each group) by signing up in a Google document, and adding their names and contact details. Then, the premise of the project was given to them in the form of a video[3], which sets the context in a dystopian future with an authoritarian dictator against which they have to collaborate in order to save the world by unlocking padlocks containing different types of enigmas, some for the American students and some for the Spanish students. Although they worked separately in their local teams, as the escape rooms were specifically designed for them to learn their L2 and about the foreign culture, they had to collaborate with their international partners to solve many of the enigmas and they were asked to discuss some of the topics presented in the escape rooms in both synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

A variety of digital tools was used by the teachers to create the puzzles, scavenger hunts and videos: Breakoutedu[4], Camtasia[5], Snagit[6], Flippity[7], and

3. https://www.screencast.com/t/UhdxMRc7I

4. https://www.breakoutedu.com/

5. https://www.techsmith.com/video-editor.html

6. https://www.techsmith.com/screen-capture.html

7. https://flippity.net

Jigsaw Planet[8], as well as Google collaboration tools, while other platforms were used by the students to interact with their international partners: Flipgrid[9], Whatsapp[10], Skype[11], and Google Hangouts Meet[12].

The enigmas were organized around three main units – (1) geography, (2) American/Spanish culture through songs and movies like *Gone with the Wind, Forrest Gump, Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, etc., and (3) food, meals, eating habits, tipping, and education – and required listening to songs, watching videos, finding out information about famous people, historical facts, and locations, etc.

There were clues hidden in all these materials provided to them, but as they involved specific knowledge about geography, culture, and language, in most cases, the students needed their partners' help to solve the mysteries, e.g. supplementary materials Appendix 1 shows part of a conversation where an American student asks their Spanish partners for help to solve a puzzle. Supplementary materials Appendix 2 contains an address in Spain that students had to search for in Google Maps and were asked to find in street view as it contained a clue. Supplementary materials Appendix 3 is an image with links and clues to promote an intercultural conversation about food and eating customs. As well as these problem-solving activities, they were also required to discuss some cultural topics, find out similarities and differences between the two countries, and comment on habits, traditions, and stereotypes.

The final requirements of the project were (1) the submission of a portfolio, consisting of a report of their interactions and an essay, and (2) a presentation, held individually in each local classroom after the project, to express their opinion about their experience. However, the process was also monitored, as a way of

8. https://www.jigsawplanet.com/?lang=es-ES

9. https://info.flipgrid.com/

10. https://www.whatsapp.com/

11. https://www.skype.com/

12. https://meet.google.com/

mentoring, defined as "the strategies and techniques that teachers use in their classes to support students' learning during virtual exchange projects" (O'Dowd, Sauro, & Spector-Cohen, 2019, p. 146). Our students were continuously asked about their progress, they had to provide an assignment after each of the three units (supplementary materials Appendix 4), and they received feedback after each submission. Finally, the learning outcomes, reflecting on the ongoing process and on these written and oral assignments, were assessed and marked.

Our initial observation of the data shows that the portfolios and presentations reflected the students' opinions about their experience, which was positive in general – they considered it fun, new, motivating, challenging, and they acknowledge having learned about the L2 language and culture, and about didactics, technology, and teamwork. For instance, supplementary materials Appendix 5 shows an extract of a conversation through *Whatsapp*, where they start organizing their interactions and refer to the use of Google Hangouts, which is new to some of them; this shows improvement in their digital competency and teamwork. Supplementary materials Appendix 6 shows extracts of some students' essays that reflect increased motivation, learning evidence, and satisfaction with the results. Some of them were at times a bit frustrated because of the uneven participation of their partners, they found some of the puzzles hard and time-consuming, and they encountered some technical problems. Consequently, in order to improve the project for the following year, we tried to overcome these problems by fostering participation, shortening and simplifying some of the tasks, giving students a short practice game at the beginning, and involving students in the creation of some puzzles. Although our preliminary reflections reveal some positive outcomes, future research and an in-depth analysis of the data on the updated project will be necessary to determine whether and how digital escape rooms foster students' critical thinking as well as their motivation.

3. Conclusion

Online international exchanges and escape rooms and are neither easy to set up for educators nor easy to carry out by learners. They require time, effort, and

engagement both by teachers, in the design of the activities and the organization of the projects, and by students, when it comes to interacting with their peers and tackling the enigmas. However, the hard work is worthwhile, as these teaching methods are very efficient in terms of learning and they foster divergent thinking and stepping out of one's comfort zone, which results in rewarding and inspirational experiences for teachers and learners alike. We tend to routinize our ways of learning and thinking, but "learning is or should be both frustrating and life enhancing. The key is finding ways to make hard things life enhancing so that people keep going and don't fall back on learning and thinking only what is simple and easy" (Gee, 2007, p. 6).

4. Supplementary materials

https://research-publishing.box.com/s/o7w9ncs7afxxtpz7va8ymmeb16ew01la

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The Evaluating and Upscaling Telecollaborative Teacher Education (EVALUATE) project was a European policy experiment funded by Erasmus+ between 2017 and 2019. The EVALUATE consortium trained teacher trainers and organised virtual exchanges which involved over 1,000 student teachers at over 34 initial teacher education institutions in Europe and beyond. Following the successful capstone conference of the EVALUATE project in September 2019, a number of colleagues answered our call for submissions to the proceedings. The articles you find here provide a window into the multifaceted contributions not only to the conference, but to the field of telecollaboration and virtual exchange at large. We hope you enjoy finding out about the many different ways in which our colleagues engage with this innovative pedagogical approach that combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology.

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