

# Virtual Exchange in a Changing World: Innovation and Inclusion

UNICollaboration Conference 2026  
June 4th-5th, Limassol, Cyprus

*Virtual Exchange in a Changing World: Innovation and Inclusion*



*Hosted By*



<https://unicollaborationconference2026.org/>

## IMPORTANT INFORMATION

- The UNICollaboration 2026 Conference will take place at the [Cyprus University of Technology \(CUT\)](#) in Limassol, Cyprus. The conference is organized by the Language Centre of CUT and UNICollaboration.
- All sessions, coffee breaks, and lunches will take place at [Tassos Papadopoulos Building](#), Themidos 1, Limassol 3036, Cyprus.
- The conference will be held in a hybrid format, allowing participants to attend either in person or online. Zoom links will be provided to all registered participants for access to the sessions. All sessions are accessible onsite and online (via Zoom). Sessions marked in blue are those in which all speakers are joining remotely.
- Times indicated on the programme are in local Cyprus time (Eastern European Summer Time, EEST, UTC+3)
- If you are attending in person, you should aim to arrive in Limassol on Wednesday afternoon (3 June) in order to attend the Welcome Reception at [Gazebo Mare](#) restaurant at 19:00-21:00 that evening.
- All presentations (except for the keynotes) are 20 minutes long with 5 minutes for questions and 5 minutes for switching rooms. Panel discussions are 60 minutes long, and workshops are 90 minutes long.
- Two weeks before the conference, presenters will receive an email asking them to upload their slides on a Google Drive folder. **Participants will not be able to connect and present using their own computers or use a USB drive on the university's computers.**
- Coffee will be available free of charge in the mornings and afternoons. Lunch on Thursday and Friday will also be provided free of charge. The Welcome Reception on Wednesday is free to attend and will include finger food and drinks. However, participants are expected to pay for the Conference Dinner on Thursday evening at 20:00-22:00 at [Kypriakon](#) restaurant at 35 euros per person which includes Cyprus meze and drinks.
- Participants are expected to cover all their travel and accommodation costs.
- We are exploring having a special issue of the [Journal of Virtual Exchange](#) including a small number of articles coming from the conference. This will be confirmed and more details will be offered at a later date.
- Participants can use the EDUROAM WIFI network at the conference. However, there is also a special Wi-Fi network available for the conference. Connection to this network will be possible in the university buildings from 4 to 5 June 2026.
- The hashtag for the conference is: **#UNICollaboration2026**. Please use this when reporting on the conference in your social networks.
- Certificates of participation will be sent by email to all registered participants after the conference.

# ACADEMIC INFORMATION

## ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Anna Nicolaou, CUT (Local Chair)

Androulla Athansiou, CUT

Dimitrios Boglou, CUT

Maria Christoforou, CUT

Elis Kakoulli Constantinou, CUT

Panayiota Hadjiconstantinou, CUT

Stavroulla Hadjiconstantinou, CUT

Christina Yerou, CUT

Shannon Sauro (President of UNICollaboration)

Lorenza Bacino, UNICollaboration

Francesca Helm, UNICollaboration

Sara Pittarello, UNICollaboration

Alexandra Reynolds, UNICollaboration

Müge Satar, UNICollaboration

Hülya Tuncer, UNICollaboration

Mirjam Hauck, UNICollaboration

## KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

### **Anthony J. Liddicoat**



Anthony J. Liddicoat is Professor in Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick and Adjunct Professor in Justice and Society at the University of South Australia. His research interests include language and intercultural issues in education, language policy and planning. He is a Fellow of the UK Academy of Social Sciences, the Executive Editor of *Current Issues in Language Planning* and Co-editor of the book series *Language and Intercultural Communication in Education (Multilingual Matters)*.

### **Laia Canals**



Laia Canals holds an Associate position at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya. Her research addresses technology enhanced task-based language learning, development of L2 through interaction in collaborative tasks in computer-mediated communication settings, the development of intercultural communicative competence, the development of digital skills and online language teacher education.

# CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

## Wednesday, 3 June

19:00-21:00	WELCOME RECEPTION AT GAZEBO MARE, LIMASSOL
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## Thursday, 4 June

### TASSOS PAPADOPOULOS BUILDING

08:00-08:45 REGISTRATION (LOBBY)

08:45-10:00 WELCOME AND [KEYNOTE 1 \(ANTHONY J. LIDDICOAT\)](#) (AMPHITHEATRE 1)  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yhMS6bpJ2b.1>

10:00-10:30 COFFEE (AMPHITHEATRE 2)

AMPHITHEATRE 1 Zoom link: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yhMS6bpJ2b.1">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yhMS6bpJ2b.1</a>	ROOM 104 Zoom link: <a href="https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1">https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1</a>	ROOM 101 Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1</a>	ROOM 102 Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOsEzXfo1W.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOsEzXfo1W.1</a>
<b>10:30-13:00</b> <b>Strand 1:</b> <b><a href="#">Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</a></b> chaired by <b>Shannon Sauro</b>	<b>Strand 2:</b> <b><a href="#">Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization</a></b> chaired by <b>Panayiota Hadjiconstantinou</b>	<b>Strand 3:</b> <b><a href="#">Pedagogical Innovations and Disciplinary Applications in VE</a></b> chaired by <b>Fabian Krengel</b>	<b>Strand 4:</b> <b><a href="#">Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</a></b> chaired by <b>Christina Yerou</b>
<b>10:30-11:00</b>  Hiba Ibrahim, Eman Swaidan, Fatima Halwani, Hanin Ibrahim, Samantha Abi Saab, Lamyia Sabbah, Bachir Attallah, Jeremy Adelman & Nael H. Alami  Exploring Intercultural Learning and Empathy among Students in a Cross-Cultural Global History Course	Luana Ferreira-Lopes, Marian Alaez & Paula Comellas Angulo  <a href="#">Barriers and Enablers for Virtual Exchange Adoption within a European University Alliance: Insights from University of Deusto</a>	Elisabet Arnó-Macià & Marta Aguilar-Pérez  IMMER-LIT: Developing disciplinary literacies through immersive environments (virtual reality and virtual exchange) in English for Specific Purposes for engineering students.	Grace Dolcini  Virtual Exchange as a Catalyst for Plurilingual and Intercultural Internationalization at Home: The NEOLAiA Approach
<b>11:00-11:30</b>  Malin Reljanovic Glimäng & Samukezi Mrubula-Ngwenya  Disrupting Place and Power through Virtual Exchange: Culture, Identity, and Memory in Public Spaces	Sina Werner  <a href="#">Navigating Virtual and Physical Collaboration: Student Perspectives on Blended Mobility</a>	Darlene Kilian, Mark Jacob & Lena Bussmann-Fuentes  From Idealism to Sustainability: Funding COILs to Anchor Innovation	Anna Nicolaou, Stavroulla Hadjiconstantinou, Iolie Nicolaidou, Nicoletta Pantela & Maria Victoria Soule  Bridging the Global North and Global South through Virtual Exchange: Designing inclusive and equitable media literacy Virtual Exchanges in the DigitREE project
<b>11:30-12:00</b> <a href="#">Anna Turula &amp; Maike Korinna Grau</a>  <a href="#">Critical Virtual Exchange. Student Expectations and Deliverables</a>	Sabine Menu & Lucyna Błażejczyk-Majka  Virtual exchanges as tools for inclusive European education: evidence from the 73 European university alliances	Nikhil Sapre  Collaborative Sustainability Integration Project	Alex Masardo & Maria Meredith  From Coaching to Co-Researching: Rethinking Communication, Clarity and Confidence in a Virtual Exchange Between the Global North and South
<b>12:00-12:30</b>  Steinar Mathisen	PANELDISCUSSION 12:00-13:00	Dora Loizidou & Pascal Caron  Understanding the	José Luis Jiménez-Figarotti  The Digital Trans-indigenism Contact

Building bridges or heading for a fall: Exploring South-North Critical Virtual Exchange in Vocational Education	Natasha Mrkic-Subotic, Lesley Mc Cannell, Konstantinos Petridis & Reinout Klamer  Practical insights and recommendations, drawing on multi-institutional lenses of presenters from Canada, Greece, and the Netherlands	contribution of e-tandem exchanges within learners' broader language-learning ecologies	Zone: Decolonial Praxis and Systemic Barriers
<b>12:30-13:00</b>  PANEL DISCUSSION 12:30-13:15  Qian Kan, Mirjam Hauck & Regina C. Brautlacht  Virtual Exchange with Chinese Universities: Sharing Practice, Building Community	PANELDISCUSSION 12:00-13:00  NatashaMrkic-Subotic, Lesley Mc Cannell, Konstantinos Petridis & Reinout Klamer  Practical insights and recommendations, drawing on multi-institutional lenses of presenters from Canada, Greece, and the Netherlands	Yuliana Lavrysh & Iryna Simkova  Making Invisible Skills Visible: Recognition Strategies for VE	Eve Smith, Martin Ward & Ayako Yoshino  Students want an international experience when they choose a research intensive university: Student voices on COIL

13:00-14:00 LUNCH (AMPHITHEATRE 2) - Visit UNICollaboration table to share ideas and suggestions for the organization.

<b>AMPHITHEATRE 1</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1</a>	<b>ROOM 104</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYyWbA01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1">https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYyWbA01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1</a>	<b>ROOM 101</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1</a>	<b>ROOM 102</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOeEzXfo1W.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOeEzXfo1W.1</a>
<b>14:00-16:00</b>  <b>Strand 5:</b> <b><a href="#">Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE</a></b> <b>Chaired by Elis Kakoulli Constantinou</b>	<b>Strand 6:</b> <b><a href="#">Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE</a></b> <b>chaired by Anna Nicolaou</b>	<b>Strand 7:</b> <b><a href="#">VE Institutional Integration</a></b> <b>chaired by Müge Satar</b>	<b>Strand 8:</b> <b><a href="#">AI and Emerging Technologies in VE</a></b> <b>chaired by Maria Christoforou</b>
<b>14:00-14:30</b>  Camino Rea, Elis Kakoulli Constantinou, Eleni Kakrida & Alexandra Athanasiou  English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Cross-Cultural Higher Education Settings: Enhancing Communication and Discipline Literacy Skills	Mahnaz Shirdel & Marko Siitonen  <a href="#">Stance-taking as a tool for identity construction in virtual exchange</a>	Rita Koris & Małgorzata Marchewka  Higher Education teachers' readiness to engage in Virtual Exchange: Institutional and departmental strategies to foster teachers' involvement and support their academic development in Virtual Exchange	Stefan Dreisiebner, Eithne Knappitsch, Joachim Griesbaum, Thomas Mackey, Justyna Berniak-Woźny, Emina Adilović, Anna Zinenko, Barbara Covarrubias Venegas, Subarna Bhattacharya, Jini Jacob and Tessa Thadathil  Incorporating Artificial Intelligence to facilitate relational dynamics in Virtual Exchange - Experiences from two Virtual Exchange projects
<b>14:30-15:00</b>  Marta Fortes & Ana Sevilla-Pavón  Virtual Exchange and Gender Equality in Language Learning, Business & History within SEMILLA	<a href="#">Tara Mathien, Luciana Calvo &amp; Benameur Nehar</a>  <a href="#">Making the Case for Sustained Partnership Design in International Collaborations through Virtual Exchange</a>	WORKSHOP: 14:30-16:00  Reinout Klamer, Rob Kuipers & Jos Beelen  Stakeholder Mapping in Virtual Exchange (COIL - VE)	Maria Georgiou & Sviatlana Karpava  Perceptions and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence Integration in Higher Education: Insights from Students and Faculty

<p><b>15:00-15:30</b></p> <p>Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko, Maria Calvo Barrachina, Janka Szilágyi &amp; Feihong Wang</p> <p>Math, Literacy, and Games: Teacher Preparation Across the Globe</p>	<p>Alex Masardo, Carol Cirulli Lanham, Ellen Shupe, Bee Gan, Sylena Measles, Kyle Macciomei, Maria Meredith</p> <p>Preparing students for COIL: An open-source pre-training module</p>	<p>WORKSHOP: 14:30-16:00</p> <p>Reinout Klamer, Rob Kuipers &amp; Jos Beelen</p> <p>Stakeholder Mapping in Virtual Exchange (COIL - VE)</p>	<p>Konstantinos Petridis, Elena Mizrahi, Nava Shaked, Samia Zeid, George Vardalachakis &amp; Emmanuel Lourakis</p> <p>IMPACT: Advancing Peace, Skills, and AI through Virtual Exchange</p>
<p><b>15:30-16:00</b></p> <p>Emilia Askari, Sandra Gasca, Sarah Cortez de la Cruz</p> <p>Creating a Virtual Exchange Course Centered on Podcasting About Poverty &amp; the Environment in the US &amp; Colombia: A Case Study</p>	<p>Mia Cirkveni &amp; Charles Obinwa</p> <p>Reflections from the UK-Croatia COIL on International Business Expansion</p>	<p>WORKSHOP: 14:30-16:00</p> <p>Reinout Klamer, Rob Kuipers &amp; Jos Beelen</p> <p>Stakeholder Mapping in Virtual Exchange (COIL - VE)</p>	<p>Maria Christoforou, Kristi Jauregi-Ondarra &amp; Juul Meijerink</p> <p>Designing and Implementing a High-Immersion Social Virtual Reality Virtual Exchange in Higher Education: Reflections on Pedagogical and Multimodal Insights</p>
<p>16:00-16:30 COFFEE AND VIRTUAL POSTER SESSION (AMPHITHEATRE 2)</p>			
<p><b>AMPHITHEATRE 1</b></p> <p>Zoom link: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9ylhMS6bpJ2b.1">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9ylhMS6bpJ2b.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 104</b></p> <p>Zoom link: <a href="https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1">https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 101</b></p> <p>Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 102</b></p> <p>Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOeEzXfo1W.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOeEzXfo1W.1</a></p>
<p><b>16:30-18:00</b></p> <p><b>Strand 9:</b> <b>AI and Emerging Technologies in VE</b> chaired by Maria Christoforou</p>	<p><b>Strand 10:</b> <b>Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization</b> chaired by Fabian Kregel</p>	<p><b>Strand 11:</b> <b>Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</b> chaired by Sake Jager</p>	<p><b>Strand 12:</b> <b>Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE</b> chaired by Shannon Sauro</p>
<p><b>16:30-17:00</b></p> <p>Ángela Alonso &amp; Luciana Cabrini Simoes Calvo</p> <p>GenAI in VE: opportunities and challenges</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Paloma Rodriguez</p> <p>COIL/VE for Staff: Learn How</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Mirjam Hauck, Ana Beaven, Rita Koris</p> <p>Decolonising VE: how do we prepare and train educators for it?</p>	<p>Margarita Karsouma, Dora Loizidou &amp; Catherine Muller</p> <p>Challenges and co-planning: study of a telecollaborative project in teaching French as a Foreign Language</p>
<p><b>17:00-17:30</b></p> <p>Tara Mathien &amp; Marietta Univaso</p> <p>Exploring AI Usage in Educational Contexts through a Virtual Exchange Project</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Paloma Rodriguez</p> <p>COIL/VE for Staff: Learn How</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Mirjam Hauck, Ana Beaven, Rita Koris</p> <p>Decolonising VE: how do we prepare and train educators for it?</p>	<p>Eric Hagley</p> <p>Virtual Exchange, Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, Intercultural Competence, Teacher Professional Development</p>
<p><b>17:30-18:00</b></p> <p>John O'Connor, Murat Gülmez &amp; Lia Pop</p> <p>Crossing Cultures in the Metaverse</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Paloma Rodriguez</p> <p>COIL/VE for Staff: Learn How</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Mirjam Hauck, Ana Beaven, Rita Koris</p> <p>Decolonising VE: how do we prepare and train educators for</p>	<p>Ciara R. Wigham &amp; Shona Whyte</p> <p>Backstage interaction: opportunities for learning in task-based virtual exchange with young EFL learners</p>

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<b>18:00-18:30</b> Jon Rubin  Will Artificial Intelligence Suck the Life out of Virtual Exchange?	Maria Antonia Manresa Axisa & Bruno Ferreira de Lima  Crossing boundaries: Interdisciplinary intercultural learning for sustainable development through COIL	Nael H. Alami, Sara Abou Ibrahim, Eman Swaidan, Fatima Halwani, Shyla Gonzalez-Dogan, Adnan Turan, Hiam Loutfi  VE & VR for Teacher Education in Conflict Zones: Promoting Empathy, Access, and Understanding	
19:00-20:00 MEMORIAL CELEBRATION FOR SARAH GUTH AT MOLOS SEAFRONT PROMENADE			
20:00-22:00 CONFERENCE DINNER AT KYPRIAKON RESTAURANT			

## Friday, 5 June

### TASSOS PAPADOPOULOS BUILDING

08:15-09:00 REGISTRATION (LOBBY)

09:00-10:00 [KEYNOTE 2 \(LAIA CANALS\)](https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1) (AMPHITHEATRE 1)  
<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1>

10:00-10:30 COFFEE (AMPHITHEATRE 2)

AMPHITHEATRE 1 Zoom link: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPI5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1</a>	ROOM 104 Zoom link: <a href="https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1">https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1</a>	ROOM 101 Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1</a>	ROOM 102 Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOsEzXfo1W.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOsEzXfo1W.1</a>
<b>10:30-13:00</b>  <b>Strand 13:</b> <b><a href="#">Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</a></b> chaired by Sake Jager	<b>Strand 14:</b> <b><a href="#">Research and Evaluation in VE</a></b> chaired by Antigoni Parmaxi	<b>Strand 15:</b> <b><a href="#">Research and Evaluation in VE</a></b> chaired by Stavroulla Hadjiconstantinou	<b>Strand 16:</b> <b><a href="#">Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</a></b> chaired by Elis Kakoulli Constantinou
<b>10:30-11:00</b>  PANEL DISCUSSION 10:30-11:30  Francesca Helm, Casper van der Heijden, Ana Beaven, Laura Brandolin, Sara Pittarello, Anna Nicolaou, Adrien Olszak-Olszewski, Manuela Alfe, Rapitsenyane, Yaone Y & Esther Montiel  Critical Reflection on Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiatives	Nada Nasr, Samar Bouzeineddine, Eman Sweidan, Fatima Halwani & Bachir Attallah  <a href="#">The Impact of Virtual Exchange on Intercultural Sensitivity Among Lebanese Undergraduate Students</a>	Emily Kraus  Centering Student Voices in Virtual Global Spaces	Fabian Krenzel & Carola Surkamp  Co-Constructing Knowledge with Literary Texts: (Re-)Discovering Third Places in Virtual Exchange
<b>11:00-11:30</b>  PANEL DISCUSSION 10:30-11:30  Francesca Helm, Casper van der Heijden, Ana Beaven, Laura Brandolin, Sara Pittarello, Anna Nicolaou, Adrien Olszak-Olszewski, Manuela Alfe, Rapitsenyane, Yaone Y &	Daniele Polizio & Valentina Schettino  <a href="#">Reducing gaps through Virtual Exchanges in German as a Foreign Language. A cooperation between pre-service German teachers in Vienna and German learners in Salerno</a>	Arsen Cenaj  Understanding Student Teachers' Perspectives on Virtual Exchange in French Higher Education	Rob Kuipers & Reinout Klamer  COILectiVE NL

<p>Esther Montiel</p> <p>Critical Reflection on Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiatives</p>			
<p><b>11:30-12:00</b></p> <p><b>WORKSHOP:</b> 11:30-13:00 Keith Bowen &amp; Nael Alami</p> <p>Virtual Exchange, Virtual Reality, and Conversational AI in Global Health Courses: Building Empathy and Understanding in Humanitarian Response</p>	<p>Lara Thumm</p> <p>Exploring the Long-Term Impact of Virtual Exchange on Teachers' Professional Development: Insights from the VALIANT Project</p>	<p>Roméé Jager, Alexander Frame &amp; Lotta Kokkonen</p> <p>"It was like we saw a TV show or something": Students' perspectives on the online mobility phase in Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 11:30-13:00</p> <p>Marina Orsini-Jones</p> <p>Female Voices in the Third Space Toolkit - a South-North COIL-VE Knowledge-Sharing Workshop</p>
<p><b>12:00-12:30</b></p> <p><b>WORKSHOP:</b> 11:30-13:00 Keith Bowen &amp; Nael Alami</p> <p>Virtual Exchange, Virtual Reality, and Conversational AI in Global Health Courses: Building Empathy and Understanding in Humanitarian Response</p>	<p>Cristina Pascual Aibar &amp; Beatriz Cabrera Fernández</p> <p>The Impact of Virtual Exchange on the Oral Performance of B1 Learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language</p>	<p>Gabriella Horváth-Csikós</p> <p>Best practices in designing VE Projects - results of a Hungarian-Turkish VE Project</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 11:30-13:00</p> <p>Marina Orsini-Jones</p> <p>Female Voices in the Third Space Toolkit - a South-North COIL-VE Knowledge-Sharing Workshop</p>
<p><b>12:30-13:00</b></p> <p><b>WORKSHOP:</b> 11:30-13:00 Keith Bowen &amp; Nael Alami</p> <p>Virtual Exchange, Virtual Reality, and Conversational AI in Global Health Courses: Building Empathy and Understanding in Humanitarian Response</p>	<p>Marta Aguilar-Pérez, Elisabet Arnó-Màcià, Karen Fleischhauer, Björn Kjellgren, Katrin Köppl &amp; Balbina Moncada</p> <p>Mapping Intercultural Communicative Competence in Engineering Virtual Exchange: A Systematic Analysis of BIP and COIL</p>	<p>Margarita Vinagre, Marta Giralt &amp; Ciara Wigham</p> <p>Socio-emotional engagement in VE: Exploring lingua franca and L1-L2 interactions</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 11:30-13:00</p> <p>Marina Orsini-Jones</p> <p>Female Voices in the Third Space Toolkit - a South-North COIL-VE Knowledge-Sharing Workshop</p>
<p>13:00-14:00 LUNCH (AMPHITHEATRE 2) - Visit UNICollaboration table to share ideas and suggestions for the organization</p>			
<p><b>AMPHITHEATRE 1</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPl5hKB8C9yhMS6bpJ2b.1">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPl5hKB8C9yhMS6bpJ2b.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 104</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1">https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 101</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 102</b> <b>Zoom link:</b> <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOsEzXfo1W.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOsEzXfo1W.1</a></p>
<p><b>14:00-16:00</b></p> <p><b>Strand 17:</b> <b>Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</b> chaired by Christina Yerou</p>	<p><b>Strand 18:</b> <b>Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization</b> chaired by Panayiota Hadjiconstantinou</p>	<p><b>Strand 19:</b> <b>Research and Evaluation in VE</b> chaired Francesca Helm</p>	<p><b>Strand 20:</b> <b>VE and Teacher Education</b> chaired by Stavroulla Hadjiconstantinou</p>
<p><b>14:00-14:30</b> Björn Kjellgren &amp; Sophie Bélanger</p> <p>The Virtual Work Behind Virtual Exchange: Insights from a Cross-institutional Global Virtual Team</p>	<p>Teklu Urgessa &amp; Worku Jifara</p> <p>The Transformative Convergence of Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Exchange: A Literature Review</p>	<p>Hiba Ibrahim</p> <p>Reframing Intercultural Competence in Virtual Exchange: Relational Dynamics and Emerging Practices</p>	<p>Ingrid Hortin, Sirkka Ivakko &amp; Cajsja Grenner</p> <p>Embedding Virtual Exchange in the Curriculum: A Journey of Progression at Malmö University</p>
<p><b>14:30-15:00</b></p> <p>WORKSHOP 14:30-16:00</p> <p>Fabian Krengel, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng, Mirjam Hauck, Nael H Alami, Yuliana Lavrysh &amp; Kristina Katsos</p> <p>Towards CVE for Trust- and Peacebuilding</p>	<p>Jos Beelen &amp; Reinout Klamer</p> <p>Using story circles to capture COIL-VE experiences: A study from The Hague University of Applied Sciences, Coventry University and the University of the Free State</p>	<p>Feihong Wang, Gerardo Lopez Diaz &amp; Emmanuelle Awad</p> <p>When A Big Online Class Meets A Small In-Person Class: Impact of a Virtual Exchange Project on US Psychology Students with Matched Virtual Exchange Partners vs. Self-identified Virtual Exchange Partner</p>	<p>Maria Laura Angelini, Isabel Torrijos &amp; Rut Muñiz</p> <p>Challenging Comfort Zones through Virtual Exchange: Lessons from an Eight-Year Simulation-Based Learning Initiative in Teacher Education</p>

<p><b>15:00-15:30</b></p> <p>WORKSHOP 14:30-16:00</p> <p>Fabian Krengel, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng,, Mirjam Hauck, Nael H Alami, Yuliana Lavrysh &amp; Kristina Katsos</p> <p>Towards CVE for Trust- and Peacebuilding</p>	<p>Megan Mocko, Margeaux Johnson, Monijia Amani &amp; Amy Parziale</p> <p>Investigating Intercultural Communication through presenting and feedback: A mixed method study of virtual exchange in statistics courses</p>	<p>Viktorii Drobotun</p> <p>Assessing Collaborative Academic Writing in a COIL-Mediated International Learning Environment</p>	<p>Müge Satar, Asuman Aşık, Yao Wang, Gamze Emir, Simin Li &amp; Gonca Yangın Ekşi</p> <p>Globally competent teaching in language teacher education: a virtual exchange between Türkiye and the UK</p>
<p><b>15:30-16:00</b></p> <p>WORKSHOP 14:30-16:00</p> <p>Fabian Krengel, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng,, Mirjam Hauck, Nael H Alami, Yuliana Lavrysh &amp; Kristina Katsos</p> <p>Towards CVE for Trust- and Peacebuilding</p>	<p>Paula Belló, Koritza Subero Perez &amp; Mariana Vargas Aignasse</p> <p>Curriculum Integration and Accreditation of Virtual Exchange: A COIL-Based Model for Sustainable and Internationalized Teacher Education Programs</p>	<p>Bee Gan, Anna Maria DiBetta &amp; Cinnamon Bennett</p> <p>Are We There Yet? Testing Our Journey to Continuous Global Competence</p>	<p>Elisabet Arnó-Macià &amp; Sonia Carmen Munteanu</p> <p>Designing and implementing a transdisciplinary Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) from an LSP teacher perspective</p>
<p>16:00-16:30 COFFEE (AMPHITHEATRE 2)</p>			
<p><b>AMPHITHEATRE 1</b> Zoom link: <a href="https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPl5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1">https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86525990026?pwd=PF71QY6V7fPl5hKB8C9yIhMS6bpJ2b.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 104</b> Zoom link: <a href="https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1">https://us05web.zoom.us/j/82896314292?pwd=PSYywBa01NqFBtKXplShjYid4cvgbH.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 101</b> Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87987431690?pwd=X85H9IDLp1qwhsmaS0oeGjhrqRRUck.1</a></p>	<p><b>ROOM 102</b> Zoom link: <a href="https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOesEzXfo1W.1">https://us02web.zoom.us/j/81241123752?pwd=OefU1CGdy3WUXI2CndbeYOesEzXfo1W.1</a></p>
<p><b>16:30-18:00</b></p> <p><b>Strand 21:</b> <b>VE, COIL and Internationalization</b> chaired by Müge Satar</p>	<p><b>Strand 22:</b> <b>Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion</b> chaired by Francesca Helm</p>	<p><b>Strand 23:</b> <b>AI and Emerging Technologies in VE</b> chaired by Mirjam Hauck</p>	<p><b>Strand 24:</b> <b>Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE</b> chaired by Sake Jager</p>
<p><b>16:30-17:00</b></p> <p>Paulina Subiabre-Ubilla, Cajsa Grenner, Ingrid Hortin &amp; Sirkka Ivakko</p> <p>Shaping Teacher Identity Through Plurilingual Virtual Exchange: Preparing Educators for Future Classrooms</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Noel Habashy</p> <p>Cultural Humility in Action: Research, Practice, and Implications for Global Learning and Virtual Exchange</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Carol Lanham, Reinout Klamer, Ellen Shupe, Bee Gan, Alex Masardo</p> <p>An AI Toolkit: Enhancing Collaborative Online International Learning with Artificial Intelligence</p>	<p>Katarzyna Radke, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng, Charo López-Contreras, Thomas Raith</p> <p>"This made me think...": Four-Way Collaboration Between Future Teachers Exploring the Role of AI in Quality Education</p>
<p><b>17:00-17:30</b></p> <p>PANEL DISCUSSION 17:00-18:00</p> <p>Jon Rubin, Sara Pittarello, Veronica Rodriguez Luna &amp; Henry Shepherd</p> <p>COIL Virtual Exchange Research Initiatives Around the World</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Noel Habashy</p> <p>Cultural Humility in Action: Research, Practice, and Implications for Global Learning and Virtual Exchange</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Carol Lanham, Reinout Klamer, Ellen Shupe, Bee Gan, Alex Masardo</p> <p>An AI Toolkit: Enhancing Collaborative Online International Learning with Artificial Intelligence</p>	<p>Antje Neuhoff</p> <p>Virtual Language Cafés - Informal Language Learning at the Language Centre</p>
<p><b>17:30-18:00</b></p> <p>PANEL DISCUSSION 17:00-18:00</p> <p>Jon Rubin, Sara Pittarello, Veronica Rodriguez Luna &amp; Henry Shepherd</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Noel Habashy</p> <p>Cultural Humility in Action: Research, Practice, and Implications for Global</p>	<p>WORKSHOP 16:30-18:00</p> <p>Carol Lanham, Reinout Klamer, Ellen Shupe, Bee Gan, Alex Masardo</p>	<p>Anna Kwasniewska &amp; Francisco Alberto Nunez Tapia</p> <p>Structured for Growth: Two Semesters, Three Continents, Measurable Gain</p>

COIL Virtual Exchange Research Initiatives Around the World	Learning and Virtual Exchange	An AI Toolkit: Enhancing Collaborative Online International Learning with Artificial Intelligence	
18:00-18:30 CLOSING REMARKS AND AWARD PRESENTATION (AMPHITHEATRE 1)			
19.00 WALKING TOUR OF LIMASSOL			

## POSTER SESSIONS

TASSOS PAPADOPOULOS BUILDING (AMPHITHEATRE 2)	
Koritza Subero Pérez, Paula Belló & Mariana Vargas de Benci	Miguelina Cabral Domínguez
Smart Repository for COIL Experiences: Innovation, Inclusion, and Systematization with AI Support	Developing Metacognitive Awareness in Music Didactics: A Spain-Argentina Virtual Exchange for Future Teachers

## SOCIAL EVENTS

Welcome Reception, Wednesday 3rd June 19:00-21:00, at Gazebo Mare (Free of charge)



Conference Dinner, Thursday 4th June 20:00-22:00, at Kypriakon Restaurant (Cyprus traditional meze €35)



Limassol Walking Tour with a professional guide, Friday 5th June 19:00-20:00 (Free of charge)



# Virtual Exchange in a Changing World: Innovation and Inclusion

## KEYNOTE ABSTRACTS

### 1. Anthony J. Liddicoat - University of Warwick, UK

#### ***Virtual exchange: from intercultural experience to intercultural language learning***

Virtual exchange has become an increasingly prominent component of language and intercultural education, yet its pedagogical value depends on how experience is transformed into learning. This presentation examines ways of building on virtual exchange as an intercultural experience to develop intercultural learning through structured reflection and mediation. It argues that intercultural language learning is not the automatic outcome of contact with otherness, but a developmental process involving noticing, comparing, interpreting, and reflecting on language and culture. In virtual exchange contexts, learners engage in authentic communication with peers across linguistic and cultural boundaries; however, without guided pedagogical intervention, such encounters may remain at the level of experiential exchange. This presentation explores how educators can promote the development of intercultural capability, emphasizing the role of reflective dialogue, critical language awareness, and the decentring of self. The presentation highlights the importance of intentional design in transforming interaction into meaningful intercultural understanding and in fostering learners who can engage productively with diverse others and mediate meaning across difference in increasingly connected global environments.

### 2. Laia Canals - Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

#### ***Mobilizing multimodal and plurilingual resources: bridging interaction and interculturality in next-generation virtual exchanges***

In my talk, I will synthesize a body of research on virtual exchanges (VEs), particularly e-tandem formats, examining how learners engage in video-mediated, task-based interaction. I will focus on three interrelated dimensions: linguistic development, intercultural competence, and plurilingual practices. Findings demonstrate that VEs create rich environments for meaning negotiation, interactional feedback, and the use of metalanguage, all of which foster second language development. At the same time, these exchanges provide opportunities for intercultural learning, though not without challenges, including miscommunication, avoidance strategies, and occasional reliance on stereotypes. My research further highlights the role of translanguaging, showing how learners strategically draw on their full linguistic repertoires to scaffold communication and enhance metalinguistic awareness. Beyond documenting benefits, my work on VEs underscores the importance of interactional dynamics, learner roles, and multimodal resources in shaping interactions. In a world increasingly dominated by human-machine interactions, the distinctive human nature of VEs emerges as an opportunity to offer authentic human communication and connections, which can lead to increased motivation to practice and communicate, as well as inclusive access to international experiences. My talk will end by envisioning future directions VEs can take: integrating multimodality, fostering intercultural reflection, activating a plurilingual mindset, and offering accreditation models, while also considering the potential of GenAI to support learners in preparing for VEs. All this will allow VEs to become transformative and equitable alternatives to physical mobility in language education, opening the door to a more inclusive and connected world in which languages, cultures, and people are brought together.

# PRESENTATIONS, PANEL DISCUSSIONS, WORKSHOPS, POSTERS ABSTRACTS

Thursday, 4 June

## Strand 1: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Hiba Ibrahim, Eman Swaidan, Fatima Halwani, Hanin Ibrahim, Samantha Abi Saab, Lamyia Sabbah, Bachir Attallah, Jeremy Adelman & Nael H. Alami

### *Exploring Intercultural Learning and Empathy among Students in a Cross-Cultural Global History Course*

Virtual exchange (VE) holds promise for enhancing critical thinking and helping students explore diverse perspectives on individual and national motivations that shape sociopolitical forces and 'glocal' realities. This study examines the integration of VE into a cross-cultural global history course to develop students' intercultural competence and historical empathy. Delivered at a leading UK university during the 2023-2024 academic year, the courses involved students from various countries, including Lebanon. A mixed-methods approach combined pre- and post-course surveys, live session observations, discussion forum analysis, course assignments, and focus groups. Quantitative results showed no statistically significant improvement in intercultural competence or overall empathy scores ( $Z = -0.084$ ,  $P = 0.933$ ). However, confidence in intercultural interaction and historical perspective-taking improved significantly. The participant group was diverse, mainly aged 18-24, from Western and Eastern Europe. Notably, 89.7% of students reported high engagement, and 90% felt comfortable in group discussions. Skill development was observed, particularly in critical thinking (62.1%) and research skills (55.2%), though no significant difference was found between students who perceived improvement and those who did not ( $P = 0.092$ ). Thematic analysis revealed students' engagement with historical suffering, empathy, critical reflection, and active listening. Discussion forums and case studies promoted empathy and intercultural understanding, while Zoom sessions, though lecture-heavy, showed moments of empathetic engagement through nonverbal cues. Overall, VE effectively fostered intercultural competence, critical thinking, and communication skills essential for navigating multicultural environments. The presentation concludes with implications for using VE to develop historical empathy.

Malin Reljanovic Glimäng, Samukezi Mrubula-Ngwenya

### *Disrupting Place and Power through Virtual Exchange: Culture, Identity, and Memory in Public Spaces*

Grounded in principles of place-based learning and decolonizing pedagogies, this presentation reports on two iterations of an interdisciplinary virtual exchange project between students at the University of Limpopo (South Africa) and Malmö University (Sweden). The VE explored how public monuments and place names reflect power, identity, and historical memory. Over the course of seven weeks, students from political science and teacher education collaborated in international and interdisciplinary groups to investigate statues, memorials, and monuments within their respective local contexts. Through guided research, intercultural dialogue, and creative co-production, they explored questions such as, "Whose histories are commemorated in public spaces?" Whose are omitted? How are monuments contested or reimagined in times of social change? Students co-created short educational films (5-7 minutes) that wove together their local stories and shared insights, showcased on a digital platform. The project foregrounded local knowledge, lived experience, and critical reflection, while fostering civic awareness, intercultural collaboration, and critical literacies. Drawing on insights from both cycles of the project and building on previous research on exploring safe/brave spaces in virtual exchange, this presentation explores key pedagogical questions: What does it mean to engage in place-based learning across borders and through VE? How can VE support decolonizing aims in higher education? What challenges and possibilities arise when students critically examine public space as a site of learning and resistance across the Global South/North? Ultimately, the project demonstrates how place-based VE can serve as a powerful pedagogical

strategy for reimagining civic education as a site of social justice, epistemic plurality, and transformative learning.

Anna Turula & Maike Korinna Grau

### *Critical Virtual Exchange. Student Expectations and Deliverables*

This presentation is part of an ongoing collaboration between pre-service teacher education programmes at the universities of Kraków/Wrocław (Poland) and PH Freiburg (Germany) with a view to enhancing prospective foreign language teachers' critical digital literacy and intercultural communicative competencies. Participating in a Virtual Exchange and reflecting on their experiences enables students to learn about this approach from first-hand experience as well as published research. In our most recent project, designed as CVE (critical virtual exchange, cf. Hauck 2023), the students work on topics related to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In small groups, they (i) address a SDG issue of their choice; (ii) think of local solutions to the problem chosen; and (iii) test their idea in practice. In the final phase of the project, the students – who are prospective teachers of English – will compare possible ways of adapting the project design to primary/secondary classrooms in their respective educational systems. Carried out alongside the project is our study of the students' expectations, SDG-motivated civic concerns, actions taken to make the world a better place in the spirit of CVE as well as whether the participants see such projects as transferable to their own future classrooms. We collect our data through reflection portfolios and various project deliverables, which are later going to be subject to thematic and discourse analyses. A preliminary examination of the data shows that out of the four groups of competences (O'Dowd 2015), the pedagogical ones (professional development; being able to collaborate in the increasingly diverse and complex society) as well as relevant attitudes and beliefs seem to dominate in the students' expectations with organisational and digital competences not listed as the participants' priorities. This may show that the competence framework of VE is in the process of refocusing, potentially caused by ICT normalisation (Bax 2003).

Steinar Mathisen

### *Building bridges or heading for a fall: Exploring South-North Critical Virtual Exchange in Vocational Education*

For decades, VE has enabled learners to learn languages in an authentic environment, learn about other cultures and collaborate with students across physical space from within the confines of their classrooms. This practice has been explored in different contexts, from primary to university level education, but within research on VE, there has been a tendency to focus more on researching VE practices in higher education. A lesser-developed area of VE research is within vocational education and global South-North collaborations. This study takes departure from the principles of Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) and addresses both opportunities and challenges that arose when vocational teachers from a TVET school in Ghana and English teachers from a Norwegian vocational school collaborated on planning a CVE for their students. The outcome is two iterations of CVE between students in Ghana and Norway, where they create videos of themselves presenting their interests, their school, and how they work with their vocation, then share the videos asynchronously. Artefacts produced by both teachers and students, as well as communication, have been collected and analysed through the lens of expansive learning. Using Engström's principles of activity systems as the prime unit of analysis, multivoicedness and historicity in the activity systems, as well as contradictions and expansive learning cycles, help to analyse the complex inner workings of this project. The intention behind CVE is to make VE more inclusive of marginalised groups and countries. However, the obstacles introduced by collaborating across the South-North axis may discourage practitioners. Analysis of the data suggests that there needs to be an added focus on the facilitation of exchange, institutional support, and technological adaptation of the exchange. Although this research focuses on vocational education and Global South-North collaborations specifically, it also highlights issues that are of interest to the broader VE community.

*Virtual Exchange with Chinese Universities: Sharing Practice, Building Community*

Over the past two decades, virtual exchange (VE) involving Chinese universities and Chinese language learning has developed into a rich and geographically diverse field. Documented bilateral projects span a variety of configurations, including Chinese–American (Luo & Yang, 2022; Luo & Gao, 2024; Weng & Pu, 2023), Chinese–British (Guo et al., 2022; Tang et al., 2021; Lewis & Qian, 2021), Chinese–French eTandem (Wang-Szilas et al., 2013, 2018), Chinese–Portuguese (Rienties & Rets, 2022), Chinese–Brazilian (Yin et al., 2026) and Chinese–Australian (Wang & Tian, 2010) exchanges. Across these studies, VE has been shown to consistently foster intercultural communicative competence, language development and learner motivation. However, it has also revealed persistent challenges related to asymmetric language proficiency between partners, uneven institutional integration and limited pedagogical scaffolding for less advanced learners (Lewis & Qian, 2021; Yin et al., 2026). The design of tasks and the choice of platform — ranging from Skype and WeChat to wikis and virtual environments — have emerged as critical variables shaping the quality of exchanges (Tang et al., 2021; Guo, 2023). Teacher training and pre-service teacher preparation remain largely unexplored in this context (Lan & Yu, 2023; Weng & Pu, 2023), as does the perspective of Global South partners (Yin et al., 2026) and the Chinese university-side view of internationalisation more broadly. Following the pandemic, VE has gained renewed institutional relevance in China as a sustainable and inclusive alternative to physical mobility (Ganassin et al., 2021), raising new questions about platform design, AI-assisted task development (McCallum, 2023) and the long-term integration of VE into Chinese higher education curricula.

Virtual exchange with Chinese universities offers distinctive opportunities for intercultural learning, global collaboration, and institutional partnership-building — yet it remains an underexplored area within the broader VE research landscape. This symposium, convened by the newly established VE China Hub, brings together practitioners and researchers with first-hand experience of designing and implementing VE programmes with Chinese partner institutions. It aims to increase the visibility of the Hub, foster community among those with shared interests in China-facing VE, and provide a space for honest dialogue about both the promise and the complexity of these partnerships.

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## Strand 2: Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization

Luana Ferreira-Lopes, Marian Alaez & Paula Comellas Angulo

### *Barriers and Enablers for Virtual Exchange Adoption within a European University Alliance: Insights from University of Deusto*

The University of Deusto is a member of the European University of Cities in Post-industrial Transition (UNIC), an alliance formed by ten European universities. Among its objectives, the alliance commits to exploring superdiversity through innovative approaches to teaching, learning, and mobility. Within this framework, Virtual Exchange (VE) has been identified as a key strategy to promote Internationalisation at Home (IaH). To support the implementation of VE across the alliance, UNIC launched in 2024 the Virtual International Projects (VIP) Fund. Through this fund, academics from participating universities can apply for financial support to implement VE initiatives in collaboration with partner institutions. After two calls and in anticipation of a third one, at University of Deusto, we analysed the barriers and enablers that shape the adoption of VE in our institutional context in relation to our participation in a European alliance. Among enablers, the alliance structure facilitates partnership building by providing access to a stable network of committed institutions and colleagues. Second, the formal recognition offered through the VIP Fund incentivises teachers to experiment with VE and helps validate the substantial effort involved in developing high-quality projects. However, the study also identified key barriers. One of the most significant challenges is translating the alliance's shared understanding of VE into our own academic policies and procedures. Misalignment between institutional workload models and the time required to design VE experiences also generates tensions. Additionally, the limited availability of documented VE good practices within the institution reduces opportunities for inspiration and reference, especially for teachers new to VE methodology. Overall, while the European alliance provides meaningful support and motivation, institutional adaptation remains essential to ensure sustainable integration of Virtual Exchange at the University of Deusto. All of this has led to the development of a Teaching Innovation Project at Deusto.

Sina Werner

### *Navigating Virtual and Physical Collaboration: Student Perspectives on Blended Mobility*

Blended Mobility refers to the strategic combination of online learning phases with periods of short-term physical mobility (O'Dowd & Werner, 2024). This approach to international education has become increasingly popular in European universities, particularly with the introduction of Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) under the new Erasmus+ programme. BIPs are a type of Blended Mobility involving short, intensive programmes that use innovative teaching and learning methods, including online collaboration. As research on this teaching approach is starting to grow, existing studies indicate gains in intercultural competence and communication (Amante & Rodrigues, 2025; Bazen & Duma, 2025; O'Dowd & Werner, 2024; Perfözl & López-Varela, 2022), professional learning (Borrelli et al., 2024), and soft-skill development (Meredith, 2025). Yet, little is known about how students themselves experience and compare the different modes of collaboration within these programmes or how they navigate transitions between virtual and physical phases. This study addresses this gap by exploring student experiences in a four-year Blended Mobility course in which participants from across Europe (Spain, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Finland, Estonia, Switzerland, and the Netherlands) worked together on innovation in foreign language education. It aims to answer the following questions: (1) How do students perceive the different forms of collaboration within the course? (2) How do they experience the transitions between phases? (3) What challenges and affordances do they associate with each phase? Following a qualitative research approach that analyses students' perspectives across multiple iterations of the course, we aim to gain insights into their experiences during BIPs. The data collected will be used to derive implications for prospective implementations of blended mobility programmes at the tertiary level.

Sabine Menu & Lucyna Błażejczyk-Majka

### *Virtual exchanges as tools for inclusive European education: evidence from the 73 European university*

## *alliances*

Promoted by Erasmus+ in the last decade, virtual exchanges (VE) have got embedded only at the margins into academic curricula so far. Since 2019, European university alliances have been launched by the European Union (EU) to make European education more inclusive, with VE seen as relevant (post-Covid) solutions for the internationalisation of curricula “at home” in higher education. The presentation is based on the 6 years’ experience of co-teaching of the two authors as part of the EPICUR alliance’s course offer. Our course deals with European integration history from a transnational perspective in initial education and it has grown every year with more students. Our VE’s goal is that students from various (single, bi- or multiple) national backgrounds critically reflect about more than one national perspective on EU history and develop international and intercultural online management skills. This academic collaboration was initiated thanks to the Unicollaboration advanced training on VE organised in Spring 2020 and it has received EPICUR’s support since then. Purpose of the presentation is to discuss the opportunities and challenges generated by European university alliances in developing VE that can become embedded in curricula. It is grounded on a literature review about the outcomes of the 73 alliances in organising VE from the most recent published reports (PPMI, FOREU4ALL, single alliances). The presentation provides new data set and first-hand VE experience to explore the mutual benefits for alliances and VE, the opportunities offered by alliances in terms of institutional and project support, and the challenges. While alliances have developed joint pedagogical objectives and quality assurance procedures making VE fitting the purpose, and they have developed joint institutional capacity (e.g., interoperability of pedagogical platforms), they have struggled to embed VE into curricula so far, mainly due to the lack in academic training and barriers in reforming curricula.

Natasha Mrkic-Subotic, Lesley Mc Cannell, Konstantinos Petridis & Reinout Klamer

*Practical insights and recommendations ,drawing on multi-institutional lenses of presenters from Canada, Greece, and the Netherlands*

The transformative potential of COIL Virtual Exchange (VE) as a tool for internationalization is widely recognized. However, a significant challenge remains: how do institutions effectively sustain these initiatives beyond individual faculty efforts? This panel addresses this critical question by examining the strategic and organizational frameworks that connect COIL/VE to a broader institutional purpose, thereby ensuring its long-term viability and impact. We will explore how COIL/VE serves as a powerful driver of Internationalization at Home (IaH), providing globally-engaged learning opportunities for all students, including those who may not be able to participate in traditional study abroad programs. By integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum, COIL/VE initiatives make global competence an accessible and inclusive learning outcome. This session will discuss key strategies for institutionalizing COIL, including: Creating a centralized support structure to provide faculty with pedagogical, technical, and administrative assistance. Developing a clear institutional purpose for COIL that aligns with strategic goals such as equity, diversity, inclusiveness and global engagement. Integrating COIL into formal curriculum planning and quality assurance processes to ensure its sustainability and recognition. The presentation will offer practical insights and recommendations, drawing on multi-institutional lenses of presenters from Canada, South Africa, Spain and the Netherlands. We argue that a successful COIL strategy must be a purposeful one, moving beyond isolated projects to become an integral component of an institution's commitment to inclusive, innovative, and globally-connected education. The Q&A session will provide an opportunity to discuss the challenges and best practices for developing and implementing such purposeful strategies.

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## Strand 3: Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization

Elisabet Arnó-Macià & Marta Aguilar-Pérez

*IMMER-LIT: Developing disciplinary literacies through immersive environments (virtual reality and virtual exchange) in English for Specific Purposes for engineering students.*

Engineering studies are characterised by a clear practical component (laboratories, case studies and work placements) that is connected with real professional environments. Additionally, ESP courses need constant updating to adapt to rapidly evolving globalised and digitised environments. To connect ESP with technology-rich environments and current professional communication, the research project IMMER-LIT aims to investigate how realistic immersive scenarios (virtual reality and virtual exchange) can contribute to the development of engineering students' disciplinary literacies, and, in turn, whether these immersive scenarios can help bridge the gap between ESP courses and real professional communication practices in globalised engineering settings. IMMER-LIT aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What disciplinary genres do students use in virtual environments and what processes do they follow to produce these genres?; (2) What are students' and teachers' perceptions of the efficacy of VR and COIL for the development of linguistic and disciplinary communicative skills?; (3) Do students consider that these simulation activities prepare them to communicate and collaborate in real-life academic and professional contexts? This presentation will focus on the research design and status of the ongoing IMMER-LIT project. First, it will present the theoretical background on connecting immersion in ESP and disciplinary literacy development, with a specific focus on the modification and emergence of genres. Second, it will describe how an ethnographic approach, based on the analysis of participants' practices and views, can shed light on how immersive environments, such as virtual reality and virtual exchange can be leveraged to enhance students' motivation and disciplinary literacy development. Findings are expected to help design ESP courses that are increasingly relevant and authentic, thus linking ESP practices to real communication practices in globalised engineering professions.

Darlene Kilian, Mark Jacob & Lena Bussmann-Fuentes

*From Idealism to Sustainability: Funding COILs to Anchor Innovation*

Virtual exchanges (VEs) offer excellent opportunities for inclusive internationalization, strengthened university partnerships, future-oriented learning and teaching concepts - like team-teaching and project-based learning - as well as the development of future skills. These elements provide important added value to our teaching goals, boosting the educational quality of our courses. Yet many instructors balk at integrating VEs into their classes for lack of resources, institutional anchoring and frameworks. Those that do integrate COILs or telecollaborations often do so out of idealism and a love for innovation, sacrificing extra time, and making do with the resources at hand to create VE projects within existing curricula frameworks. With 'start-up' funding though, dedicated virtual exchange pioneers can connect partners, anchor VEs within university alliance structures and curricula, build frameworks, create guidelines, provide training, and procure useful equipment and subscriptions - all leading to the creation of a sustainable virtual exchange program. In this presentation, we highlight two of our COIL projects that did receive money through third-party funding. These extra resources enable us to provide a richer experience for the students, paid time for coordinating, and opportunities for professional development and networking. We present examples that illustrate how VE funding of one partner can iterate into an improvement of all partner collaborations. We introduce you to our funding sources, the concepts of our grant proposals, what we were/are able to fund and how this serves to elevate our teaching. We will present how this 'start-up' funding will be used to create a framework for better anchoring within the institution's educational portfolio of the future. This anchoring strengthens our partnerships, provides internationalization for a broad-base of students, and works towards VEs becoming a fundamental experience that is integrated into the studies of all students at our university, TU Bergakademie Freiberg.

Nikhil Sapre

## *Collaborative Sustainability Integration Project*

This study is part of the Collaborative Sustainability Integration Project (CoSIP) and its main objective is to promote the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) within HE curriculum through COIL. The CoSIP is based on three broad themes: Socioeconomic Growth, Climate Change and Inclusion. This study analyses findings from the Pre-COIL survey completed by 101 participants of a synchronous Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) session, exploring their demographic profiles, digital engagement, and sustainability awareness. The sample comprised 43 males, 56 females, and two undisclosed respondents, with average ages of 25 and 24, respectively, from five universities in four countries. Postgraduates formed the largest group, followed by second- and third-year undergraduates, showing distinct gender patterns—males concentrated in postgraduate study and females predominating at undergraduate levels. Most participants (60%) were not employed, reflecting their full-time student status. Digital engagement was high across the sample: over 90% of males and nearly 80% of females reported broadband access and frequent news consumption on personal devices, suggesting strong technological readiness. Postgraduate students showed the highest levels of digital engagement, indicating a potential association between academic level and information access. Sustainability awareness was also widespread. Around two-thirds of respondents had studied topics related to sustainability, ethics, or responsible leadership, and nearly 90% of them endorsed the relevance of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to their degree programmes. Only 24 participants had prior COIL experience—17 in sustainability-related projects—but attitudinal support for sustainability integration was consistently high. Interestingly, second-year undergraduates displayed the greatest participation in sustainability-linked COIL projects, exceeding postgraduates. Overall, 86% of participants agreed that SDGs are relevant to their academic learning and future careers. The findings underscore strong student support for embedding sustainability and international collaboration within curricula, highlighting the value of COIL as a framework for advancing global and sustainability-oriented higher education.

Dora Loizidou & Pascal Caron

## *Understanding the contribution of e-tandem exchanges within learners' broader language-learning ecologies*

This study is grounded in sociocultural theory, which views learning as a socially mediated process shaped by interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). Research shows that virtual exchange can foster autonomy, strategic engagement and intercultural dialogue in online collaborative settings (Helm, 2015; O'Dowd, 2018). Within this landscape, e-tandem represents a specific model based on reciprocity and learner responsibility (O'Rourke, 2007). Adopting a learning ecology approach, learners develop and mobilise strategies across interconnected formal, non-formal and informal environments (Reinders & White, 2011). This study examines the contribution of a non-formal e-tandem exchange implemented between students at the University of Cyprus and francophone peers at the Université de Lorraine in France. While the programme offers a structured yet flexible online environment (shared responsibility for language practice, and learner-led topic negotiation), participants are simultaneously engaged in formal university courses and may pursue additional informal practices (media consumption, self-study, personal interactions). This creates a rich and complex ecology in which learning happens across multiple spaces. Our aim is therefore to explore how this non-formal virtual exchange contributes to the learners' overall language-learning trajectory, rather than analysing the e-tandem exchange in isolation. We examine how the e-tandem exchange plays a role in their broader development. We address the following research questions: 1. Which learning strategies emerge within the non-formal e-tandem context? 2. How do learners relate e-tandem exchanges with their formal coursework and their informal linguistic practices? In this qualitative study, data were collected through two questionnaires administered at mid- and end-semester, complemented by semi-structured interviews with the students (n=20). The data are analysed in NVivo 15 using a thematic analysis combining top-down coding based on the conceptual framework and bottom-up inductive coding to identify emergent categories and learner-driven insights. The findings indicate that the exchange enhanced learners' awareness of their emerging personal learning methods, prompting them to articulate and refine the strategies they find most effective.

Yuliana Lavrysh & Iryna Simkova

## *Making Invisible Skills Visible: Recognition Strategies for VE*

A growing challenge in higher education is that students develop valuable transversal competencies, such as digital collaboration, intercultural communication, entrepreneurial mindset, and AI literacy, but these skills remain largely invisible to employers. This presentation introduces a recognition-centered strategies for VE that transforms learning outcomes into employer-readable evidence. We will explore a Skills Passport, competency portfolios, and micro-credentials aligned with international employability and skills taxonomies, enabling students to document not only what they learned, but how they demonstrated it in authentic contexts. This recognition system is illustrated through a German-Ukrainian VE project in which students engaged in innovation sprints addressing real-world challenges, including financial inclusion, gig-economy careers, sustainable energy, and AI-enabled collaboration. The resulting digital products, teamwork processes, and reflective artifacts generated assessable proof of workplace competencies. The presentation shows how VE can function as a global talent development ecosystem, making skills visible and meaningful for employers worldwide.

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## Strand 4: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Grace Dolcini

### *Virtual Exchange as a Catalyst for Plurilingual and Intercultural Internationalization at Home: The NEOLAIa Approach*

Over the past two decades, the internationalization of European Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) has expanded rapidly, shaped by globalization, increased mobility, and the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). While English has become the dominant lingua franca of academia, this growing linguistic uniformity risks marginalizing other languages and cultural perspectives. To address this, universities are increasingly seeking ways to advance internationalization at home by embedding global and intercultural learning opportunities within the local institutional context. The NEOLAIa Alliance, a network of European universities committed to inclusive internationalization, approaches this challenge through the integration of virtual exchange (VE) as a catalyst for plurilingual and intercultural engagement. NEOLAIa's VE initiatives connect students, educators, and staff across its member institutions in collaborative online projects that promote authentic communication in multiple languages. These exchanges enable participants to negotiate meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries, fostering critical reflection on language use, identity, and global citizenship within the academic setting. By positioning VE as both a pedagogical practice and a strategic tool for language-inclusive internationalization, NEOLAIa advances the principles of plurilingualism and intercultural competence as integral components of internationalization at home. Participants not only enhance their linguistic repertoires but also develop the intercultural awareness necessary for navigating diverse educational and professional environments. Ultimately, NEOLAIa's experience demonstrates how virtual exchange can transform internationalization from a mobility-dependent model into an inclusive, digitally mediated process that values linguistic diversity and promotes equitable participation across higher education systems

Anna Nicolaou, Stavroulla Hadjiconstantinou, Iolie Nicolaidou, Nicoletta Pantela & Maria Victoria Soule

### *Bridging the Global North and Global South through Virtual Exchange: Designing inclusive and equitable media literacy Virtual Exchanges in the DigiTREE project*

Virtual Exchange (VE) has gained prominence as an innovative pedagogical model that promotes global collaboration, intercultural dialogue, and digital competence in higher and secondary education. By connecting learners across cultural and geographical contexts, VEs create opportunities for meaningful engagement; however, much of the existing practice remains concentrated within institutions in the Global North. Despite increasing interest, few initiatives have developed sustained and equitable partnerships between the Global North and the Global South, and limited research examines how access to technology, power relations, and different educational realities shape such exchanges. Responding to these gaps, this study adopts a Critical Virtual Exchange approach (Hauck, 2023) and draws on design-oriented explorations of equitable VE design (O'Dowd, 2023; 2025) to develop a model that supports all participants equally. The DigiTREE, an EU-funded project, serves as the context for this exploration phase of a design-based research (DBR) initiative involving three institutions in Europe and three in Sub-Saharan Africa. DigiTREE fosters virtual exchanges between European higher and secondary education students and higher education students in the Global South to develop media literacy, intercultural competence, critical thinking, and digital skills. Targeting regions with limited access to international peer interaction, the project aims to empower marginalized youth through inclusive and equitable learning opportunities. The methodological foundation draws on an extensive literature review and a survey of the responses of 473 students from Cyprus, Latvia, Lithuania, Zambia, Kenya, and Botswana, examining youth social media habits to inform tool selection and task design. Analysis of survey data and open-ended responses identifies contextual challenges and emerging design principles that guide the subsequent implementation of the VE. Findings emphasize the need for reciprocity, contextual sensitivity, and critical engagement to support a balanced Global North–South collaboration.

Alex Masardo & Maria Meredith

## *From Coaching to Co-Researching: Rethinking Communication, Clarity and Confidence in a Virtual Exchange Between the Global North and South*

Virtual Exchange (VE) is increasingly recognised for its potential to promote intercultural understanding and inclusive internationalisation in higher education. Drawing on models such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and more recently Communities of Inquiry (Cofi) (Masardo, et al., 2025), VE enables students across borders to collaborate on shared academic goals (Guth & Helm, 2010; O'Dowd, 2018). However, while these spaces are often framed in terms of opportunity and growth, they also present complex challenges – particularly in relation to language, hierarchy, and role interpretation – especially within Global North–South partnerships. This paper explores these dynamics through a reflective case study of a transnational VE project between the University of Gloucestershire (UoG), UK, and Universitas Ahmad Dahlan (UAD), Indonesia. During its second iteration in 2024-25, this VE project introduced an innovative new feature: five doctoral students from UAD were invited to act as academic coaches for six Indonesian undergraduates, supporting them in developing their research confidence and critical engagement within the module. This was in response to a request from UAD to consider doctoral student involvement. While the coaching was designed to enhance student agency and scaffold collaborative learning through peer collaboration, a novel initiative at UAD, an unexpected insight emerged. When asked to reflect on their coaching experiences, the majority of doctoral students wrote instead about their experiences as co-researchers. This paper draws on those reflections, and our facilitation experience, to examine how role clarity, affective safety, and intercultural communication shape equitable participation in VE.

José Luis Jiménez-Figarotti

## *The Digital Trans-indigenism Contact Zone: Decolonial Praxis and Systemic Barriers*

This longitudinal ethnographic study (2020-2025) examines the transformative potential and systemic challenges of Collaborative Online International Learning in amplifying Indigenous perspectives on environmental justice in higher education environments. Grounded in critical environmental justice and Indigenous epistemologies, the research involves six virtual exchange iterations with 172 students, 15 Indigenous leaders, and 10 faculty members from Venezuela, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, and Germany. Using a mixed-methods approach, triangulating participatory observations, 33 semi-structured follow-up interviews, and critical discourse analysis of co-created documentaries, the study evaluates how intercultural collaborations reshape participants' understanding of Indigenous rights and sustainability. Findings highlight both the transformative potential and structural barriers of integrating Indigenous perspectives into virtual learning. A 2025 Mexican-Amazon Basin collaboration, led by Indigenous women, demonstrated how virtual platforms amplify marginalized voices. Three co-created documentaries disrupted Eurocentric narratives and fostered allyship by centering oral histories and lived experiences. Conversely, a 2021 South Africa-Venezuela exchange with students from Zulu communities revealed systemic inequities, technological barriers, sociopolitical instability, and colonial legacies that hinder equitable participation. These contrasting case studies underscore the complexities of integrating Indigenous perspectives in global educational contexts. However, obstacles such as technological inequities and differing levels of commitment highlighted the complexities of cross-national virtual collaboration. By contrasting failed and successful iterations, this research offers a replicable, decolonial framework for inclusive virtual learning environments that integrate Indigenous knowledge systems, foster intercultural solidarity, and address global environmental challenges.

"This presentation focuses on the student voice findings of an ongoing project at a research-intensive university, aiming to scale up the institution's COIL delivery. Over the past four years, the project has built an evidence base leading to institutional support for COIL within the university's delivery of student education. This includes training, showcase events and the creation of the role of institutional COIL academic lead.

Eve Smith, Martin Ward & Ayako Yoshino

*Students want an international experience when they choose a research intensive university: Student voices on COIL*

This presentation will share key findings from student focus groups, divided into COIL-experienced and non-experienced participants. The advantages of COIL, well documented in the literature (Ketteringham et.al.2022; King de Ramirez 2021; Mestre-Segarra & Ruiz-Garrido, 2022; Minei et.al.2021; Naicker et.al. 2021; Oenbring & Gokcora, 2022; Polyakova et.al. 2021; Pouromid, 2019), were reaffirmed by our participants. Among the COIL-experienced students, there was some discussion of issues around technical problems, differences in expectations and communication problems. However, these issues were often framed as challenges that had been overcome, giving students a sense of achievement and growth. Among the non-experienced students, the experience of online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic was used as a frame of reference to discuss the challenges of COIL. Groupwork was frequently seen as problematic due to differences in expectations, perceptions of unfair division of work and the impact that other students could have on an individual's grades. However, the possibility of working with students from another part of the world, or another culture appeared attractive and tended to outweigh all the potential difficulties of online collaboration. The international aspect of a research-intensive university was valued by both groups, as students expected to be taught by international experts and have peers from diverse backgrounds. While many students felt that study abroad was good, costs were seen as a limiting factor. COIL was seen as a positive aspect of the international experience at university.

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## Strand 5: Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE

Camino Rea, Elis Kakoulli Constantinou, Eleni Kakrida & Alexandra Athanasiou

### *English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in Cross-Cultural Higher Education Settings: Enhancing Communication and Discipline Literacy Skills*

International Higher Education is undergoing a significant transformation, driven by the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan and accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Blended Intensive Programmes (BIPs) and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) are gaining prominence, aiming to make international experiences more inclusive, flexible, and sustainable. This paper presents a Blended Intensive Programme (BIP), collaboratively organized by the Technical University of Cartagena (Spain), the Cyprus University of Technology, and the Agricultural University of Athens (Greece), exploring how English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy can be effectively integrated into virtual exchange and blended mobility to foster communication and disciplinary literacy across diverse academic and cultural contexts. The programme engages students from a wide range of disciplines — engineering, agricultural, biomedical, and finance accounting and management sciences — in a project-based learning experience focused on designing proposals pertaining to multifaceted and multidisciplinary engineering, environmental and business projects, among others. This approach aims to develop students' linguistic competence, intercultural awareness, and the ability to communicate persuasively in English within their professional domains. The BIP combines a three-week online component with a five-day physical mobility in Athens (April 2026). The online phase includes synchronous meetings to introduce instructors, project guidelines, and workshops on persuasive and academic language, followed by asynchronous group collaboration. During the in-person phase, students engage in workshops on presentation skills, collaborative project development, and field visits, culminating in a final presentation contest where mixed international teams defend their proposals before peers, instructors, and a group of Vocational Education students, making the experience more meaningful and inclusive. This blended and interdisciplinary approach fosters not only ESP competence but also key 21st-century skills such as digital literacy, teamwork, intercultural communication, and critical thinking. By integrating virtual exchange and in-person collaboration, the BIP creates an inclusive and authentic environment that mirrors professional communication challenges in globalized workplaces. This presentation will discuss the design, implementation, and pedagogical impact of the programme, demonstrating how blended mobility initiatives can enhance both linguistic and transversal competences in Higher Education across Europe.

Marta Fortes & Ana Sevilla-Pavón

### *Virtual Exchange and Gender Equality in Language Learning, Business & History within SEMILLA*

This paper reports on two Virtual Exchanges, SEMILLAHist and SEMILLABiz; conducted between the University of Limerick (Ireland) and the University of Valencia (Spain) as part of the broader SOCIOEMOVE & SEMILLA Project, funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, and Equality, respectively, involving from eight countries and aiming to raise awareness of gender inequalities and the struggles of rural women worldwide, in line with the United Nations' International Year of Rural Women (2026). A total of 161 undergraduate students participated: first- and second-year business students studying Spanish at Limerick, and first-year English Studies and International Business students learning English at the University of Valencia. Both exchanges follow the three-task telecollaborative model proposed by O'Dowd and Ware (2009). Task 1 focuses on intercultural introductions through video exchanges. Next, Task 2 integrates AI-driven tools (Hello History and ChatGPT) in SEMILLAHist for interviews with historical women. At the same time, SEMILLABiz students conduct real-life interviews with rural women to explore barriers to education and entrepreneurship. Finally, Task 3 culminates in bilingual podcasts/vodcasts where students collaboratively present findings and propose solutions to 21st-century challenges faced by women worldwide. Qualitative data, including recordings of synchronous meetings and students' reflective audio submissions, is being collected and analysed using thematic analysis with NVivo 14 to examine language proficiency development (Spanish/English), intercultural competence, and socioemotional, transferable skills such as teamwork and leadership. Reflections are also being assessed for critical thinking and alignment with SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality), while final podcasts/vodcasts will be evaluated for creativity and application of knowledge. By integrating AI technologies with real-life scenarios and addressing equity and inclusion, this study contributes to research on Virtual Exchange as a transformative practice for global citizenship and social responsibility in higher education (Akçay et al., 2024).

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Kathleen Colantonio-Yurko, Maria Calvo Barrachina, Janka Szilágyi & Feihong Wang

### *Math, Literacy, and Games: Teacher Preparation Across the Globe*

This presentation focuses on an interdisciplinary Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project, where teacher candidates from various educational disciplines collaborated in an interdisciplinary unit. In this COIL, U.S. undergraduate math teacher candidates, graduate literacy students, and Spanish TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) students worked together across time zones and cultures. Merging COIL models (Rubin, 2022) and active learning through gamification (Kingsley & Grabner-Hagen, 2015; Sakai & Shiota, 2016), teacher candidates designed an interdisciplinary game for a specific school context to enhance students' language and knowledge in math and literacy. They co-created games that integrated language learning, literacy, and math concepts for elementary education, and addressed diverse student needs, promoting active learning and building professional communities. A key focus was the relationship between math and literacy teaching, emphasizing disciplinary literacy. It is through disciplinary literacy that math learners grow as speakers, listeners, and meaning makers in mathematics learning contexts (Buehl, 2023; Lent, 2015). The process included collaboration, understanding gamification techniques, negotiating game design, and presenting their work through a video on Padlet. This presentation uses autoethnographic methods (Chang, 2008) to reflect on the instructors' experiences throughout the COIL. Lessons learned from previous projects, a revised COIL collaboration template, and future collaboration plans will be shared. The presenters will also discuss the implications of their framework for future international collaborations in teacher education and other disciplines, demonstrating how other COIL researchers can use co-authored narratives and reflections for self-analysis to deepen their COIL instruction and COIL design.

Emilia Askari, Sandra Gasca, Sarah Cortez de la Cruz

### *Creating a Virtual Exchange Course Centered on Podcasting About Poverty & the Environment in the US & Colombia: A Case Study*

At a moment of escalating political tensions between the United States and South American countries accused of links to drug trafficking, two journalism professors reflect on their three-year collaboration teaching a virtual exchange course. The course examines the intersection of poverty and the environment in their two countries: the US and Colombia. Undergraduates from the University of Michigan in the US and Universidad Jorge Tadeo Lozano in Colombia are invited into small international teams, producing narrated podcast episodes on four topics per term. In 2025, the episode topics were chocolate, avocados, ecotourism and sustainable clothing. Each episode includes sound bites from interviews recorded in Colombia and interviews recorded in the US. Each episode has two (nearly) identical editions: one narrated in Spanish, one narrated in English. Student groups co-write scripts that analyze similarities and differences in how the podcast topics are discussed in the two countries. In the process, students develop international competencies across barriers of language, culture, journalistic traditions and institutional teaching norms. At the end of the course, student reflections demonstrate how this experiential learning project builds understanding even as the political leaders of Colombia and the US are threatening war. We share student voices from their reflections and from their podcast

episodes, which are posted publicly on Spotify. We also share best teaching practices, discussing challenges, lessons learned and planned improvements. Syllabi and assignment descriptions are offered, along with information about our use of Slack as a space for asynchronous weekly student commentaries on course-related resources. These weekly commentaries address a range of issues including poverty in the two countries, Indigenous perspectives on the news, developing “radio voices” and writing for audio. We suggest opportunities for future research, future increased public engagement with the podcast episodes, and future expansion of this innovative teaching model.

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## Strand 6: Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE

Mahnaz Shirdel & Marko Siitonen

### *Stance-taking as a tool for identity construction in virtual exchange*

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has become a prominent approach within Internationalization at Home (IaH), aiming to foster global competencies and intercultural understanding among students who may lack access to physical mobility programs. However, extant literature suggests that participants sometimes avoid engagement with difference by over-emphasizing similarities. This investigation addresses this tension by conducting a micro-analytic examination of identity construction in COIL through the lens of stance-taking. Employing a social constructionist framework, which conceptualizes identity as a dynamic and emergent phenomenon enacted through interactional practices, this study utilizes multimodal Conversation Analysis (CA) to scrutinize a video-recorded Skype discussion among students of languages from a Finnish and an Iranian university who used English as a lingua franca. Stance-taking is analyzed in terms of alignment (structural coordination and support) and affiliation (affective support). The analysis revealed participants frequently prioritized alignment and affiliation through sequential coordination and collaborative category work, fostering group cohesion and relational solidarity. While rare, instances of disaffiliation created a space for extended personal narratives and individual identity expression, constrained by an overarching preference for agreement. The findings demonstrate that while participants possess sophisticated interactional competencies for developing intersubjectivities and solidarity, the preference for alignment limits the critical exploration of diverse worldviews. These results underscore the critical need for pedagogical innovations that explicitly train COIL participants in productive engagement with disagreement and difference to resist the pull toward superficial consensus.

Tara Mathien, Luciana Calvo & Benameur Nehar

### *Making the Case for Sustained Partnership Design in International Collaborations through Virtual Exchange*

Sustained collaborations lie at the heart of transformative Virtual Exchange (VE) initiatives, yet many pilots falter without long-term partnership infrastructure. This project argues that intentional, reciprocal relationships—rooted in shared goals, trust, and collective support—empower VE partners to evolve their original projects, extend into new disciplinary arenas, and generate a ripple effect of cross-border exchange. This presentation will map case studies from a VE partnership work group that have maintained and grown active partnerships for over five years and conduct an analysis of how their ongoing ties catalyzed iterative collaborative project design, co-publication pipelines, and information dissemination routes for members. The study will also trace the expansion of the group's reach, demonstrating that sustained partnerships seed emergent nodes, new partner institutions and interdisciplinary connections, thus broadening the global VE/COIL ecosystem. Drawing on social network analysis and practitioner experiences using a community of practice framework, we will identify insights that can be applied to other international partnerships to convert one-off projects into continuous, evolving collaborations that inform best practice. By showcasing the amplifying effect of long-term partnerships, the proposal invites scholars and practitioners to rethink partnership design as an integral process rather than a transactional milestone. Outcomes will include partnership-building strategies, examples of sustained partnership impacts, and a call for policy shifts that recognize and reward collaborative longevity between stakeholders worldwide. These findings will enrich discourse by feeding perspectives and practice.

Alex Masardo, Carol Cirulli Lanham, Ellen Shupe, Bee Gan, Sylena Measles, Kyle Macciomei, Maria Meredith

### *Preparing students for COIL: An open-source pre-training module*

Since its inception, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has been recognised as an innovative pedagogy that strengthens intercultural communication, digital collaboration and other competencies essential for the 21st-century workforce. While research has demonstrated COIL's value in enhancing global learning (Rubin, 2019; Borger, 2022; Shaw et al., 2025; Withanachchi et al., 2022), far less attention has been given to how students are

prepared for participation. Existing resources, such as the Stephens Initiative Mentoring Handbook, the SUNY COIL Student Guide, and the What Is Culture? Framework, highlight the importance of pre-collaboration orientation and critical reflection. However, a clear gap remains in concise, hands-on training materials that explicitly target the intercultural and digital collaboration skills required for successful COIL engagement. This presentation reports on the research underpinning the development of an open-source pre-COIL training module, scheduled for public release in July 2026. Designed as a one-hour interactive online module, it prepares students for COIL through practical strategies, reflective prompts, and short knowledge checks intended to strengthen readiness for intercultural teamwork and virtual collaboration. The module was co-created by academics, instructional designers, pedagogy specialists and intercultural learning experts from the Universities of Texas at Dallas, Grand Valley State (Michigan), Gloucestershire and Sheffield Hallam. Initial conceptual work was shared at the IVEC 2025 conference in Crete to gather oral and written feedback from the international Virtual Exchange community (IVEC 2025 Conference JVE Special Issue, in preparation). This feedback informed a subsequent series of focus groups, conducted across three time zones with students, faculty and professional services staff, to refine the module's structure, accessibility and pedagogical effectiveness. By providing a freely available, scalable resource, this project aims to strengthen COIL outcomes and contribute to more equitable and inclusive global learning opportunities in higher education. The module is intentionally aligned with WCAG 2.1 AA standards and universal usability principles, using concise content, clear navigation and purposeful multimedia to ensure an efficient and accessible learning experience for all students.

Mia Cirkveni & Charles Obinwa

### *Reflections from the UK-Croatia COIL on International Business Expansion*

The COIL project Sustainable International Business Expansion (October–December 2025), jointly being delivered by Anglia Ruskin University (UK) and the Faculty of Economics and Business in Osijek, UNIOS (Croatia), offers a practical example of how COIL can enhance sustainability awareness and intercultural competence in business education. Over seven weeks, a mixed UK–Croatian student team explores how the UN SDGs can be integrated into international business strategy. Working together in synchronous and asynchronous sessions, students analyze a sustainable multinational company and propose market entry strategies for emerging markets. Weekly Zoom meetings and a shared Google Drive folder support a step-by-step process from introductions and company selection to internal and external company analyses (using frameworks such as VRIO, SWOT, and Porter's Five Forces), strategic evaluation (Ansoff), and a final joint presentation. Several insights have emerged during implementation. Early orientation and icebreaker sessions have been essential for building trust and encouraging open intercultural communication. Continuous lecturer feedback plays a motivational role, reassuring students that their efforts are being observed and valued. The main challenges so far relate to maintaining the timeline and balancing participation levels across the group, as not everyone contributes equally or attends every synchronous meeting. Midway reflections already highlight the importance of a clear structure, defined deliverables, and continuous feedback in sustaining accountability. Moreover, students have shown clear growth in teamwork, global business literacy, and communication skills. Both institutions recognize that patience, empathy, and clarity are crucial for successful collaboration. A post-COIL survey will capture students' reflections on their experiences, focusing on international collaboration and communication, sustainability awareness, and the development of their business skills. Future iterations will build on these lessons, incorporating additional synchronous check-ins, structured reflections, and potential industry input to strengthen real-world relevance.

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## Strand 7: VE Institutional Integration

Rita Koris & Małgorzata Marchewka

### *Higher Education teachers' readiness to engage in Virtual Exchange: Institutional and departmental strategies to foster teachers' involvement and support their academic development in Virtual Exchange*

Internationalization at home (IaH) initiatives and teaching innovation has placed in the heart of higher education worldwide (Leask, 2015; Sengupta & Blessinger, 2022; Turner et al., 2019). Universities may prompt their teaching staff to engage in internationalization activities also as part of their teaching innovation approach. The use of innovative teaching methods, such as Virtual Exchange projects, is an expectation faced by lecturers in higher education today. Despite the many advantages of the Virtual Exchange projects as a tool to enhance students' skills and employability (Helm & Beaven, 2020; Koris et al., in print; Satar, 2021), teachers are often reluctant to get involved in these initiatives. Whilst Virtual Exchange research has tended to focus on project outcomes, student experiences and their skills development (Helm & Beaven, 2020; Koris et al., in print; Lindner, 2016; Satar, 2021), relatively little attention has so far been paid to the importance of teacher readiness and engagement (O'Dowd & Dooly, 2022). Therefore, the aim of this presentation is to identify the determinants of the complex position of teachers, with a special focus on their individual predispositions and institutional support. Applying the participatory case study approach as research method (Williams & Keady, 2021), this study investigates teachers' experiences and institutional practices from various diverse international contexts. The results of analysing a series of virtual exchange case studies reveal the complexity of teacher readiness to potentially engage in Virtual Exchange initiatives and put forward recommendations on how to popularise the idea of Virtual Exchange projects among faculty.

Reinout Klamer, Rob Kuipers & Jos Beelen

### *Stakeholder Mapping in Virtual Exchange (COIL - VE)*

How do you ensure that Virtual Exchange is embedded in your educational institution? We realize that the stakeholders involved, their roles and positions vary greatly. Understanding this diversity helps with targeted and systemic implementation. Mapping stakeholders is therefore a worthwhile activity for all staff involved in Virtual Exchange. It allows participants to become aware of their own role and others involved within their educational context, and then to take follow up actions. This workshop is based in the results and the methodology used in a recent explorative study by The Hague University of Applied Sciences and Nuffic (Dutch organisation for internationalisation in education) on mapping stakeholders in Internationalisation at Home. The results and information regarding this has been published here: <https://www.nuffic.nl/en/mapping-stakeholders> (2025). For this workshop we will:

- Introduce the background, the study, and the results of that study in Dutch higher and vocational education and its relevance to an international context
- Shortly highlight other existing stakeholder models and the practice of stakeholder mapping
- Introduce the stakeholder model of Jos Beelen, and its background
- Use two cycles of mapping stakeholders for the current situation, based on the methodology used in the interviews. These cycles will focus on 1: naming stakeholders and placing these in the model, 2: adding stakeholders from Jos Beelen's model where applicable.
- Asking formative questions towards the desired situation using an interactive methodology. Where to start? Who is involved?
- Allowing respondents to reflect on their experiences and the dynamics in their institutional context.

- Closing the session with some final thoughts and tips

For the duration of the session the focus is on context specific situations and sharing among participants to arrive at consensus. This workshop is especially relevant to all participants questioning a more systemic approach for Virtual Exchange at their institution.

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## Strand 8: AI and Emerging Technologies in VE

Stefan Dreisiebner, Eithne Knappitsch, Joachim Griesbaum, Thomas Mackey, Justyna Berniak-Woźny, Emina Adilović, Anna Zinenko, Barbara Covarrubias Venegas, Subarna Bhattacharya, Jini Jacob and Tessy Thadathil

### *Incorporating Artificial Intelligence to facilitate relational dynamics in Virtual Exchange – Experiences from two Virtual Exchange projects*

Relational dynamics encompass the complex patterns of interaction between individuals, including collaboration, communication, and intercultural understanding. In virtual exchange (VE) environments, these dynamics are shaped by participants' diverse cultural backgrounds and communication competencies, creating both challenges and opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Artificial intelligence (AI) offers new possibilities to enhance relational dynamics by supporting communication, promoting cultural sensitivity, and assisting in conflict resolution. AI is effective in mediating team conflicts, bridging cultural differences, and strengthening communication and collaboration in global virtual teams. This contribution explores two research questions: (1) What are potential use cases of AI in facilitating relational dynamics in VE? and (2) How is AI perceived when introduced during onboarding as a facilitator in team conflicts? The study draws on empirical findings from two mature VE projects: Intercultural Perspectives on Information Literacy and Metaliteracy and the Global Case Study Challenge. Both projects have recently integrated AI systematically into their teaching concepts. During the winter term 2025/26, AI was strategically employed to support onboarding and to assist in resolving team conflicts, using slightly different approaches in each project. Student perceptions were gathered through verbal and written feedback, complemented by facilitator observations, and analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Following a literature review of potential AI applications for supporting relational dynamics in VE, recent adaptations in both projects will be presented with specific examples. The evaluation provides initial insights into the feasibility and effectiveness of these approaches and enables comparison between the two models. The contribution concludes with a discussion linking empirical findings to the literature review and reflecting on implications for other VE contexts. This work lays the foundation for further research and practical applications that help educators and students leverage AI to enhance intercultural collaboration in virtual learning environments.

Maria Georgiou & Sviatlana Karpava

### *Perceptions and Challenges of Artificial Intelligence Integration in Higher Education: Insights from Students and Faculty*

As higher education increasingly embraces digitally mediated learning and global collaboration, Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming an integral component of innovative and inclusive educational ecosystems. Previous research on AI in Higher Education (Crompton and Burke, 2023; McGrath et al., 2023) has shown that both students and academic staff recognize its potential, even as ethical issues require careful attention (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019; Rasul et al., 2023). This study examined the perceptions of students and faculty regarding AI integration in Higher Education, with attention to its implications for technology-enhanced learning. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining closed- and open-ended survey questions with interviews involving 10 students and 10 faculty members. The sample consisted of 28 faculty and 200 students from various courses at a private university in Cyprus. Key findings reveal generally positive attitudes toward AI integration. Students reported using AI tools for academic research and writing support, functions that may also facilitate participation and equitable access within Virtual Exchange (VE) activities. Faculty members highlighted AI's potential for personalized learning and the generation of instructional materials, which can help streamline the design of inclusive, globally connected learning experiences. Various concerns were also identified as students expressed worries about AI's potential impact on critical thinking, and the risks to data privacy and security. At the same time, the faculty emphasized the need for training and institutional support for the pedagogically sound and ethical use of AI technologies. Both groups noted the importance of clear guidelines and regulation. The findings will be compared with ongoing data collection from a public university in Cyprus. Overall, the results underscore the need for strategic AI integration that supports inclusive, ethical, and innovative educational practices.

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Zawacki-Richter, O., Marín, V.I., Bond, M., & Gouverneur, F. (2019). Systematic review of research on artificial intelligence applications in higher education—where are the educators?. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education*, 16(1), 1-27.

Konstantinos Petridis, Elena Mizrahi, Nava Shaked, Samia Zeid, George Vardalachakis & Emmanuel Lourakis

### *IMPACT: Advancing Peace, Skills, and AI through Virtual Exchange*

The Inter-Mediterranean Peace & Collaboration (IMPACT) initiative (<https://eve-impact.eu/>) is an ambitious Erasmus-funded Virtual Exchange project dedicated to empowering youth aged 15–30 across Europe, Morocco, and Israel with essential soft and digital competencies for the 21st century. Through the dynamic interplay between Virtual Exchanges (VE) and Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs), IMPACT cultivates intercultural understanding, employability, and peace-oriented leadership. Over the past two years, IMPACT has engaged more than 2,000 students and staff in transformative learning experiences focused on Soft & Digital Skills, Leadership, AI for Teaching and Learning, and Business English. This presentation will showcase how IMPACT innovatively tackles key challenges in Virtual Exchange implementation, including:

- Embedding VEs within university curricula and institutional frameworks.
- Strengthening Internationalization at Home through inclusive digital collaboration.
- Leveraging VEs as a form of Diploma Science that nurtures global citizenship and peace education.
- Integrating AI tools to enhance both training and impact assessment.

We will present IMPACT's strategic approach, methodologies, and digital instruments that have turned Virtual Exchange into a catalyst for collaboration, employability, and intercultural dialogue across the Mediterranean.

Maria Christoforou, Kristi Jauregi-Ondarra & Juul Meijerink

### *Designing and Implementing a High-Immersion Social Virtual Reality Virtual Exchange in Higher Education: Reflections on Pedagogical and Multimodal Insights*

This presentation reflects on the pedagogical design and implementation of two rounds of a High-immersion Social Virtual Reality (HiSVR) Virtual Exchange (VE) project, conducted across two consecutive years, between university

students in the Netherlands and Cyprus. The project aimed to foster intercultural communication and collaboration through immersive social VR environments. Drawing on our experience as coordinators, instructors, and researchers, we reflect on how the design of activities, facilitation strategies, and technological affordances supported embodied learning, presence, and intercultural awareness. In designing the exchange, we sought to create authentic opportunities for experiential and relational learning. Activities such as exploring 3D videos of each other's universities, presenting national foods, and playing virtual basketball were intentionally structured to encourage embodiment and empathy through avatar-mediated interaction. These design choices highlighted how immersion and presence can strengthen intercultural engagement in inclusive, non-judgmental virtual spaces. Implementing the exchange also revealed the importance of scaffolding digital and spatial literacy through familiarisation sessions and providing equitable access to equipment and support. From a research perspective, analysing HiSVR interactions offered valuable methodological insights: multimodal transcription required attention to gesture, gaze, spatial positioning, and environmental affordances such as sound, movement, and virtual objects. These analytical reflections underscore the complexity and richness of meaning-making in HiVR environments. The presentation concludes with lessons learned about aligning pedagogical intentions with technological design, promoting equitable participation, and addressing the analytical challenges of researching immersive, multimodal learning in higher education.

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## Strand 9: AI and Emerging Technologies in VE

Ángela Alonso & Luciana Cabrini Simoes Calvo

### *GenAI in VE: opportunities and challenges*

In the last few years, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has transformed the educational and academic landscape in unprecedented ways. Specifically, the potential of Generative AI (GenAI), a subset of AI focused specifically on creating new content based on patterns it has learned from existing data, has been explored by researchers, teachers and students alike, bringing opportunities, advances and concerns about its safe and effective use (Curry et al., 2025). This new scenario requires the development of AI literacy (Chiu, 2025; Mills et al., 2024; Gunder et al., 2024) and clear institutional policies and guidelines for its ethical use. In Virtual Exchange (VE), GenAI has also been incorporated into some projects (Hauck & Helm, 2024; Calvo; Mardegan; Finardi; Rosenberg, in press; among others). However, there is still an incipient research focus due to its recent emergence. Taking into consideration this intersection of VE and GenAI, this proposal presents a review of literature carried out to identify how GenAI has been discussed and used in VE. This literature review is part of a broader research project which analyses the use of GenAI in VEs by students and teachers as well as their view on its use in online collaborations. Based on the review and thematic analysis of academic papers, book chapters, conference proceedings and other types of secondary sources, the authors identify opportunities, challenges as well as critical and ethical aspects of implementing and integrating GenAI in VE. The findings will enable a deeper understanding of the topic and a further phase of this study will allow the authors to propose practical pedagogical recommendations.

Tara Mathien & Marietta Univaso

### *Exploring AI Usage in Educational Contexts through a Virtual Exchange Project*

Virtual exchange as a vehicle for reflective inquiry about artificial intelligence (AI) in teacher education holds promise for bridging cultural perspectives and instructional practice. This presentation reports on the outcomes of a semester-long virtual exchange embedded in two teacher education programs that brought together future teachers from universities in Chile and the United States. Participants engaged with AI tools in the preparation and critique of lesson plans. Through a cycle of synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, learners documented their experiences via reflective prompts, participated in moderated peer discussions, and co-designed AI-mediated instructional materials aligned with standards from Chile and the US. The data gathered were analyzed through a mixed-methods framework that combines narrative analysis of reflective prompt entries with pre- and post-surveys measuring perceived usefulness, ethical concerns, and cultural relevance of AI. Results will include participants' confidence to integrate AI, a refined understanding of the need to adapt AI tools to local linguistic and socio-cultural frameworks, and sensitivities to ethical stewardship. These outcomes aim to highlight the value of preparing future teachers to engage with AI critically and responsibly, positioning the technology as a tool that requires thoughtful pedagogical judgment. Critical reflection components will be shared regarding participants' confronting assumptions, negotiating meanings across borders, and envision AI as an augmentative rather than a replacement tool in teacher education. The presentation synthesizes these findings to argue that virtual exchange not only fosters cross-cultural learning about AI but also catalyzes the development of pedagogical strategies that are contextually attuned and grounded. The implications extend beyond teacher preparation to broader educational policy, underscoring the role of international collaboration in shaping responsible AI deployment in classrooms worldwide.

John O'Connor, Murat Gülmez & Lia Pop

### *Crossing Cultures in the Metaverse*

This paper presents an in-depth examination of a multi-semester collaborative teaching initiative that unites students from Technological University Dublin (Ireland), Çağ University (Türkiye), and the Technical University of Cluj-Napoca (Romania) through a module conducted entirely within the metaverse. Built around the annual Student Challenge

Project developed in partnership with the Virtual Worlds Education Consortium (in association with Colorado University), the module uses the virtual world Second Life® to facilitate structured, project-based learning among transnational student teams. These teams, comprising members from each participating institution, engage in the co-design and production of interactive three-dimensional presentations that draw on the creative and communicative affordances of immersive virtual environments. The module fosters a wide range of transferable skills, including digital literacy, virtual teamwork, creative practice, and intercultural communication. Although English serves as the primary medium of instruction, cultural and linguistic diversity is a core feature of the learning environment. This diversity is reinforced by an equally international and multidisciplinary teaching team, which models inclusive pedagogical strategies and supports students in negotiating differences in communication styles, academic expectations, and cultural perspectives. A central focus of the paper is the shared learning experience of both students and educators as they collaboratively navigate the challenges inherent in metaverse-based virtual exchange. These challenges include technological barriers, varying levels of familiarity with virtual world platforms, and the logistical demands of coordinating real-time collaboration across multiple time zones spanning three continents. Through weekly synchronous class meetings, combined with substantial independent and group project work, participants develop a deeper understanding of remote collaboration and the complexities of intercultural engagement. The findings illustrate the significant potential of virtual worlds to deliver meaningful, inclusive, and high-impact international learning experiences. The module offers a replicable model for virtual exchange and invites educators to embrace the metaverse as a powerful and transformative space for future-oriented teaching and learning.

Jon Rubin

### *Will Artificial Intelligence Suck the Life out of Virtual Exchange?*

We are living through a fraught period on planet earth. Our climate is being pushed beyond any known limit, diversity is now seen by many as a threat, and truth seems less real than do lies. Amidst this conflagration, artificial intelligence is better funded and more prominent than is health and requires huge energy resources. So, how does virtual exchange fit into this chaotic scenario? Virtual Exchange or COIL, one of its best-known models, is about connecting people online who are far apart physically and/or culturally. It depends on participants engaging and believing those whom they meet are who they claim to be, so each can learn from the other to develop collaborative projects. The problem is that with AI it is difficult and will soon be impossible to verify that one's online partner is who they claim to be. For example, it is already quite simple to embed a video filter that makes a person's Zoom image appear much younger or older than they really are. It is also possible in real time, to change a teen's voice into that of an elder, and to have a French person speak English even though they know no English (translation is still imperfect, but give it 2 years). This latter trick is often praised by the VE community as it does allow people to converse who otherwise would struggle to do so. But that possibility also gradually undermines our identity. Will AI tools ultimately make online interpersonal exchange so prone to inauthenticity that the format will collapse? It is time to stop worrying about AI writing student papers and consider whether AI will replace the students. This presentation will explore and demonstrate these issues and will seek feedback from the audience. AI is not inevitable. Please Fight Back.

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## Strand 10: Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization

Paloma Rodriguez

### *COIL/VE for Staff: Learn How*

Administrative staff play a vital role in supporting global engagement, yet are often excluded from internationalization efforts. COIL/Virtual Exchange for Staff addresses this gap by enhancing the intercultural, professional, and technical skills of staff through sustained virtual collaboration with professional counterparts abroad. COIL/VE for Staff participants report high satisfaction, increased motivation, greater intercultural confidence, and improved job-related skills. This workshop situates COIL/VE for Staff as an Internationalization at Home initiative, provides data on the intrainstitutional and interinstitutional benefits of the program, and guides attendees in developing and launching their own COIL/VE for Staff initiatives. Traditional internationalization strategies have focused on faculty and students, often overlooking the crucial contributions of administrative staff. As Hunter (2018) and Whitsed et al. (2022) note, these staff members are frequently “invisible actors” in the internationalization process — expected to adapt without adequate preparation, recognition, or opportunities for growth. This presentation addresses this critical oversight by sharing COIL/VE for Staff, a program designed to extend the benefits of COIL/Virtual Exchange to administrative personnel. Drawing on the frameworks described by Rodríguez (2024) and Rodríguez et al. (2025), this initiative positions COIL/VE for Staff as an inclusive, identity-affirming practice. It provides global learning opportunities to individuals with limited access to physical mobility, while also enabling professional development in intercultural competence, digital collaboration, and foreign language practice. By reimagining the role of staff in global engagement, this initiative illustrates how technology-driven COIL/VE can serve as an innovative and sustainable Internationalization at Home model that reaches beyond the classroom to transform the entire institution. This workshop seeks to inspire other institutions to recognize the value of staff engagement in internationalization and to provide practical guidance for the design and implementation of COIL/VE for Staff programs.

Maria Antonia Manresa Axisa & Bruno Ferreira de Lima

### *Crossing boundaries: Interdisciplinary intercultural learning for sustainable development through COIL*

This ongoing project examines how Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) can foster interdisciplinary and intercultural learning in science education, a field in which COIL remains underexplored (Corbett 2023; O’Dowd 2023). Bringing together students and researchers in Science and Intercultural Education from Durham University (United Kingdom) and the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), the initiative aims to investigate how participants engage with issues related to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) while navigating linguistic, cultural and disciplinary boundaries. In this context, twelve undergraduate students from Chemistry (DU) and Biosciences (UFRJ) are working in mixed-nationality groups to discuss public challenges associated with the use of synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, and, by drawing on the SDGs, to propose solutions that consider interrelated environmental, economic, cultural and health dimensions. To promote autonomy and meaningful collaboration, students are encouraged to choose the synchronous and asynchronous communication tools that best support their interactions. Over the course of ten weeks, they will have participated in structured meetings with faculty from both institutions and will have collaboratively developed a written report and an oral presentation detailing their proposed solution. Initial findings from pre-project questionnaires, reflective journal entries and observations of structured tutorial meetings, indicate high levels of engagement and buy-in to the group project. Students perceive science to be a shared and bridging language across their different scientific disciplinary, educational and cultural backgrounds. As noted in recent research on COIL programs (O’Dowd, 2025), English is the dominant language of communication, however the research team has aimed to generate a multilingual environment by deliberately promoting the use of Portuguese in the structured tutorial meetings and provide Portuguese lessons to Durham students. We expect this research will contribute to advancing a mult centred, interdisciplinary and intercultural COIL pedagogy adaptable to diverse institutional and international contexts.

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## Strand 11: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Mirjam Hauck, Ana Beaven, Rita Koris

### *Decolonising VE: how do we prepare and train educators for it?*

VE is not a neutral educational intervention but rather suffers from the same colonial structures and practices known from other forms of blended or online international learning (Helm, 2020). Addressing this challenge means more than raising awareness to this effect, and providing professional development for educators, facilitators and internationalisation administrators that allows them to tackle these issues both at the level of VE design and VE implementation (and evaluation). Our approach is informed by scholars like Stein and Andreotti (2021) who challenge hegemonic discourses, the masking of global complexity and the perpetuation in education of colonial ideologies and encourage us “to think otherwise”. Workshop participants will share VE challenges rooted in power dynamics, access to and use of technology, linguistic hegemonies, and extractivist attitudes to intellectual resources and data. We will share and discuss relevant case studies and jointly draft a tentative framework that allows us to tackle the aforementioned challenges in our VE practices by applying the lens of critical VE (CVE) (Hauck, 2023, 2025), i.e. VE through the social justice and inclusion lens. By the end of the workshop, attendees will have a clearer idea of ways to make their VE more ethically sound, non-colonial and fully participatory. Hauck, M. (2025) Critical Virtual Exchange: At the interface of Critical CALL, Critical Digital Literacy, and Critical Global Citizenship Education. In E. Britton, A. Kraemer, T. Austin, H. Liu, and X. Zuo (Eds.), *Advancing Critical CALL across Institutions and Borders* 9pp. 29-54). Sheffield: Equinox.

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Nael H. Alami, Sara Abou Ibrahim, Eman Swaidan, Fatima Halwani, Shyla Gonzalez-Dogan, Adnan Turan, Hiam Loutfi

### *VE & VR for Teacher Education in Conflict Zones: Promoting Empathy, Access, and Understanding*

Educators operating in emergency contexts and conflict-affected regions must be equipped to manage trauma, ensure inclusivity, and adapt to unpredictable and resource-limited settings. Thus, robust educational program design and high-quality training are critical for advancing professional development among educators working in these challenging settings. In this context, Virtual Exchange (VE) and Virtual Reality (VR) offer promising avenues for cross-border collaboration and immersive, context-sensitive learning. This study investigates their integration as innovative tools for Education in Emergencies (EiE) teacher preparation. The research will center on a joint EiE course co-designed by Lebanese and American educators and grounded in experiential learning and a pedagogy of kindness. The course combines VE dialogues, collaborative case analyses, and immersive VR scenarios—such as displacement and resource-limited classrooms—paired with reflective activities.

A mixed-methods design will be employed to collect comprehensive data. Quantitative data will be gathered through pre- and post-intervention surveys measuring empathy (using the Interpersonal Reactivity Index), intercultural sensitivity, and perceived teaching self-efficacy. Qualitative data will include thematic analysis of participants’ reflective journals, focus group discussions on cross-cultural collaboration, and semi-structured interviews exploring their experiences with the VR simulations. The study is designed to answer the following research questions:

- To what extent do VE and VR foster empathy, intercultural understanding, and reflective capacity in pre-service teachers?
- How do VE and VR expand access to meaningful teacher education for students in conflict-affected regions?
- How do immersive VR simulations shape participants' perceived readiness, resilience, and understanding of EiE pedagogical and protection principles?

Through this research, the project aims to shed light on the transformative capabilities of VE and VR in supporting educational and teachers' professional development in conflict zones and to generate an evidence-based model for leveraging immersive technologies and prepare a more resilient and empathetic global educator workforce.

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## Strand 12: Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE

Margarita Karsouma, Dora Loizidou & Catherine Muller

### *Challenges and co-planning: study of a telecollaborative project in teaching French as a Foreign Language*

This study explores an ongoing telecollaborative project designed within a doctoral research framework to digitally connect two French as a Foreign Language classes. The participants are 15-year-old students from a public high school in Cyprus and a private school in Norway. The objective is to explore how virtual exchanges support the development of communication skills in French learning, through intercultural awareness. The project is co-designed and implemented by two French teachers. This study focuses on their remote collaboration, particularly their shared decision-making process, the constraints they encounter, and how these shape project implementation. Mangenot and Tanaka (2008) emphasize the crucial role of the relationship and teamwork between project coordinators, that can often lead to difficulties in telecollaboration. Unlike traditional classroom activities, where the teacher works alone with students, the telecollaborative teacher is required to cooperate with another teacher, working remotely but towards the same goals. O'Dowd (2013) also highlights that such collaborations require teachers to negotiate pedagogical, institutional, and technological challenges. Wigham and Whyte (2024) show how teachers' choices reflect their teaching style and cognition, including beliefs and knowledge of language learning (p.13). This work examines the constraints encountered during project planning. Initial observations show that these are mainly related to organization, scheduling, and the institutional contexts of the two schools. The data consist of partners' communication, through meeting transcriptions and written messages, shared documents, and reflective journals. Our main question concerns what these specific constraints reveal on the completion of the project, and the study also considers the solutions proposed. Following Muller's (2017) reference to Helm (2015), obstacles related to the use of digital tools are also examined, as technology can be both useful and risky for teachers. This study seeks to reveal specific partnership dynamics influencing the reality of telecollaborative projects and to reconsider the collaborative dimension in language education.

Eric Hagley

### *Virtual Exchange, Teaching of English as a Foreign Language, Intercultural Competence, Teacher Professional Development*

This study examines how and why teachers of Foreign Languages (FL) around the world view and use Virtual Exchange (VE). Perhaps controversially, this research defines VE as an interculturally communicative method of teaching a FL. VE has numerous and important benefits over more traditional methods of teaching FL, but also many hurdles to surmount and is therefore still not a mainstream FL teaching method. Teachers in different national and cultural contexts contend with socio-economic, religious, institutional, pedagogical and time constraints that affect their ability to incorporate VE into curricula. This research explored the relationships between teachers' understanding and use of English language pedagogy, intercultural competence and technology, to provide insights into the purposeful adoption of VE worldwide. The primary research question was, 'Why do FL teachers include VE in their syllabi?' This research explicated the answer to that question through a multi-phase mixed method approach. A large survey of the FL teaching field including teachers from the global south and north attained data on teachers' understanding of both VE and the notion of 'intercultural competence' (IC). It showed the barriers and affordances teachers encounter with VE and included teachers who have had VE experience, those who have wanted to participate in VE but could not and those that do not participate in VE at all. Follow-up interviews examined, in depth, teachers' reasons, barriers, affordances and Professional Development (PD) needs in relation to VE. Remote classroom observations also assisted answer the questions 'How do teachers' local contexts affect implementation of VE?' and 'What PD assists teachers to implement VE?' The research also examined teachers' understanding of the terms "intercultural" and "communicative", as these terms inform and contextualise FL teaching and VE. Whether teachers' understanding of these terms affected their views of VE as a FL teaching method is examined.

Ciara R. Wigham & Shona Whyte

### *Backstage interaction: opportunities for learning in task-based virtual exchange with young EFL learners*

In virtual exchange (VE) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), second language (L2) researchers and teachers alike value the potential of authentic, meaning-focused live interaction to support language development. With global trends towards an ever earlier start to L2 education and ongoing generalisation of VE, the need for research with young learners (YL) is particularly acute (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2018; Dooly & Vinagre, 2022). In our previous work, we have analysed learner-learner interactions and developed an analytical framework drawing on several methodological approaches: discourse analysis (turntaking, turn types), TBLT (task phases), and multimodal (inter)action analysis (Norris 2019). We have also developed the new notion of arena, building on Goffman's (1959, 2008) distinction between frontstage and backstage spaces. This work highlights different learning opportunities afforded in particular task conditions depending on teacher role, task conceptualization, and learner agency. The current study focuses on learner participation in a synchronous oral information gap task with a group of 4 primary EFL learners performing in the absence of direct teacher supervision. It addresses the following research questions: What L2 learning opportunities are afforded frontstage and backstage in live YLVE? How are learning opportunities supported by verbal and co-verbal actions in each space? Data for this mixed-methods study include transcribed hors-champ video-recordings of VE interaction, as well as teacher and learner interviews. Our coding scheme extends that of Pennock-Speck & Clavel-Arroitia (2023) to include participant, arena, task phase, and turn dimensions. The presentation provides examples of fine-grained quantitative and qualitative analysis, revealing the importance of multimodal interaction in the backstage area of the arena. Indeed, we will argue that the main locus of L2 use and development for young learners in live task-based VE is in fact backstage, contrary to received wisdom in both VE and TBLT. We discuss implications for task design and teacher education.

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# Friday, 5 June

## Strand 13: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Francesca Helm, Casper van der Heijden, Ana Beaven, Laura Brandolin, Sara Pittarello, Anna Nicolaou, Adrien Olszak-Olszewski, Manuela Alfe, Rapitsenyane, Yaone Y & Esther Montiel

### *Critical Reflection on Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange initiatives*

The goal of this panel is to critically reflect on the challenges and opportunities of the current Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange programme (E+ VE), from the perspective of experts in VE involved in both the design, development and implementation of E+ VE projects. Panelists will critically reflect on how in-depth VE activities have been planned, along with challenges and opportunities encountered so as to share insights for future initiatives. After briefly introducing each project represented in the panel (ClivEx, CVEinAI, DigiTREE, Una-VEx, Virtu Peace), we will discuss how VE projects can help to challenge and interrogate the status quo in approaches to Internationalisation at Home in EU contexts and beyond, as well as contribute to strengthening collaboration across VE projects. The guiding questions for the panel are as follows:

#### PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH and IMPACT

1. How do Erasmus+ VE projects encourage pedagogically robust and impactful virtual exchanges across the regions? Which are the limitations?
2. How do you measure the impact of your Virtual Exchange activities and does this contribute to the continuous improvement of your VE activities?
3. What is the evidence of the impact of Erasmus+ VE projects on students, educators and institutions?

#### CHALLENGES

1. What trade-offs have you encountered between available resources and pedagogical quality?
2. What have been the main challenges in the Erasmus+ VE projects implementation? (e.g. administrative, technical, pedagogical, epistemological/knowledge ecologies, partnership-related)

#### OPPORTUNITIES

1. How could Erasmus+ VE projects be improved to deliver more impactful and qualitative VE projects?
2. What unexpected opportunities emerged during implementation which could inspire future practice?

#### FUTURE DIRECTIONS

1. What would make future initiatives more inclusive and impactful?
2. How can VE projects work more effectively together to strengthen the VE ecosystem in Europe and beyond?

Keith Bowen & Nael Alami

*Virtual Exchange, Virtual Reality, and Conversational AI in Global Health Courses: Building Empathy and Understanding in Humanitarian Response*

In this workshop, our team of global researchers will guide participants through a hands-on exploration of Confronting the Refugee Crisis, an open-source platform that connects students of global health from around the world to study and help solve problems for refugees. The platform leverages Virtual Exchange, Virtual Reality, and Conversational AI to achieve measurable educational outcomes, while drawing on advanced technological and methodological strategies to mitigate risks. After a brief introduction to the project's history, published findings, and current trajectory, participants will join small groups to log into the course and experience its VR+AI simulations in flatscreen mode on our OpenEdX platform, while working with facilitators who will circulate around the room to share the VR+AI simulations on our MetaQuest headsets, which add an immersive character to the experience that learners find engaging and powerful. Participants will be invited to discuss several relevant topics, including use of realistic Virtual Reality immersion to foster a sense of empathy with refugees and sense of urgency to address problems at refugee sites, use of Large Language Models and Conversational AI to integrate detailed assessments of conditions at specific refugee sites with thousands of pages of published best practices to provide immediate scaffolded guidance, and use of Virtual Exchange to connect students from both high- and low-income countries to ensure multiplicity of perspectives in collaborative problem solving. Central to the discussions will be the ethics of working with vulnerable populations and strategies for mitigating risks, including raising accuracy and reducing biases through new techniques in content moderation and development of sustainable partnership models to reduce digital divides. Participants will be invited to join a research study on multiple campuses to gather data on the affordances of Virtual Exchange, Virtual Reality, and Conversational AI to advance educational outcomes, while effectively mitigating risks.

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## Strand 14: Research and Evaluation in VE

Nada Nasr, Samar Bouzeineddine, Eman Sweidan, Fatima Halwani & Bachir Attallah

### *The Impact of Virtual Exchange on Intercultural Sensitivity Among Lebanese Undergraduate Students*

As higher education adjusts to the quick changes in society and technology, Virtual Exchange (VE) has become an inclusive and revolutionary pedagogy that fosters intercultural competency, empathy, and global awareness. This study examines the impact of VE participation on the development of intercultural sensitivity among undergraduate students at a private university in Lebanon. It hypothesizes that students who are engaged in VE courses exhibit greater intercultural sensitivity than their peers without such experiences. Adopting a quantitative, cross-sectional design, the study utilizes a validated instrument to measure various dimensions of intercultural sensitivity: interaction engagement, respect for cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, and interaction attentiveness. Data will be collected through an online self-administered questionnaire distributed to approximately 200 undergraduate Lebanese students recruited via convenience sampling within a Lebanese private university. This study follows a comparative approach between two groups. Both groups, VE and non-VE participants, share similar demographic and academic profiles. Statistical analyses conducted in SPSS will test group differences and explore associations between demographic variables and intercultural sensitivity dimensions. The findings are expected to contribute empirical evidence on the role of VE in fostering inclusive internationalization and to inform institutional strategies that promote intercultural responsive access to global learning opportunities in higher education.

Daniele Polizio & Valentina Schettino

### *Reducing gaps through Virtual Exchanges in German as a Foreign Language. A cooperation between pre-service German teachers in Vienna and German learners in Salerno*

Virtual Exchanges (VE) have proven to be highly beneficial in the field of German as a Foreign Language (for an overview, see Würffel & Schumacher, 2022). At the University of Vienna (Austria), the Master's program in German as a Foreign and Second Language has for several years included a course in which master's students participate in peer-based, non-hierarchical group videoconferences with German learners at partner universities outside the German-speaking world (Prikoszovits, 2022). In the summer semester of 2025, five students from the Master's program in German Studies at the University of Salerno (Italy) joined this cooperation for the first time. During three videoconferences, participants engaged in informal discussions on (inter)cultural topics that they jointly selected during the first online meeting. The Vienna students focused on developing interaction-promoting strategies and refining their teacher talk, while the Salerno students gained opportunities for spontaneous and informal (virtual) communication with competent German speakers. Drawing on online and offline observations by the two instructors (notes taken during the sessions and analysis of about two and a half hours of video and audio recordings), the talk will discuss observed benefits and challenges, as well as the potential use of the recordings for didactic activities. The material can serve, on the one hand, as a resource for pre-service teachers of German to reflect on teacher talk, feedback, and interaction strategies, and on the other hand, as input for German learners abroad to analyze linguistic aspects such as pronunciation, sentence construction or lexical issues.

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Lara Thumm

### *Exploring the Long-Term Impact of Virtual Exchange on Teachers' Professional Development: Insights from the*

## VALIANT Project

The integration of digital and sustainable approaches in education necessitates innovations that transcend traditional classroom boundaries. Virtual exchange (VE) offers a compelling solution, fostering global collaboration and professional growth among educators (O'Dowd, 2021). This study examines the long-term impact of participation in the VALIANT Project (Virtual Innovation and Support Networks for Teachers), an Erasmus initiative that connected educators across Europe through VE. Focusing on teachers' professional development, this research utilizes qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews with former VALIANT participants. Preliminary findings align with those documented in the existing body of literature and reveal that engagement in VE not only enhances digital competencies and intercultural communication skills but also contributes to broader pedagogical shifts (Helm, 2015). Participants reported increased confidence in implementing collaborative, student-centred teaching methods and greater awareness of sustainability practices in education (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2018). Moreover, the data suggests that VE experiences foster enduring professional networks, which continue to support teachers in addressing global educational challenges (Lewis & O'Dowd, 2020). This presentation will provide an overview of the study, key themes emerging from the data, and examples of participants' transformative experiences. The findings underscore the potential of VE as a sustainable model for professional development, with implications for policy and practice in teacher education. By highlighting the benefits of VE, this research contributes to the growing discourse on digital transformation and new technological innovations in education.

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Cristina Pascual Aibar & Beatriz Cabrera Fernández

### *The Impact of Virtual Exchange on the Oral Performance of B1 Learners of Spanish as a Foreign Language*

Following structural changes in the BA European Languages and Cultures (University of Groningen, The Netherlands) curriculum—particularly in the Spanish Proficiency courses—the teaching team sought new ways to enhance students' oral production. In this context, three virtual exchange models have been progressively implemented and refined since 2021. This presentation examines the impact of the B1-level virtual exchange on students' oral performance. After observing students' positive perceptions of the effectiveness of this project for language development, the lecturers sought to determine whether these perceptions were reflected in measurable learning outcomes. To this end, the oral performance of two groups of B1 students enrolled in a one-semester course was compared: one that participated in the virtual exchange and another that did not. The analysis draws on the final oral mark and the scores of the rubric components used for its assessment, with approximately 100 students per group. The results will present a comparison of both groups in both holistic performance and specific analytical criteria, including vocabulary range, coherence, fluency, accuracy, and interaction. These findings will contribute to a better understanding of the role of virtual exchange in improving oral proficiency at the intermediate level.

Marta Aguilar-Pérez, Elisabet Arnó-Màcià, Karen Fleischhauer, Björn Kjellgren, Katrin Köppl & Balbina Moncada

## *Mapping Intercultural Communicative Competence in Engineering Virtual Exchange: A Systematic Analysis of BIP and COIL*

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programs (BIPs) are growing in engineering education to foster international online and blended collaboration (Rubin & Guth, 2022; Potolia, & Derivry-Plard, 2023). While such programmes provide instructors with venues to promote students' international, interdisciplinary collaboration, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC, Deardoff, 2017) is rarely addressed systematically, but is rather expected to develop incidentally as a result of having culturally diverse students in the same course. This empirical study examines the extent to which ICC is addressed in engineering virtual exchange programs within the network of T.I.M.E. (Top International Managers in Engineering) universities—over 50 universities in about 40 countries from all over the world. Using mixed-methods analyses, we mapped the public websites of all T.I.M.E. partner universities and identified those universities with BIPs and COILs. This first analysis revealed that BIPs have much greater visibility than COIL. Syllabi were coded for explicit ICC contents and learning outcomes as well as for the mention of (inter)culturality in the promotional course materials. Preliminary findings point to a fuzzy view of ICC mainly based on students' experience, cultural exchange and bonding. BIPs are often presented as a taster for other international experiences, while very few courses feature explicit ICC contents in their syllabi. Course documents and websites also mention the benefit of collaborating with culturally diverse students and practising English as a lingua franca. In addition to the mapping and survey analysis, survey data were collected from engineering instructors involved in BIP/COIL to explore their awareness of and approach to ICC. Initial findings aim to inform the development of a research-based ICC framework specifically adapted for engineering virtual environments, addressing the critical need for systematic ICC development in STEM internationalization efforts.

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## Strand 15: Research and Evaluation in VE

Emily Kraus

### *Centering Student Voices in Virtual Global Spaces*

The Global Conversations (GC) program is a dynamic and interactive initiative launched and coordinated by DePaul University in collaboration with partner institutions around the world. The GCs are innovative virtual sessions in which students from around the world dialogue on interdisciplinary, global issues. The GC program was created in March-May 2020 in response to the COVID pandemic. Since inception, over 4,400 students from 6 continents have participated in GCs, co-facilitated by international faculty teams from 79 institutions. Initially, the entire series centered on how students were experiencing the pandemic in various areas of their lives; their universities, their jobs, their relationships, and their physical and mental health. They also discussed with their peers how a global pandemic impacted every sector of the world, such as education, climate change, tourism, and how it was most devastating to humans living on the margins. Over the last five years the initiative has evolved and grown substantially. The GC topics are no longer exclusively focused on the pandemic and instead include a variety of global issues such as "Voices of Diversity: Navigating Multilingualism and Social Justice," "Addressing Technological and Other Challenges Students Face in Higher Education," and "Visions of 'Democracy' under Stress." With each round students and faculty from more countries are made aware of the initiative and participate. The ingenuity of the GC program is that it is low cost, accessible to students with internet and computer access, and therefore provides an immediate entry into the virtual, global world. The GCs invite students to learn from the perspectives and experiences of others across national, linguistic and cultural lines. This sparks an interest in international education and for further global connections. Additionally, the faculty members who participate often develop professional connections as well, which can lead to VE collaborations and professional scholarship.

Arsen Cenaj

### *Understanding Student Teachers' Perspectives on Virtual Exchange in French Higher Education*

Virtual Exchanges (VE) are promoted in European universities as an alternative to physical mobility, aligning well with the European Union's current priorities for accessibility and inclusion in higher education (Vriens et al. 2010, Krejtz et al. 2025). In France, many institutions and universities now offer their students the opportunity to participate in VEs (Claeys, H. 2025). However, since the concept of VE is a relatively new practice, it is uncertain and misunderstood among students. This presentation will share how French university student teachers perceive VE and what motivates their decision to engage or not. The research combines qualitative and quantitative methods by gathering data from a questionnaire, focus groups with diamond ranking exercises and case scenarios, and semi-structured interviews with both students and administrative facilitators involved in the internalisation process to measure perceptions and motivation. Through this analysis, we identified patterns of motivation, hesitation, and perceived value. Findings reveal a preference among many students for hybrid mobility, combining online and physical components, due to perceived limits of virtual interaction in building intercultural connections. However, several participants recognise VE as a more inclusive and accessible option for those students who face financial or logistical barriers to mobility. This research concludes with recommendations for institutions to encourage students to participate in VE.

Romée Jager, Alexander Frame & Lotta Kokkonen

### *"It was like we saw a TV show or something": Students' perspectives on the online mobility phase in Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes*

This presentation builds principally on empirical research carried out for the first presenter's PhD in communication studies, examining the potential of Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes to enhance students' intercultural communication competence within the broader landscape of higher education internationalisation. Drawing on participant observation in four BIPs carried out in 2023 and 2024, as well as interviews and focus groups with participants and organisers, the presentation explores (i) how BIPs are perceived as an implicit means of enhancing students' intercultural competence through international encounters, (ii) the differing importance placed on the online

mobility phase compared to the physical mobility phase, and (iii) how these dynamics shape students' experiences of BIPs. Although the four BIPs included in this study address a variety of learning themes rather than explicitly focusing on linguistic or cultural questions, the research situates them within universities' broader efforts to promote Internationalisation at Home (Beelen & Jones, 2015) and/or internationalisation of the curriculum (Leask, 2015). In this context, the presentation considers the extent to which such programmes may contribute to the development of 'Multilingual and Intercultural Communication Competence' (cf. Kokkonen & Natri, 2024), critically reflecting on the implicit discourse that intercultural encounters within BIPs naturally foster such outcomes.

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Gabriella Horváth-Csikós

### *Best practices in designing VE Projects - results of a Hungarian-Turkish VE Project*

Before my abstract you can see the possible 4 topics we are about to deal with in the spring semester with our students. I have already carried out a successful VE project with University of Sfax, Tunisia and Izmir Democracy University. In the next semester I will continue to work with Izmir Democracy University. We are going to decide on the topic with the Hungarian and Turkish students as soon as the second semester starts. The possible topics are:

1. Corporate Image and Brand Trust on Social Media
2. Crisis Communication: Natural Disasters, Economic Instability, and Political Crises
3. The Influencer Economy and Digital Consumer Culture
4. Gender and Media Representations

#### Abstract

The Virtual Exchange (VE) project is a collaborative initiative implemented by two partner institutions: Budapest University of Economics and Business (Hungary) and Izmir Democracy University (Turkey). The project aims to create an international, interactive learning environment where students can develop intercultural competence through meaningful and structured online collaboration. The primary objective of the VE project is to provide students with opportunities for intercultural and interactional development by engaging them in jointly performed tasks with peers from different cultural backgrounds. These collaborative activities are designed to encourage authentic communication, foster curiosity, and strengthen students' ability to navigate cultural differences. Through this experiential learning process, participants gain international exposure without the need for physical mobility, making the project accessible and inclusive. A further aim is to support global awareness, mutual understanding, and digital literacy. As students work together in diverse teams, they enhance essential employability skills such as digital competence, teamwork, problem-solving, collaboration, and both verbal and written communication in a foreign language. These skills are increasingly important in a globalised labour market where virtual cooperation and intercultural interaction have become integral to professional practice. A distinctive feature of the project is its emphasis on designing tasks that

require students to step outside their immediate environments—beyond classrooms or homes—to collect information, observe real-life contexts, and engage with their local communities. This approach allows students to gain insights that cannot be obtained merely from online searches or textbooks. It also helps them connect theory with practice, encouraging critical thinking, cultural curiosity, and a deeper understanding of everyday realities in different countries.

Margarita Vinagre, Marta Giralt & Ciara Wigham

### *Socio-emotional engagement in VE: Exploring lingua franca and L1-L2 interactions*

EVE-SFI is a higher-education virtual exchange (VE) that involves collaboration among students from three universities in three countries to develop the oral interaction skills of foreign language undergraduates. Over six weeks, student dyads interact via videoconferencing to discuss three topics and their interactions, based on suggested questions, take place in either English as a lingua franca (ELF, Spain-France) or in English and Spanish (L1 and L2, Spain-Ireland). As a final task, students submit a self-reflection video to assess what they have learned during the VE. This study discusses the extent to which students' interactions (n=60) and self-reflection videos (n=20) reflect any differences regarding the socio-emotional response of students in the two groups (lingua franca/ L1-L2). Using LIWC sentiment analysis, interactions were quantitatively analysed for word count, affect and emotion (positive and negative), cognitive and social processes, and anxiety. Self-reflection videos were transcribed and qualitatively analysed following a content analysis approach. Findings show that there is an increase in the results for word count, affect, positive emotion and social process, and a decrease in the results for negative emotion and anxiety in the results of task 3 when compared to those of task 1, which would indicate an inverse correspondence of these categories over time (similar to findings by Nissen et al., 2024). Other findings suggest that, although students who used ELF had higher levels of proficiency in the L2, it was students who used the L1- L2 that showed a higher increase in affect, positive emotion, social, and cognitive processes despite having lower levels of competence in the L2. Since this increase was present both in the L1 and the L2, this finding would suggest that students used the L1 as a compensation communication strategy and that its use does not hinder the production of socio-emotional responses in the L2.

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## Strand 16: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Fabian Kregel & Carola Surkamp

### *Co-Constructing Knowledge with Literary Texts: (Re-)Discovering Third Places in Virtual Exchange*

Utilizing literary texts as learning material in VE is not a new phenomenon. For example, Müller-Hartmann (1999) discussed the merits of young adult literature in telecollaborative projects between English learners in secondary education. Consistent with the notion of the “third place” (Kramsch 1994), findings suggest that discussing literary texts in VE can provide rich opportunities for cultural learning. By engaging with the narrative, learners can negotiate meanings and develop empathy and solidarity – e.g., by contrasting interpretations of story events or comparing if they sympathize or identify with the same characters. Beyond VE, research on the role of literary texts in language teaching gestures towards potential for transformative learning, e.g. in compliance with goals of global education and education for sustainable development (Bartosch 2021, Surkamp 2022). Literary texts can make complex issues accessible, craft fictional worlds as cautionary tales, and function as resources to spark reflexivity and coordination of perspectives. Literature also provides opportunities to surface and interrogate long-held beliefs and values (Genetsch 2022). Its so-called ‘representative function’ (Stellvertreterfunktion) is helpful in this regard: literature enables learners to incorporate own experiences and emotions into their engagement with difficult topics. By talking about fictional characters, they do not have to reveal anything about themselves. In times of increasing polarization and violent conflicts, this presentation therefore revisits the role of literary texts and how they may support critical VE (Hauck 2023). We explore how literature may offer fertile ground for fostering ambiguity tolerance and controversial discussions in safer/braver spaces (Reljanovic Glimäng 2022, Kregel 2025). We discuss a particular text – Susan Abulhawa’s *Mornings in Jenin* – and selected affordances for co-construction of knowledge processes in the context of the contested discourse around Palestine/Israel. Findings will be based on practical experiences and preliminary results of qualitative research from projects with partners in Germany, Israel/Palestine, and Türkiye.

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Rob Kuipers & Reinout Klamer

### *COILectiVE NL*

In recent years, the Netherlands has made significant progress in Collaborative Online International Learning and Virtual Exchange (COIL VE). This growth was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, the national Virtual Collaboration subsidy (VIS) from the Ministry of Education and Science (ending in 2025), and an increasing focus on inclusion, digitalisation, and sustainability in education. Despite this momentum, many initiatives remain fragmented and small-scale. To address this collectively, COILectiVE NL was founded. During this session, we will introduce COILectiVE NL—a national initiative uniting Dutch vocational and higher education institutions, in collaboration with Nuffic, to promote cooperation, knowledge exchange, and quality enhancement in COIL VE. We will share our activities, results, and shared vision for advancing COIL VE, Internationalisation at Home, and links with broader frameworks such as the European University Alliances. The presentation will showcase the outcomes of our first year, including the establishment of a governance structure, the creation of a shared national vision, and the development of professional learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities such as webinars and workshops. We will also discuss our approach to fostering quality, equitable partnerships, and the sustainable implementation of COIL VE, as well as the thematic streams shaping our future work. COILectiVE NL distinguishes itself through cross-sectoral collaboration between vocational and higher education and active engagement with other (international) COIL VE networks. This session will interest academics, researchers, and institutional leaders seeking to learn more about embedding COIL VE within broader internationalisation strategies and connecting with a vibrant and growing community of COIL VE practitioners in the Netherlands and beyond.

Marina Orsini-Jones

### *Female Voices in the Third Space Toolkit - a South-North COIL-VE Knowledge-Sharing Workshop*

In this workshop participants will first of all be introduced to the British Academy/Leverhulme-funded project Female Voices in the Third Space: Researching Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in South-North Collaborative Online International Learning-Virtual Exchange and the Toolkit that emerged from the interviews with academic female staff who had engaged with COIL-VE who were located in four different continents. The project investigates the evolving field of COIL-VE in Higher Education (HE) through a Global South-North research lens that is distinctive for its focus on female voices. We use COIL and VE as equivalent terms in this workshop. Drawing from the definition of VE from the EVOLVE project, we see COIL-VE is a pedagogical approach, underpinned 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. Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology”. We also propose that COIL-VE is a challenging, fertile, fluid and liminal Third Space, that can foster intercultural dialogue and trigger transformational learning experiences. During the workshop, participants will work in pairs/groups and will be invited to comment on the Toolkit, knowledge-share on their own COIL-VE experiences and lessons learnt. The workshop aims at supporting all COIL-VE practitioners and researchers to reflect further on the values and capitals that can be developed in the COIL-VE fluid Third Space, particularly the COIL-VE project involves a South-North partnership. The transformational features of COIL-VE in terms of value-added for continuous development as Higher Education professionals committed to equality, diversity and inclusion will also be explored and discussed.

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## Strand 17: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Björn Kjellgren & Sophie Bélanger

### *The Virtual Work Behind Virtual Exchange: Insights from a Cross-institutional Global Virtual Team*

Virtual Exchange (VE) scholarship has tended to foreground student-facing activities, yet the feasibility and coherence of VE rely equally on the collaborative work of the transnational teams who design and sustain it. This paper presents an analytically grounded account of five years of virtual collaboration within the Multilingualism and Multiculturalism team of a European University Alliance. Consisting of educators, administrative staff and researchers from nine universities, the group has planned and delivered VE-related initiatives including, virtual courses, intercultural competence modules, an online language café and tandem programmes. By examining the collaborative processes underpinning these activities, the paper offers insights into the conditions necessary for effective VE work across institutions. Drawing on participant observation and shared digital artefacts, the study describes how the group developed the interpersonal, coordination, and technological competences associated with global virtual teamwork through routine navigation of structural constraints characteristic of European University Alliances, e.g., divergent academic calendars, heterogeneous institutional routines, uneven resource allocations, and team membership determined externally rather than selected for project needs. In response, the group established shared conceptual foundations, created norms for synchronous and asynchronous collaboration, engaged in deliberate metacommunication to negotiate expectations, and cultivated digital workflows to maintain continuity despite fluctuating availability. Over time, this work, while building on previous competencies, also strengthened members' digital communication and collaboration literacies. The analysis demonstrates how such collaborative practices, often invisible in VE reporting, shape the inclusiveness, sustainability, and pedagogical quality of VE initiatives. By situating a case examining backstage collaborative practices within the broader VE discourse, the paper argues that the professional learning embedded in cross-institutional virtual collaboration is a critical component of VE ecosystems. Insights into how teams build and sustain these competencies can inform a transferable framework for institutions seeking to scale VE in ways that are both educationally meaningful and organisationally resilient.

Fabian Kregel, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng,, Mirjam Hauck, Nael H Alami, Yuliana Lavrysh & Kristina Katsos

### *Towards CVE for Trust- and Peacebuilding*

This workshop explores the potential of critical VE (CVE) to educate for peace through trust-building – as a response to violent conflicts and to contribute to an emerging focus on VE for the greater good. CVE has been framed as VE grounded in equity, diversity, inclusion and access (EDIA) principles (Hauck, 2023, 2025). We consider it an apt intervention for implementing pedagogies of peace, aiming at “more cooperative coexistence [...] by amplifying practices of compassion, tolerance, restorative justice, and global citizenship” (Kukulska Hulme et al., 2024, p. 13). CVE has been put forward to foster critical intercultural and global awareness, i.e. Global Citizenship education (GCE) as promoted by scholars who want us to challenge hegemonic discourses and perpetuation of colonial ideologies in education and encourage us “to think otherwise” (Andreotti, 2006, p. 7). Thus, CVE can provide the backdrop for critical GCE aligned with Andreotti's (2006; 2014) reasoning. We see trust- and peace-building as core components of critical GCE with efforts supporting students in entering possibly disruptive and disorienting “brave spaces” where the aim is mediation, solidarity, and transformation (Reljanovic Glimäng, 2022). We discuss how proactive listening and negotiation of meaning processes – while striving to maintain ambiguity tolerance –, can support trusting relationships (Kregel, 2025, forthcoming). Recent experimental evidence from a USA–UAE COIL demonstrates that VE can reshape social trust and engagement in nuanced ways, underscoring the importance of intentionally facilitated CVE for peace-oriented educational outcomes (Benstead et al., 2025). We will discuss (1) how VE practitioners can prepare for critical exchanges in times of violent conflict to support peacebuilding through rapport building and (2) how we can facilitate ongoing projects through trauma-informed principles when difficulties arise. Supplemental resources will include reflections from students in Ukraine, Germany, and Israel/Palestine and insights from scholars working across Cypriot borders.

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## Strand 18: Virtual Exchange, COIL and Internationalization

Teklu Urgessa & Worku Jifara

### *The Transformative Convergence of Artificial Intelligence and Virtual Exchange: A Literature Review*

This literature review explores the transformative convergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Virtual Exchange (VE), envisioning a future of borderless classrooms where students from diverse global locations collaborate as a single team. VE uses technology to bridge geographical and digital divides, fostering global citizenship. The review posits that AI is not merely a disruptive tool but a potential partner that can deepen and enrich these global connections. The convergence is presented as a two-way, symbiotic relationship. On one hand, AI enhances VE by managing the logistics of international collaboration, personalizing learning journeys, and powering immersive virtual worlds for student interaction. On the other hand, the established framework of VE built on critical thinking, dialogue, and cross-cultural understanding provides an ideal context for students to ethically question and engage with AI itself. This cultivates vital skills for a diverse, AI-driven world. This integration signifies more than just new tools; it represents a fundamental shift in the global learning ecosystem. The review maps the current landscape, including AI-powered collaboration and new approaches to for intercultural dialogue and critical thinking. It also looks forward to a future shaped by immersive AI and spatial computing, where virtual interactions feel as dynamic as in-person encounters. Crucially, the authors propose a practical framework to guide this evolution, ensuring that the classrooms of the future are built with a strong focus on sound pedagogy, ethics, and genuine human connection and oversight. The ultimate goal is to harness the relational core of VE alongside the transformative potential of AI, preparing students not only to navigate a globalized world but to collaboratively shape its future.

Jos Beelen & Reinout Klamer

### *Using story circles to capture COIL-VE experiences: A study from The Hague University of Applied Sciences, Coventry University and the University of the Free State*

How do students truly experience intercultural learning in COIL, and how do these moments shape their career readiness? Traditional surveys often miss the nuanced, personal narratives that reveal transformational learning. This presentation shares preliminary results from a unique multi-institutional study using story circles—a participatory methodology that creates shared spaces for deep reflection. Supervised by faculty and supported by researchers, three student- and early career researchers at three universities deployed story circles for this study. Story circles brought together small groups of students to reflect on their COIL experience through several rounds of storytelling and peer responses. These rounds progressed from personal backgrounds to memorable COIL experiences, intercultural sensitivity, and perceived future careers. Students explored how COIL practices could help them to build their future set of transversal skills. The Hague UAS shares this exploratory research to examine the link between learning experiences, transformational learning, and employability. We will introduce the study design, share key findings, and discuss how this student-centered research approach fits into the wider framework connecting virtual exchange, internationalization at home, and career readiness—demonstrating that the stories students tell about their COIL experiences may be just as valuable as the experiences themselves.

Megan Mocko, Margeaux Johnson, Monijia Amani & Amy Parziale

### *Investigating Intercultural Communication through presenting and feedback: A mixed method study of virtual exchange in statistics courses*

Students, even those focused on quantitative fields such as statistics, will need to be able to present data and to give feedback to colleagues in their careers. Communication is a vitally important part of teaching statistics. In a previous study, students mentioned that one of the challenges they had was presenting data and giving feedback to others in a different culture. This study examines communication challenges during a four-part asynchronous virtual exchange involving over 1,000 students from six countries. Activities include an icebreaker, data analysis, an initial verbal

presentation, peer feedback, and a final presentation. The purpose of this study is to be understand the challenges that these students face and to explore students' intercultural attitudes, skills, and knowledge for intercultural communication in a virtual exchange of undergraduates in a statistics course. This mixed-method explanatory sequential design (quant -> QUAL) will explore intercultural communication. During the Spring 2026 semester, students will be asked to complete the Personal Report of Intercultural Communication Apprehension (PRICA), self-perceived communication competence (SPCC), and willingness to communicate (WTC). Then 6 - 12 students will be selected based on the purposeful sampling of their intercultural communication abilities: two students from each level, low, moderate, and high intercultural competencies. Summary statistics from the surveys will be presented, along with the results of the thematic analysis of the interviews. These findings will help to inform curriculum changes in the COIL experience to improve students' intercultural communication.

Paula Belló, Koritza Subero Perez & Mariana Vargas Aignasse

### *Curriculum Integration and Accreditation of Virtual Exchange: A COIL-Based Model for Sustainable and Internationalized Teacher Education Programs*

As universities navigate rapidly changing technological, environmental, and socio-political contexts, integrating Virtual Exchange (VE) into degree programs has become essential to cultivating inclusive, globally oriented, and sustainable educational pathways. This presentation examines the curricular integration and formal accreditation of VE within teacher education programs, arguing that institutional recognition is a key factor in ensuring the long-term sustainability and pedagogical impact of these initiatives. Grounded in a COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) design implemented in an undergraduate English teacher education program, the study highlights how VE can strengthen the internationalization of the curriculum, promote intercultural understanding, and support the development of future educators capable of working in diverse and interconnected learning environments. Evidence from student reflections, performance-based tasks, and faculty experiences demonstrates that accredited VE fosters deeper engagement, clearer learning trajectories, and increased commitment from both students and instructors. The presentation argues that VE cannot remain an isolated or peripheral activity: its full potential is realized when embedded in curriculum structures, evaluated through transparent criteria, and recognized as a meaningful component of degree progression. By positioning VE as an accredited pedagogical practice, institutions can advance sustainable education, extend equitable access to global learning, and prepare teachers to navigate a world marked by complexity, diversity, and rapid change.

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## Strand 19: Research and Evaluation in VE

Hiba Ibrahim

### *Reframing Intercultural Competence in Virtual Exchange: Relational Dynamics and Emerging Practices*

Virtual exchange (VE) has enabled geographically dispersed learners of English as an Additional/Second Language (EAL/ESL) to collaborate in developing intercultural competence (IC) (O'Dowd, 2011). However, recurring applications of IC constructs that overlook technology-mediated contexts and social practices common in VE restrict exploration of newly emerging practices of IC (Thorne, 2016) and the 'simplicity' of the VE environment (Dervin, 2016). Likewise, continued centering of the "native speaker" in VE problematizes students' essentialist engagement with so-called "authentic cultural representations" (O'Dowd, 2021). There is therefore an urgent need for research exploring how students navigate IC in English as a lingua franca (ELF) VE environment. This study adopts an exploratory qualitative design, combining digital ethnography (Hine, 2015) with a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2014), to examine the interculturality (Dervin, 2016) experiences of EAL/ESL university students in a VE between Canada and Jordan. It investigates what experiences shape students' strategies for engaging with IC in small groups, what factors influence their engagement, and how these experiences contribute to evolving epistemologies of IC in technology-mediated language learning. Data sources included a pre-study survey, semi-structured interviews with stimulated recall (Gass & Mackey, 2022), and observations of participants' multimodal interactions and artifacts. Interpretive thematic analysis (Clarke et al., 2015) and multimodal discourse analysis (Kress, 2010) were used for within- and cross-case analysis. Findings show that students' IC strategies were co-constructed through relational dynamics shaped by the VE context. Participants used storytelling, mentorship, linguistic adaptation, politeness, let-it-pass strategies, and distributed leadership to navigate tasks. These were influenced by pedagogical choices, learner identities and evolving experiences, ELF as a shared communicative ground, and the digital affordances of VE tools. While some intercultural traits aligned with conventional IC models, the findings challenge static views of cultural knowledge. Learners co-constructed diverse cultures of learning where IC emerged as fluid, emotional, and context dependent. The study contributes to VE scholarship by emphasizing a shift from individual to relational understandings of interculturality in VE and wider TMLL environments. It offers implications for designing equitable, emotionally aware VE experiences and extending IC frameworks to better reflect the complexities of digital intercultural communication.

Feihong Wang, Gerardo Lopez Diaz & Emmanuelle Awad

### *When A Big Online Class Meets A Small In-Person Class: Impact of a Virtual Exchange Project on US Psychology Students with Matched Virtual Exchange Partners vs. Self-identified Virtual Exchange Partner*

Global experiences contribute to students learning success such as better GPA and higher likelihood of being retained and graduate eventually (Lee et al., 2022). Virtual exchange (VE) programs are effective in boosting students' intercultural competency without financial or logistic constraints. A VE collaboration was established in Spring 2025 between a large US online Developmental Psychology (DP) class and a small Lebanon in-person DP class in which each UF students conducted a VE snapshot writing project to reflect on a developmental topic and exchange with their VE partner(s) virtually for further cultural perspectives on the chosen topic with both empirical and pictorial evidence. Since learning about different cultural norms on human development is part of the curriculum, it is unknown if the VE project further boosted students' intercultural competency. Also, due to class size difference, US students either partnered with matched Lebanese students or self-identified partners of college students of different cultural and language backgrounds (either from the same online class or from outside of both classes). Whether the VE impact would differ among students with matched Lebanese partners vs. self-identified partners from the same class vs. those from outside of both classes is still a question. 218 Participating students responded to the International Critical Thinking and International Communication Attitudes and Beliefs Survey (University of Florida, 2014) before and after the VE project. Analysis suggests a significant positive VE impact with increased international critical thinking and communication attitudes and beliefs in students. Further group comparisons did not find significant differences to the most part, suggesting having self-identified VE partners of different cultural and/or language background may be a viable solution with there is a short of VE partners from an international classroom of smaller size in a VE collaboration. Implication and future direction of this research will be discussed.

Viktoriia Drobotun

### *Assessing Collaborative Academic Writing in a COIL-Mediated International Learning Environment*

The proliferation of distance learning technologies has created favourable conditions for optimizing and enhancing educational processes, facilitating the emergence of a new form of learning — Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). COIL's increasing prominence stems from its capacity to enable synchronous learning among participants from diverse educational institutions, countries, and cultural backgrounds. This research evaluates the effectiveness of assignment design and assessment rubrics for collaborative academic writing within a COIL initiative involving 28 participants: 10 third-year students doing the course of English for Cross-Cultural Communication, Theory and Methodology of Teaching Ukrainian Language and Literature and Foreign Language in Basic Secondary School from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine and 18 5th-year students, Double Degree in Business and Law, Universitat Jaume I, Spain. Situated within the framework of global educational cooperation, this research examines the development of collaborative academic writing skills through the thematic exploration of Greenwashing. The COIL sessions enabled students to critically analyze corporate environmental misrepresentation while simultaneously enhancing their writing proficiency through structured collaborative activities. The research objectives included (1) developing a comprehensive set of tasks, exercises, and an appropriate COIL model to foster academic writing competence in an international collaborative online environment and (2) establishing methodologies and assessment criteria to evaluate the development of academic writing skills under these conditions. Throughout the COIL sessions, students engaged in integrated reading, speaking, and writing exercises, complemented by peer review activities. Pre- and post-assessments quantified writing improvements, while post-questionnaires captured qualitative data on students' experiences and perceptions. Results revealed significant improvements in students' abilities to structure arguments coherently, employ appropriate academic registers, and demonstrate critical thinking within collaborative writing contexts. Participants reported increased confidence in their writing capabilities. Nevertheless, challenges such as language barriers and differing levels of writing proficiency were identified, highlighting areas for additional support and curriculum refinement. In conclusion, this research demonstrates the effectiveness of COIL in fostering collaborative academic writing skills and cross-cultural communication competence. The findings emphasize the value of integrating international collaboration into writing curricula to provide students with authentic learning experiences that extend beyond traditional classroom settings.

Bee Gan, Anna Maria DiBetta & Cinnamon Bennett

### *Are We There Yet? Testing Our Journey to Continuous Global Competence*

This practical report explores the continuous development of global and digital skills through the integration of Virtual Exchange (VE) activities across undergraduate degree programmes at Sheffield Hallam University. Building on our “Global Learning for All” framework, we examine how embedding VE at multiple points in the curriculum—foundation, applied practice, and leadership—enables sustained, scaffolded growth in students’ intercultural and digital competencies. Central to our approach is involving students directly in co-designing the VE activities. Through workshops and feedback cycles, we aimed to ensure VE projects reflect students’ interests, identities, and career aspirations while driving authentic engagement. We report on our structured evaluation process: collecting longitudinal data across cohorts, analysing changes in digital confidence and global awareness, and gathering qualitative reflections on student agency and relevance. We share challenges encountered, such as balancing institutional objectives with flexible, student-driven design and ensuring every student’s voice is heard in a large, diverse cohort. Key lessons highlight the importance of adaptability, open dialogue, and a willingness to revise the framework in response to real-time student input. Our findings reflect on what has worked, where iterations were required, and how student participation shaped the perceived value and outcomes of VE. This account provides actionable recommendations for educators seeking to embed VE sustainably: make student input central, utilise longitudinal assessment to guide practice, and view global skill-building as a continuous journey, rather than a one-off intervention. Our experience provides practical, tested insights for institutions committed to ensuring global and digital fluency for all.

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## Strand 20: VE and Teacher Education

Ingrid Hortin, Sirkka Iivakko & Cajsa Grenner

### *Embedding Virtual Exchange in the Curriculum: A Journey of Progression at Malmö University*

The development of intercultural understanding and global collaboration is a key aspect of sustainability, and the advancement of democracy is a long-term vision for Malmö University and correlates with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Magna Charta Universitatum. For the past seven years, our institution has been using Virtual Exchange (VE) as a didactic approach in our teacher training programs for elementary school teachers, providing authentic situations where our students are challenged to use intercultural strategies that will support them to teach in diverse, global classrooms. Currently, we have successfully embedded VE into the course curricula of the majority of our specialist English courses. Our focus now is to ensure a progression through the VE-experiences, deepening the students' intercultural competences. These competences encompass strategies for effective collaboration, negotiation of meaning, and completing tasks in a virtual, multicultural setting. The integration of both synchronous and asynchronous learning formats has allowed students to develop a range of communication strategies, deepening their understanding of cultural nuances while fostering personal relationships with peers from different backgrounds. Our approach includes synchronous "kick-off" meetings that model relationship-building techniques, helping students feel more confident in engaging with international peers and navigating collaborative tasks. This presentation shares our journey from the initial introduction of Virtual Exchange to its current implementation. Additionally, we will include our students' reflections on the impact of VE in their learning process. Furthermore, we will discuss the successful practices we have established, as well as the challenges we have overcome.

Maria Laura Angelini, Isabel Torrijosi & Rut Muñiz

### *Challenging Comfort Zones through Virtual Exchange: Lessons from an Eight-Year Simulation-Based Learning Initiative in Teacher Education*

This reflective account shares practical insights from an eight-year virtual exchange (VE) initiative coordinated by Spain, involving teacher education partners across Poland, Romania, the US, Austria, Canada, Norway, Tunisia, and Algeria. The project's web-based simulation platform connected participants and facilitators in cross-border simulations designed to foster meta-competence development—self-regulation, reflective judgment, and critical consciousness—in diverse educational contexts. Among the main implementation challenges were harmonising institutional calendars, managing different educational policy frameworks, and preparing facilitators to conduct intercultural, emotionally supportive debriefings, particularly across multiple languages and perspectives. Role-play within simulations—using profiles such as head of studies, pedagogue, and parent—triggered intense reflection, ethical dilemmas, and discomfort, often amplified by differing cultural norms and expectations. Key lessons learned include the necessity of robust facilitator training for intercultural and ethical reflection; the importance of scaffolded support when navigating discomfort zones; and the value of ongoing adaptation to maintain inclusion and engagement. The VE format broadened the authenticity and relevance of simulation challenges by enabling direct engagement with cultural, linguistic, and educational diversity, ultimately enhancing participants' empathy, resilience, and intercultural competence. Practical recommendations for future projects emphasise the importance of flexible frameworks, cross-cultural facilitator collaboration, and ethical guidelines for mediating discomfort constructively.

Müge Satar, Asuman Aşık, Yao Wang, Gamze Emir, Simin Li & Gonca Yangın Ekşi

### *Globally competent teaching in language teacher education: a virtual exchange between Türkiye and the UK*

Developing global competence in future language teachers is essential for fostering learners' ability to navigate diverse cultural, social, and communicative contexts. Global competence encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for engaging with global issues and intercultural encounters, and supports the cultivation of responsible, reflective, and communicatively capable global citizens (Deardorff, 2009). Building on the principles of the Globally Competent Teaching framework as articulated by Kerkhoff & Cloud (2020) which emphasises situated, integrated,

critical, and intercultural pedagogical orientations, this study explores how an eight-week Virtual Exchange (VE) between pre-service English language teachers in Türkiye and the UK contributed to their development as globally competent teachers. The VE design foregrounded collaborative, inquiry-based, and dialogic tasks; synchronous and asynchronous intercultural interaction; and structured reflection through e-portfolios. Participants engaged with authentic global issues, co-constructed lesson ideas, critically compared educational assumptions, and received guided support in connecting VE experiences to pedagogical applications. These design features enabled sustained intercultural contact, iterative meaning-making, and the application of global competence principles in teaching-related scenarios. Data collected through surveys, e-portfolios, and interviews indicate substantial growth in participants' globally competent teaching, including gains in intercultural awareness, critical literacy, and integration of global themes into instructional planning. Participants valued the VE's authenticity and its role in bridging theory and practice within the Global Teaching Model. However, the study also identified challenges. Participants noted difficulties such as uneven digital literacy, varying levels of engagement, logistical constraints across time zones, and the cognitive load involved in simultaneously managing collaboration, language use, and critical reflection. These challenges illustrate the need for institutional support, clear scaffolding, and sustained VE facilitation. This study demonstrates that well-designed virtual exchanges can provide an accessible, pedagogically robust means for cultivating globally competent teaching in language teacher education.

Elisabet Arnó-Macià & Sonia Carmen Munteanu

*Designing and implementing a transdisciplinary Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) from an LSP teacher perspective*

New initiatives in blended mobility, based on international collaborations such as Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programmes (BIP), call for the reappraisal of teaching and learning practices. Combining online and face-to-face learning, and often involving transnational student teams addressing societal-based challenges, BIPs lend themselves to transdisciplinary approaches. As effective communication becomes key to successful student team work, Languages for Specific Purposes (LSP) teachers have a central role in promoting intercultural communication, reflection and learner autonomy, while engaging in dialogue with specialists from different disciplines. This report focuses on the design and implementation of a transdisciplinary BIP that addresses challenges related to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), and that specifically focuses on the redesign of public spaces for accessibility, sustainability and inclusion. Specifically, it reports on the opportunities and challenges that these innovative real-life learning scenarios present for transdisciplinary blended collaboration. This paper will discuss aspects related to challenge-based approaches to teaching and learning in blended programmes, student recruitment and engagement, institutional barriers, assessment of complex projects at different universities, teacher opportunities and challenges in blended learning, as well as impact on internationalisation of higher education. Based on examples from BIP implementation, this paper will provide reflections on and lessons learned, focusing specifically on the design of the virtual and face-to-face stages, the integration of different disciplines, addressing intercultural competence and language mediation, and transdisciplinary approaches to assessment. Special attention will be paid to authentic multimodal and multilingual communication that emerges in students' collaborative projects. Practical guidelines will be offered for participants to engage in BIPs by expanding their collaborations with lecturers and students from different disciplines in collaborative projects, while at the same time, they reflect on and enhance their own professional development.

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## Strand 21: VE, COIL and Internationalization

Paulina Subiabre-Ubilla, Cajsa Grenner, Ingrid Hortin & Sirkka Ivakko

### *Shaping Teacher Identity Through Plurilingual Virtual Exchange: Preparing Educators for Future Classrooms*

As educational systems face increasing linguistic, social, and political complexity, preparing teachers to navigate plurilingual, and emotionally dynamic classrooms has become a central priority in teacher education. This study examines how participation in a plurilingual Virtual Exchange (VE) between pre-service teachers from Malmö University (Sweden) and Universidad de Talca (Chile) contributes to the development of teacher identity and fosters the interpersonal, technological, and intercultural competencies required in future classrooms. VE principles such as structured intercultural dialogue, and reciprocity are grounded in current scholarship about the pedagogical potential and challenges of VE in higher education (Fernández et al., 2022; O'Dowd, 2018; Sauro, 2022). These principles create an authentic learning environment where aspiring educators negotiate meaning, manage divergent expectations, and engage with peers across linguistic and cultural boundaries. To investigate these processes, a convergent parallel mixed-methods design is used. The quantitative component consists of a survey measuring participants' perceptions of intercultural sensitivity, emerging teacher identity, emotional preparedness for teaching, resilience, and perceived challenges in VE interactions. The qualitative component involves focus groups exploring students' VE experiences, emotional and interpersonal dynamics, strategies for coping with uncertainty, and perceived implications of VE for their future teaching practice. Quantitative analysis considers descriptive statistics, while qualitative analysis will follow thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Guided by two research questions, (1) How does participation in a plurilingual VE influence pre-service teachers' emerging sense of teacher identity and their perceptions of the competencies required for future classrooms? and (2) In what ways do VE-mediated interactions prepare pre-service teachers to address their future pupils' academic, social, and emotional needs in contexts marked by uncertainty, diversity, and evolving technologies?, this study positions VE as a key pathway for shaping resilient, reflective, and globally engaged teacher identities. The results aim to inform broader applications of VE principles in diverse educational settings.

Jon Rubin, Sara Pittarello, Veronica Rodriguez Luna & Henry Shepherd

### *COIL Virtual Exchange Research Initiatives Around the World*

In 2024, the organization COIL Connect for Virtual Exchange observed that while research in virtual exchange seemed to be expanding, there were only a few entities managing this workflow or assisting the practitioners, many of whom work without dedicated research funding. COIL Connect then formed a research steering committee and began outreach to gather researchers and those interested in better understanding where COIL VE research was going. This group has since held webinars and created an intake survey for those who wish to actively participate from which it has gathered over 160 respondents. We have formed five working groups to develop new research resources on the COIL Connect site and to explore specific research modalities. We are also developing an interactive portal for direct communication between researchers and those interested in our research outcomes. UNICollaboration has been a leader in this area for some years and has been dedicated to research through various initiatives and activities, including - among others - the Journal of Virtual Exchange, several special interest groups it hosts, the research webinar series, the biennial conference with a key focus on research developments in VE, and the multiple projects in which it has taken part. The LATAM COIL Network, created a research group in 2024, and has developed a call for papers based on presentations at the 4th LATAM COIL Network Conference. Seven proposals have been accepted and are currently in the final phase of author revisions. All three organizations wish to share their programs and plans with those attending the conference and to foreground other emerging regional, national, institutional, or organizational COIL VE research initiatives, whom we invite to join us at this session. Our goal is to enhance communication about worldwide VE research between all present and possible contributors.

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## Strand 22: Intercultural Communication, Equity and Inclusion

Noel Habashy

### *Cultural Humility in Action: Research, Practice, and Implications for Global Learning and Virtual Exchange*

How can you plan and implement more effective virtual exchange programs that provide better learning opportunities for all students? Cultural humility is a concept that is found in various bodies of scholarly literature, but until recently has been largely absent from the literature on global learning. The concept of cultural humility offers the opportunity for concepts, dispositions, and language to shift conventional paradigms related to global education into an ongoing process of lifelong learning. Researchers conducted a scoping analysis, an extensive and detailed meta-analysis of the entire literature on a concept, examining 1,938 scholarly publications that addressed the concept of cultural humility. This interactive workshop presents participants with the findings of a scoping analysis on cultural humility in global education. Presenters trace its emergence across disciplines, identify gaps in research and practice, and discuss the implications of cultural humility as a signature disposition for students, educators, researchers, and practitioners. However, beyond simply examining a review of literature, this active session engages participants in the concept of cultural humility and its role within global learning, examining places to incorporate the concept into their own scholarship and practice. This session will involve an inquiry-guided structure and small-group discussion. Through the use of inquiry-guided structure, participants will apply their experiences to a series of challenges. These challenges will guide our conversation and discussion, leading to breakout sessions in small groups. Research indicates that prioritizing cultural humility can lead to increased respect for others, a focus on lifelong learning, and more fruitful intercultural relationships. In an increasingly interconnected globe, cultural humility offers a meaningful framework to support substantive interactions between individuals, whether across the globe or down the street.

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## Strand 23: AI and Emerging Technologies in VE

Carol Lanham, Reinout Klamer, Ellen Shupe, Bee Gan, Alex Masardo

### *An AI Toolkit: Enhancing Collaborative Online International Learning with Artificial Intelligence*

As we navigate the evolving digital landscape, integrating Artificial Intelligence (AI) into Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) presents exciting opportunities for both educators and students (Zmire & Chen 2024; Richter & Langese, 2024). This 90-minute hands-on workshop will explore how AI can support collaborative learning across borders, promoting equity, inclusivity, and interdisciplinary engagement. We will begin with an overview of how AI can support innovation in COIL planning and automate administrative processes (Jiang et al, 2024). Participants will then engage with AI-driven tools that facilitate group formation, formative assessment, and cross-cultural understanding. (Martinez-Maldonado et al, 2023). This workshop will also explore the transformative potential of AI in overcoming logistical challenges, such as cultural and language barriers. This includes AI-based translation tools that can help students bridge linguistic gaps and AI-powered online platforms that offer access to live cultural experiences such as virtual visits or the creation of a metaverse (Selvi, 2024). Additionally, the workshop will include an exploration of key considerations for responsible AI use in COIL settings. These include data privacy, ethical challenges, academic integrity, and the readiness of institutions to adopt these technologies (Aprianto et al, 2024). We also will examine disparities in AI policies and access across different countries. Participants will then engage in an exercise designed to raise awareness of AI's potential to perpetuate biases.

By the end of the workshop, participants will have:

Hands-on experience with AI tools that enhance COIL collaboration.

Strategies for using AI to support COIL planning, group dynamics, and intercultural engagement.

Insights into best practices for integrating AI in an inclusive, ethical, and equitable manner.

This session will provide the opportunity for participants to get hands-on experience with AI tools that can help empower both students and faculty.

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## Strand 24: Pedagogical Innovation and Disciplinary Applications in VE

Katarzyna Radke, Malin Reljanovic Glimäng, Charo López-Contreras, Thomas Raith

### *"This made me think...": Four-Way Collaboration Between Future Teachers Exploring the Role of AI in Quality Education*

This presentation reports on the Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programme (BIP) "Striking the Right Balance: Ethical Use of AI for Quality Education and Critical Thinking", inspired by the UN SDG 4 and implemented in spring 2026 (March–April). This six-week project brought together 30 future teachers of different disciplines from Germany, Poland, Spain and Sweden, to critically examine the pedagogical, ethical, and cultural dimensions of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education. The initiative combined virtual exchange (VE) collaboration with short-term physical mobility, demonstrating how hybrid models can promote inclusive and reflective international learning experiences. In the virtual phase, students worked in five international teams to analyze one of the themes related to AI use in education: (1) terms and conditions of using AI tools, (2) reliability and bias in AI-generated information, (3) evaluation and assessment of AI-supported student work, (4) the pedagogical value of AI-generated lesson plans, and (5) human skills enhanced or replaced by AI. Supported by academics from 4 European universities, the participants compared AI tools, discussed ethical implications, and co-created classroom materials. During physical mobility in Poland, the students presented their findings at a student-led academic conference and piloted their AI-supported teaching materials in local schools. These interactions with Polish pupils offered valuable insights into how young learners perceive AI and highlighted the importance of fostering critical digital literacy from an early age. The presentation will discuss how the BIP integrated VE methodologies with hands-on AI exploration, empowered students to move from users to critical evaluators of technology. Outcomes show that blended formats can successfully combine intercultural teamwork, reflective practice, and technological competence – illustrating how BIPs and VE can contribute to more ethical, inclusive, and quality-oriented approaches to teacher education in an AI-driven world.

Antje Neuhoff

### *Virtual Language Cafés - Informal Language Learning at the Language Centre*

In recent years, the Multimedia Language Centre as a self-access centre for foreign language education at TU Dresden underwent a substantial reorientation. The main focus is now on providing professional support for digital and hybrid teaching and learning. The self-access centre has realigned itself from a resource centre offering a wide range of media and materials for autonomous language learning towards an advisory and meeting centre that serves as a social learning space and central hub for informal, self-directed foreign language learning. As a result of this reorientation, informal language learning opportunities such as multilingual language cafés have been established in the past three years as a supplement to formal language courses. Such informal language contacts provide spaces for interaction and linguistic and intercultural exchange between international and German students (Internationalization@home). The language cafés have expanded into the virtual realm, with online language cafés being set up between L1 speakers from two countries and cultures. This presentation provides an overview of the specific virtual exchange format between the British Open University and the TU Dresden. In an informal atmosphere, language learners engage in conversations through discussions and playful activities with L1 speakers of their target language and fellow learners. The language cafés are moderated by teachers from both institutions. Following a two-year period, an interim assessment is conducted to evaluate what motivates the participants to take part, what their expectations are, and how these are met. The participants' survey responses have been contrasted with an evaluation of the on-site language cafés. By comparing the two formats, we have gained interesting insights into the characteristics of on-site and virtual language cafés, including their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Anna Kwasniewska & Francisco Alberto Nunez Tapia

### *Structured for Growth: Two Semesters, Three Continents, Measurable Gain*

In today's interconnected world, international collaboration is a necessity, with Virtual Exchange (VE) serving as a strong

on-ramp to physical mobility. While single-term VE projects foster cross-cultural and professional growth, this presentation examines outcomes when students participate in back-to-back, transcontinental VEs across consecutive semesters, and when the model is replicated by a new cohort the following year. Results from cohorts completing a standalone project are compared with the amplified effects observed when the same cohort completes two sequential projects. Within each two-project pair, a consistent arc was implemented: the first project addressed Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and culminated in a capstone videoconference, while the second project emphasized video storytelling, translating technical solutions into audience-ready narratives. Drawing on participants' reflections collected after the second project in each pair, together with project artifacts and peer feedback, learning trajectories are mapped in intercultural competence, distributed teamwork, problem framing, project management, communication self-efficacy, and professional identity. Findings indicate that semester-after-semester participation yields gains exceeding those of single exchanges: deeper transfer of teamwork strategies, greater adaptability to disciplinary and cultural variation, expanded transcontinental networks, and more stable collaborative norms. The session concludes with a practical blueprint for multi-phase, repeatable VE pathways that progressively scaffold complexity and autonomy –supporting a shift from isolated exchanges to sustained, high-impact international collaboration.

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