

UDC 372.881.111.1  
<https://doi.org/10.25076/vpl.33.01>  
Robert O'Dowd  
University of León, Spain

## VIRTUAL EXCHANGE AND ITS ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

*This chapter introduces the competences which are being developed as part of approaches to international education across the globe and also reviews the main approaches to developing these competence sets. The chapter then goes on to explore how Virtual Exchange can contribute to the development of the competence sets which students need to learn and work and to argue for its more widespread use and integration as a tool for preparing university students for the challenges of the globalised, networked world.*

*Virtual Exchange aims to develop international curriculum through online intercultural collaboration and exchange in the classroom. This is because higher education's response to the challenges and possibilities of globalization has come principally in the form of internationalisation. The author considers Foreign Language and Business Studies as disciplines which has recognised the relevance and potential of Virtual Exchange.*

*On the one hand, failures in intercultural communication are treated as opportunities for learning and reflection; on the other hand, scientists are searching for ways to overcome breakdowns in communication due to cultural differences.*

*Key words: intercultural competence, global citizenship, Virtual Exchange, telecollaboration, digital competences*

### **Introduction**

All over the globe, a growing number of higher education institutions are engaging their students in Virtual Exchange – a rich and multifaceted activity which refers to online intercultural interaction and collaboration projects with partner classes from other cultural contexts under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators. In contrast to many forms of online learning which are based on the transfer of information through video lectures, Virtual Exchange is based on

student-centred, collaborative approaches to learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through learner-interaction and negotiation.

The basic rationale for engaging university students in such learning is quite simple and was summed up already 20 years ago in this way by Cummins and Sayers (1995):

“In the world of the twenty-first century, decision making and problem solving in virtually all spheres – business, science, community development, government, politics- will depend on electronic networks than span diverse national and cultural boundaries. Students whose education has provided them with a broad range of experiences in using such networks for intercultural collaboration and critical thinking will be better prepared to thrive in this radically different communications and employment environment than those who have not been provided with access to cross-cultural awareness and problem-solving skills” (p.12).

However, before looking in detail about the contribution which Virtual Exchange can make to this area, it is first of all necessary to identify the key objectives of the internationalized curriculum. A review of the literature suggests that, first of all, there is common consensus that students from all disciplines require an international element as part of their education in order to be able to work and live successfully in an increasingly globalized society. Second, there also appears to be wide agreement that an internationalized curriculum involves the development, not only of the competences of intercultural competence, but also of digital and foreign language competences. Indeed, there is a recognition that these three competence sets are intertwined and that it is increasingly difficult to develop any one of these comprehensively without also attending to the other two. Simply put, students cannot interact online successfully without being able to establish successful working relationships with people from other cultural backgrounds; students cannot be considered effective global citizens if they are not able to operate effectively in digital environments; and students can neither interact successfully online nor establish serious intercultural relationships if they are not competent in foreign languages.

This chapter sets out to review what is understood by internationalisation in university education and to examine these different areas of competence which are associated with this term.

### **Globalisation and university education**

The processes of globalization have affected every aspect of modern society and university education has been no exception. Globalization, can be defined as “interdependence among nations and manifested in the economic, political, social, cultural, and knowledge spheres. Central to globalization are the increased mobility of goods, services, and people and the accelerating use of information and communication technologies to bridge time and space in unprecedented ways and at continually decreasing costs” (the International Association of Universities, 2012, p.1). Globalization has had many consequences for university education. It has brought about a staggering growth in the numbers of international mobile students and faculty; it has facilitated unprecedented levels of cooperation between institutions in research and teaching initiatives; and it has enabled universities to sell their courses and services, both physically and virtually, to a global market. The statistics available in relation to these trends are staggering at times and leave no doubt as to the fact that universities are now educating, researching and competing in a global arena. For example, in 2012, more than 4.5 million students were enrolled in tertiary education outside their country of citizenship (Education at a Glance 2014: OECD Indicators, p.342). Among the most popular destinations, Europe remains one of the most popular for mobile learners, with a stable share of around 45% of the internationally mobile student population, a population expected to grow from around 4 million to 7 million by 2020 (European Commission, 2013, p. 3).

Higher education’s response to the challenges and possibilities of globalization has come principally in the form of internationalisation. Internationalisation is defined by Knight as a “process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education” (2003, p.2). The challenges which internationalisation seeks to address are numerous and complex. They include the need to develop comprehensive international educational strategies which are not over dependent on student mobility programmes; to develop in students the particular skills and competences necessary for working in the global workplace

and, lastly, the urgent necessity to contribute to the development of students' intercultural tolerance and to train them to be "graduates, professionals, and citizens of the world to live and work effectively in a rapidly changing and increasingly connected global society" (Leask, 2015, p.17).

### **Internationalising the curriculum**

Since its emergence as a concept in the 1990's, internationalization has come to be considered a basic, essential part of any university's educational policies. There has been a great deal of literature devoted to the term and its components but this chapter will limit itself to exploring the intended outcomes of this process and the potential role that new technologies and Virtual Exchange have to play in this field.

There have been a confusing number of terms used to describe internationalization processes in university education. Hudzik mentions a number of them including "internationalization of higher education," "campus internationalization," "globalization of higher education," "comprehensive internationalization," "internationalization of curriculum and learning," (2011, p.9) before going on to propose his own term comprehensive internationalization. The European Parliament proposes an ample definition of the process and its intended outcomes in the following:

"Internationalization of higher education is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (European Parliament, 2015, p. 281).

Despite the numerous terms for 'internationalisation', most authors coincide on the essential components of the process. Knight (2008), for example, identifies two components under the term: the first of these is 'internationalisation at home' and includes curriculum-oriented activities that help students develop international understanding and intercultural skills and that prepare students to be active in a much more globalized world; and second, 'internationalisation abroad' which refers to all forms of education across borders, including student and teacher mobility, joint degrees, strategic international partnerships etc. The European Commission, in its communication "European Higher Education in the World" essentially coincides with these basic

components but presents them in three strategic areas: Promoting the international mobility of students and staff; promoting internationalisation at home and digital learning; and strengthening strategic cooperation, partnerships and capacity building (2013, p.4). Of particular interest in this definition is the link made between ‘internationalisation at home’ and ‘digital learning’.

Opinions differ when it comes to the reasons for internationalization, depending on whether one comes from a neo-liberal or more cosmopolitan tradition (Galimova, 2015, p.18). Some authors have underlined the link between internationalization and the development of intercultural or global competences necessary to operate successfully in a globalized workplace. Hudzik, for example, claims that “[i]nternationalization can be a means to prepare graduates for life and work in a global market of products, services and ideas” (2011, p. 8), while the European Commission (2013) states that “[t]he internationalisation of higher education will help prepare our learners, whether going abroad or staying in Europe, to live in a global world, increasing their experience and knowledge, employability, productivity and earning power” (2013, p. 3). Leask argues that “[e]ngineers, archaeologists, and physicists all over the world will at some stage more than likely work in a multicultural, diverse team and they will need to exercise intercultural competence in other work and social situations – as professionals and citizens” while Grandin and Hedderich suggest that in the case of 21st century engineering “the future belongs to those who learn to work or team together with other groups without regard to location, heritage, and national and cultural difference” (2009, p. 363).

However, others have looked beyond the issue of employment skills, and have underlined a more ethical or principled motivation for internationalization which can be summarized in the following way: Our society is increasingly globalized. The boundaries between the local, national and global are blurred and our graduates are destined to live in a world where they are in constant contact with members of other cultural backgrounds. Universities therefore need to prepare students to be ‘global citizens’ and develop their “capacity to critique the world they live, see problems and issues from a range of perspectives, and take action to address them” (Leask, 2015, p.17). This ethical or ‘principled’ approach to internationalization is echoed by

Rizvi (2007): He calls for internationalization to develop in students a “critical cosmopolitanism that views all of the diverse people and communities as belonging to the same universe” (2007, p.400). Similarly, Richardson (2016) proposes a ‘cosmopolitan approach’ to international Higher Education which will bring learners beyond a superficial contact with other cultures and other worldviews and be able to actively engage with difference through mutual understanding and respect.

Some authors have striven to strike a balance between economic and ethical motivations. The International Association of Universities, for example, in their key document *Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action* suggest that internationalization is driven by the need to “prepare students to be better global citizens and as productive members of the workforce” (2012).

#### **Tools for developing international study programmes**

Various activities and initiatives have been employed to internationalize university education including joint and shared degrees and the teaching of subjects through English. However, in many cases, internationalisation has become synonymous with student and staff mobility. In the European context, the European Union has put great emphasis and has invested heavily on student mobility and has set itself the task of achieving 20% student mobility by 2020, although this currently stands at 5%. It has also contributed to facilitating student mobility by enabling greater comparability and compatibility among countries of the European Higher Education Area through the implementation of the Bologna Process and tools such as European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Apart from student mobility between member states, Europe also currently attracts 45% of the internationally mobile student population, a population expected to grow from around 4 million to 7 million by 2020. In the United States, the Institute of International Education (IIE) proposes that universities double the number of students engaged in periods of study abroad, which currently is also well below 10% (IIE, 2015).

However, in recent years, there has been a growing belief that mobility is alone not sufficient to achieve the goals of internationalization. There are various reasons for this. The first reason

for moving the emphasis away from physical mobility is based on the belief that it is essentially an elitist and exclusionary activity and the financial costs of engaging in student mobility programmes means that it is not economically viable as a way to develop intercultural or global competences in university students. Richardson, for example, questions the blind faith which many invest in physical mobility programmes for this reason: “Mobility tends to be socially exclusive, providing opportunities to elite students to enhance their distinctiveness from other students but remaining inaccessible to many” (2016, p53). Even the European Commission, which, as we have seen, has invested greatly in promoting student mobility at university level, recognizes that...

“mobility will always be limited to a relatively small percentage of the student and staff population: higher education policies must increasingly focus on the integration of a global dimension in the design and content of all curricula and teaching/learning processes ...to ensure that the large majority of learners, the 80-90% who are not internationally mobile for either degree or credit mobility, are nonetheless able to acquire the international skills required in a globalised world” (2013, p.6).

A second reason for moving away from an emphasis on student mobility is based on growing evidence in the literature that physical mobility does not actually lead automatically to the development of intercultural competence or an enhanced transnational identity – which are very often the goals of internationalization policies and mobility programmes. Papatsiba (2005), for example, looked at the impact of Erasmus mobility on a cohort of French students in order to investigate the extent to which students’ experiences reflected the political and policy aims of the Erasmus mobility programme and she concluded that “acquiring a feeling of belonging in an enlarged Europe, enriching national identities with the desired European dimension remained a somewhat random result of experiential learning. This type of learning depends on situations, on encounters, as well as on the individual’s psychology” (p.183). There have been similar findings by Paige et al. (2010 cited in Richardson p.87): “what really counts is not how long you stay or where you go, but the quality of the program and the nature of deep cultural and learning experiences provided” (2010, p.7). Richardson suggests that the factors which decide whether students

actually develop their intercultural awareness or skills are 1) clear learning objectives; 2) contact with local community and 3) rigorous and facilitated reflective practices.

Finally, there is also debate about whether physical mobility programmes actually contribute to the development of the skills set which is necessary for employment in the global workplace. The Erasmus Impact Study (2014) examined the effects of Erasmus mobility on skills development and the employability of students and did find mainly positive relationship between student mobility and employment. The study found, for example that “[t]he share of employers who considered experience abroad to be important for employability also nearly doubled between 2006 and 2013 from 37% to 64%” (Brandenburg, 2014, p. 16). It also found that mobile students increased their advantage over the non-mobile students on six factors which were closely related to employability skills by 118% for all mobile students and 42% for Erasmus students. Furthermore, more than 90% of the students reported an improvement in their soft skills, such as knowledge of other countries, their ability to interact and work with individuals from different cultures, adaptability, foreign language proficiency and communication skills. However, Richardson warns that “[m]uch of the rhetoric around Erasmus is about creating an elite trans-European workforce with appropriate skills to contribute to greater cohesion and cooperation within the European Union. This assumes ...that a certain skill set is gained from mobility” (2015, p.48). However, after she reviews the research on employability and mobility, she concludes:

“Overall it would seem that for some students who participate in Erasmus...employment prospects are enhanced, while for others they are not. And it is likely that this pattern is equally true of mobile students around the world. Hence, enhancing employability is something that can be done without the need to study in another country” (2015, p.50).

The second area of research which offers insight into how to maximize the educational impact of intercultural contact and interaction is study abroad. This is defined by the Forum on Education Abroad as “a subtype of education abroad that results in progress toward an academic degree at a student’s home institution ...excluding the pursuit of a full academic degree at a foreign institution” (2011: p.12). As an



integral part of internationalisation policies in university education, study abroad programmes have received great attention and Kinginger (2008) reports a dramatic growth in interest in the learning outcomes of these programmes. However, this body of research has produced rather sobering findings on the impact of periods of study abroad on students' intercultural development. Although there has been much support from political institutions and university organisations for physical mobility per se as a tool for developing tolerance and intercultural awareness, recent evidence in the literature suggests that, in the same way that much telecollaborative research has revealed that virtual exchange often has little impact on students' attitudes and intercultural understanding (Kern, 2014; O'Dowd, 2016; Ware & Kramsch, 2004), study abroad does not actually lead automatically to the development of intercultural competence or an enhanced transnational identity. This has called into question the traditional non-interventionist approach to study abroad programmes (Vande Berg & Paige, 2008) and, as with research in intergroup contact theory, various studies have looked to identify the factors which influence the intercultural learning outcomes of study abroad. Kinginger (2009) suggests that "study abroad experiences are quite diverse and their quality dependent both on the reception extended to students and on the students' own dispositions toward learning" (p.213). Similarly, Papatsiba (2005) looked at the impact of Erasmus mobility on a cohort of French students in order to investigate the extent to which students' experiences reflected the political and policy aims of the Erasmus mobility programme and she concluded that "acquiring a feeling of belonging in an enlarged Europe, enriching national identities with the desired European dimension remained a somewhat random result of experiential learning. This type of learning depends on situations, on encounters, as well as on the individual's psychology" (p.183). There have been similar findings by Paige et al. (2010): "what really counts is not how long you stay or where you go, but the quality of the program and the nature of deep cultural and learning experiences provided" (p.7).

Apart from emphasizing the importance of the quality and depth of the intercultural encounters which student experience during study abroad, the literature in this area also underlines that there is a clear need for students to have opportunities to reflect on their experiences and that this reflection process should come in the form of pedagogical

interventions or mentoring programmes moderated by educators. Savicki & Price (2015) stress that “reflection is an important piece of the study abroad experience” (p.587) and they refer to Engle & Engle’s five-level framework of study abroad programmes which puts ‘focused and reflective interaction with the host culture’ as key to successful study abroad. Similarly, Jackson & Oguro (2017) argue that in order for students to learn from their experiences abroad, intercultural interventions are necessary in all phases of study abroad – i.e. before, during and after the mobility period. They also support interventions which move away from simplistic theories of ‘culture as nation’ and instead promote critical perspectives of culture and interculturality. Examples of such interventions include ‘cultural mentoring’ (Jackson, 2017) which train mobile students to engage in critical reflection on their international experiences.

Based on these economic and educational limitations of physical mobility, there has been a growing interest in recent years in finding ways on campus and within course curricula to develop students’ intercultural competence and expose them to international learning experiences (Brewer & Leask (2012, Handbook). This has been known by the term Internationalization at Home (IaH) and the related concept of Internationalisation of the Curriculum (IoC). This shift in focus from ‘mobility to some’ to ‘international learning opportunities for all’ is seen by many as not only practical but also as just and democratic as it provides all students with the opportunity to develop the skills and attitudes of the global workplace and global citizenship (De Wit, 2016; Richardson, 2015).

Subtle yet important differences of emphasis emerge when the terms IaH and IoC are compared together. Internationalisation at Home (IaH) is defined by Beelen and Jones as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen and Jones 2015, p. 9) meanwhile Leask defines internationalization of the curriculum as “the incorporation of international, intercultural, and/or global dimensions in the content of the curriculum as well as the learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching methods, and support services of a program of study” (2009, p.209, cited in Leask 2015). De Wit (2016, p.74) explains that the most important difference is that whereas IaH looks at the integrative process

of international and intercultural dimensions in the formal and informal curriculum, IoC looks exclusively at the content, process, learning outcomes and assessment of students' curriculum. This means that IaH has a broader reach, dealing with all international and intercultural activities and learning which take place on campus. This could include, for example, how international students are integrated, international weeks, courses offered in other languages etc.

Leask, in her seminal work on the issue (2015), identifies three elements of curriculum design which are key to IoC. She insists that integrating international elements in the university curriculum should not only be about preparing students for professional outcomes, but should also “prepare students to be ethical and responsible citizens and human beings in this globalized world” (2015, p.30). She also insists that, in order for IoC to have value, it should be based on clearly articulated goals or objectives and these should be assessed in a formal manner. Finally, she argues that one specific course or program is not sufficient to deal with international issues in the curriculum and that IoC will need to be attended to across a course of study: “The development of skills such as language capability and intercultural competence may need to be embedded in a number of courses at different levels” (2015, p.30).

#### **The goals of an international curriculum**

Any practitioner or researcher investigating the goals or intended outcomes of international education may be taken aback by the variation and complexity in terminology currently in use in the field. While in the area of foreign language education the terms intercultural competence and intercultural awareness have now gained general acceptance, the interdisciplinary nature of international education has meant that intercultural competence is now used interchangeably with global competence (Jane Wilkinson (2012, Routledge Handbook intercultural Communication). Deardorff and Jones (2012) lament that there is still little consensus on terminology around intercultural competence in international education and that, depending on the discipline, readers will encounter many different terms including global competence (in the field of engineering field, for example) and cultural competence in the field of social work (p. 284).

Probably the best known model of intercultural competence is Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (1997). In

this model, Byram outlines the attitudes, knowledge, skills and critical cultural awareness which people need to interact and collaborate successfully with members of other cultures. This model has been used extensively in foreign language education and has been one of the key tools used in foreign language telecollaboration research to identify learning outcomes in virtual exchange (O'Dowd, 2006; Ware, 1998). Another well-known model of global competence is The Global People Competency Framework (Specer-Oatey and Stadler, 2009). This model also outlines the competencies that are needed for effective intercultural interaction but presents them in four interrelated clusters, according to the aspect of competence they affect or relate to: 1) Knowledge and ideas, 2) Communication 3) Relationships and 4) Personal qualities and dispositions. This model has also been used extensively and the developers have adapted the competences in the model to different stages of the lifecycle of an intercultural project.

However, in recent years, the question of terminology has become even more complex due to the emergence of the terms intercultural citizenship and global citizenship, which themselves carry separate, but related, connotations and objectives. Models of Global Competence now compete for attention with Models of Competence for Democratic Culture (Council of Europe, 2016) and Frameworks for Intercultural Citizenship (Byram, 2008). It appears that the term that is gaining dominance over the others in international education is global citizenship. De Wit explains that “the term ‘global citizenship’ is being used increasingly to define the main outcome of international education: “to educate graduates who will be able to live and work in the globalised world” (2016, p. 75) while Deardorff & Jones observe that “[t]he notion of global citizenship has become part of the internationalisation discourse in higher education around the world” (2012, p. 295). However, Leask warns us that while global citizenship may be the increasingly accepted term, “there is, however, less agreement on what is meant by the term “global citizenship” and the scope and nature of the learning outcomes necessary for graduates to be global citizens” (2015, p. 58).

The essential difference between global competence and global citizenship or intercultural competence and intercultural citizenship lies in the importance attributed to active engagement. Porto explains: “It integrates the pillar of intercultural communicative competence from

foreign language education with the emphasis on civic action in the community from citizenship Education” (p.5). UNESCO (2014) define Global Citizenship Education as aiming “to empower learners to engage and assume active roles, both locally and globally, to face and resolve global challenges and ultimately to become proactive contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world” (p.15). So, while intercultural or global competence refer to the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to communicate and act effectively and appropriately in different cultural contexts (without necessarily putting them to use), global or intercultural citizenship borrow from models of citizenship education to refer to the application of these competences to actively participating in, changing and improving society. Leask see global citizenship as developing graduates who “will be committed to action locally and globally in the interests of others and across social, environmental, and political dimensions” (2015, p. 60) and Byram sees intercultural citizenship experience as being “focused on social and political engagement. This may include the promotion of change or improvement in the social and personal lives of the intercultural individuals or their fellows” (2008, p. 187). Global competence can, therefore, be seen as a part of global citizenship. Morais and Ogden clearly understand this to be the case when they explain that “[g]lobal citizenship is understood as a multidimensional construct that hinges on the interrelated dimensions of social responsibility, global competence, and global civic engagement” (2011, p. 449, my italics added).

The concept of active citizenship has been taken up widely in recent years as a key educational outcome. The United Nations Secretary-General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) established ‘fostering global citizenship’ as one of its three priority areas (UNESCO, 2014). In the European context, the institutions of the European Union and Council of Europe have also striven to instill democratic citizenship principles in European society.

For example, the EU Education Ministers adopted in 2015 the “Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education” (2015). Known as the Paris Declaration, this document urges the member states of the European Union to ensure the sharing of ideas and good practice with a view to “ensuring that children and young people acquire social,

civic and intercultural competences, by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and nondiscrimination, as well as active citizenship (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2016, p3. My italics added). The Paris Declaration sets out a list of concrete objectives to be pursued at national and local level and defines four overarching priorities for cooperation at EU-level:

1. Ensuring young people acquire social, civic and intercultural competences by promoting democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion and non-discrimination, as well as active citizenship;

2. Enhancing critical thinking and media literacy, particularly in the use of the Internet and social media, so as to develop resistance to discrimination and indoctrination;

3. Fostering the education of disadvantaged children and young people, by ensuring that our education and training systems address their needs;

4. Promoting intercultural dialogue through all forms of learning in cooperation with other relevant policies and stakeholders (2015).

In Higher Education in the USA, Global Citizenship has also received much attention. The international organization NAFSA have published various policy documents and publications on developing global competence and global citizenship for American institutions of Higher Education (e.g. *Toward Globally Competent Pedagogy and Global Learning: Defining, Designing, Demonstrating*) and in 2014 the US government held a White House Summit on the theme of Study Abroad and Global Citizenship.

So what are the key elements of intercultural or global citizenship which educators should take into account when developing their virtual exchange initiatives? Although there are various studies and discussions of what global citizenship should involve (Leask, 2015; UNESCO, 2014), there are currently three models or interpretations of Global Citizenship Education which stand out as they provide detailed, comprehensive frameworks of competences which can be used for developing virtual exchange initiatives. These are the Council of Europe's Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (2016), UNESCO's model of Global Citizenship Education (2014) and Byram's Framework for Intercultural Citizenship (2008).

The Council of Europe's model of Competences for Democratic Citizenship and Intercultural Dialogue sets out to describe the

competences which learners need to acquire “if they are to participate effectively in a culture of democracy and live peacefully together with others in culturally diverse democratic societies” (2016, p.5). The model was developed through a systematic analysis of 101 existing models of democratic competence and intercultural competence and therefore reflects a comprehensive overview of what is generally understood in the literature to be the key elements of global citizenship. Indeed, Barnett (2015) states that “the model that we have developed in this project is inherently a global citizenship perspective” and that the model is “inherently tied to a global or cosmopolitan citizenship perspective – this perspective emphasizes the need for people to view themselves as citizens of a world community based on common human values and human dignity who respect other people’s cultural affiliations” (NP). The model contains 20 competences organized into 3 sets of values, 6 attitudes, 8 skills and 3 bodies of knowledge and critical understanding which are considered necessary for the preparation of learners as competent democratic citizens.

The model is very comprehensive and identifies many of the skills and areas of knowledge which university graduates are likely to need to live and work as active global citizens. These include, for example, analytical and critical thinking skills (“the skills required to analyse, evaluate and make judgments about materials of any kind ...in a systematic and logical manner” (2016, p.10)), cooperation skills (“the skills required to participate successfully with others in shared activities, tasks and ventures and to encourage others to co-operate so that group goals may be achieved” (2016, p.10)) and knowledge and critical understanding of the world (“knowledge and critical understanding in a variety of areas including politics, law, human rights, culture, cultures, religions, history, media, economies, the environment and sustainability” (2016, p.11)). Significantly, the model also pays special attention to linguistic skills and knowledge, thereby taking into account the important role of foreign language competence in facilitating intercultural contact and communication. In this regard, the model contains linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills as well as knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication.

However, any practitioner who considers using this model must keep in mind the political principles and educational and political objectives upon which the model is based. The model, as its name

clearly suggests, is aimed at developing citizens so they can “participate effectively in a culture of democracy” (2016, p.16) and, as such, is based on values which are common in Western societies. These include “the general belief that societies ought to operate and be governed through democratic processes” (2016, p.8), and the belief that “cultural variability and diversity, and pluralism of perspectives, views and practices ought to be positively regarded, appreciated and cherished” (p.8). The authors are explicit in the document that the model is aimed at citizens of democratic societies and that they should not be considered “general political competences which could be used in the service of many other kinds of political order, including anti-democratic orders” (p. 36). The document should therefore be understood in the current context of European society where European institutions such as the European Commission and the Council of Europe are striving to promote democratic values and practices among young people in response to the rise of anti-democratic movements such as right-wing extremism and radical Islamism. Against the background of recent terror attacks in Paris and Brussels, this document is clearly an attempt to locate intercultural dialogue and the principles of democratic citizenship to the centre of educational curricula in Europe.

Undoubtedly, for Virtual Exchange initiatives between European countries, this model provides a comprehensive set of competences which educators can use to shape and give direction to their telecollaborative activities. But it is necessary to question whether such a model would be acceptable as the basis for Virtual Exchange projects which bring European or other Western students into online collaboration with classrooms in countries where democracy is not the accepted form of government or where democracy is, perhaps, understood in very different ways. One of the key goals of intercultural education and Virtual Exchange is to give students opportunities to come into contact and engage in dialogue with worldviews and cultural perspectives which can be radically different to their own. Using a framework such as this one, which has democracy as its basis, may be seen by educators and students in non-democratic countries as an attempt to impose western values and as a form of educational imperialism. Needless to say, this is not to suggest that VE should involve a relativist approach where every opinion and practice is



accepted in the name of cultural diversity. Respect for difference in cultural beliefs and practices will always need to have limits – but these limits may have to be drawn along the line of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights rather than on western definitions and interpretations of democracy (see Byram, 2008, p.175). That said, the Council of Europe is currently developing a comprehensive set of descriptors which will enable educators to operationalize the competences and develop activities and assessment criteria for different levels of learners. There is no reason why descriptors from some of the competence sets (skills and attitudes, for example) could be used, while ignoring those of the more context-specific values set.

An alternative model which may be more suited to Virtual Exchange initiatives which bring Western classrooms into contact with partners in countries, for example, from the Muslim/Arab world or China is Byram's Framework of Intercultural Citizenship (2008, 2016). This model combines elements of foreign language competence, critical cultural awareness and intercultural communication skills adapted from his earlier model of intercultural communicative competence (1997) with the principles and content of citizenship education which involve learning leading to activity and 'service to the community'. While the elements of citizenship education are adapted from Himmelmann's model of 'democracy learning' (2007), the model deliberately avoids an over-emphasis on Western interpretation of democratic principles and understands democracy and political education as the development of 'transnational communities' and critical thinkers who engage in social and political activity together to improve their own personal lives or the societies they live in. Byram explains: "The aim is to define the competences which would enable an individual to engage in political activity – "community involvement and service" to use the phrase from the English national curriculum... – with people of another state and a different language from their own" Byram, M. (2011, p.16). Intercultural citizenship from an internationalist perspective. *Journal of the NUS Teaching Academy*, 1(1), 10-20. This would appear to be in line with Leask's understanding of global citizenship as "making the world a better place at social, environmental levels" (2015).

The UNESCO (2014) model of Global Citizenship Education (2014) concurs with the other two models in that it strives to present an approach to global citizenship which goes beyond the development of

knowledge and cognitive skills and looks also at values, soft skills and attitudes which will facilitate international cooperation and promote social transformation. The model stems from the aspirational rather than functional approaches to global citizenship and aims to engage students with the universal themes of sustainable development and peace, including conflict, poverty, climate change, energy security, unequal population distribution, and different forms of inequality and injustice. The model stems from a bottom-up design and appears to be based on various global citizenship initiatives from countries, organisations and experts who took part in two key UNESCO events: the Technical Consultation on

Global Citizenship Education (Seoul, September 2013) and the first UNESCO Forum on Global Citizenship Education (Bangkok, December 2013).

Perhaps due to the need to achieve consensus from a wide range of participants, the model is not outlined in as much detail as those presented earlier, and is limited to proposing the following competence sets which are considered to be ‘common denominators’ in the different approaches to global competence:

- an attitude supported by an understanding of multiple levels of identity, and the potential for a collective identity that transcends individual cultural, religious, ethnic or other differences (e.g. sense of belongingness to common humanity, respect for diversity);

- a deep knowledge of global issues and universal values such as justice, equality, dignity and respect (e.g. understanding of the process of globalization, interdependence/interconnectedness, the global challenges which cannot be adequately or uniquely addressed by nation states, sustainability as the main concept of the future);

- cognitive skills to think critically, systemically and creatively, including adopting a multiperspective approach that recognizes different dimensions, perspectives and angles of issues (e.g. reasoning and problem-solving skills supported by a multi-perspective approach);

- non-cognitive skills, including social skills such as empathy and conflict resolution, and communication skills and aptitudes for networking and interacting with people of different backgrounds, origins, cultures and perspectives (e.g. global empathy, sense of solidarity);

•behavioural capacities to act collaboratively and responsibly to find global solutions to global challenges, and to strive for the collective good (e.g. sense of commitment, decision-making skills) (2014, p. 17).

However, the international curriculum does not focus exclusively on the development of intercultural and global competence sets. It also requires that attention be paid to digital and linguistic competences. An approach which aims to develop these competences will be looked at in the following section.

### **Virtual Exchange: Developing the international curriculum through online intercultural collaboration and exchange in the classroom**

One of the main approaches to developing the competences of the international curriculum is undoubtedly Virtual Exchange. But what is Virtual Exchange? And what are the models or approaches to this methodology which are currently being implemented in Higher Education? In this section I will present an overview of some of the different approaches to Virtual Exchange which are currently being used in higher education. However, before examining these approaches in detail, the historical origins of this activity will be looked at briefly.

The historical origins of Virtual Exchange have been traced by Cummins and Sayers (1995) and Mueller-Hartmann (2007) to the learning networks pioneered by Célestin Freinet in 1920s France and later by Mario Lodi in 1960s Italy, decades before the internet was to become a tool for classroom learning. Freinet made use of the technologies and modes of communication available to him at the time to enable his classes in the north of France to make class newspapers with a printing press and to exchange these newspapers along with ‘cultural packages’ of flowers, fossils and photos of their local area with schools in other parts of France. Similarly, Lodi motivated his learners and helped to develop their critical literacy skills by encouraging them to create student newspapers in collaboration with distant partner classes.

The first examples of online collaborative projects between classrooms around the globe began to appear within a few years of the emergence of the internet. Early reports include the work of the Orillas Network (Cummins & Sayers, 1995), the AT&T Learning Circles (Riel, 1997), as well as more in-depth research studies into foreign language exchanges (Brammerts, 1996; Eck, Legenhausen & Wolff,

1995). The publication *Virtual Connections: Online Activities for Networking Language Learners* (Warschauer, 1995) included a collection of 'cross-cultural communication' projects which reported on foreign language students creating personal profiles, carrying out surveys and examining cultural stereotypes with distant partners. Around this time, a number of websites, including *Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections* (IECC) and *E-Tandem*, also became available online in order to link up classrooms across the globe and to provide practitioners with activities and guidelines for their projects. The IECC listserv was established by university professors at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, USA and functioned as one of the first 'matching services' for teachers who wanted to connect their students in e-mail exchanges with partner classes in other countries and in other regions of their own country. Between 1992 and 2001, IECC distributed over 28,000 requests for e-mail partnerships (Rice, 2005).

The E-tandem server was aimed at matching learners of foreign languages and was supported by a network of research and project work carried at Bochum University in Germany and Trinity College in Dublin (Christine et al., 1999; O'Rourke, 2005). Meanwhile, practitioners such as Ruth Vilmi in Finland (Vilmi, 2004) and Reinhard Donath (1997) in Germany helped to make the activity better known by publishing practical reports of their students' work online. Vilmi's work focussed on online collaboration between technical students at universities across Europe, while Donath provided German secondary school foreign language teachers with a wide range of resources and information about how projects could be integrated into the curriculum.

The IECC website also contained a very active discussion forum between 1994 and 1995 where practitioners were often asked by the moderator and IECC co-founder Bruce Roberts to react to questions related to how online intercultural exchanges could be integrated into the classroom and what type of tasks were successful in online exchanges. The responses to these questions reveal not only many of the challenges which pioneering telecollaborators were facing during the infancy of the internet, but they also demonstrate that many of the key pedagogical principles of the time are still very relevant for 21st century Virtual Exchange. Practitioners wrote about the need for adequate time for students to reflect on their email interactions as well as for adequate access to resources to ensure fluid communication

between classes. They also mention the importance of pedagogical leadership on behalf of the teachers in organising and exploiting the exchange. Roberts summed up what he considered to be the key to success in email classroom connections as being the pedagogical integration of the activity into the class and the learning process: “when the email classroom connection processes are truly integrated into the ongoing structure of homework and student classroom interaction, then the results can be educationally transforming” (1994, n.p.)

### **Subject-specific Virtual Exchange (1): Foreign Language Learning Initiatives**

It is not surprising that one of the disciplines to most eagerly take up Virtual Exchange as a learning tool has been foreign language education. From the beginnings of the internet in the early 1990’s, foreign language educators have seen the potential of connecting language learners with counterparts in other countries in order to expose them to native speakers of other languages and to give them semi-authentic experiences of communicating in these languages.

In foreign language education, Virtual Exchange has been referred to principally as telecollaboration (Belz, 2003), telecollaboration 2.0 (Guth and Helm, 2010), e-tandem (O’Rourke, 2007) or Online Intercultural Exchange (O’Dowd, 2007, O’Dowd and Lewis, 2016) and over the past 20 years it has gone on to become an integral part of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) or Network-based Language Teaching (NBLT) (Kern, Ware, & Warschauer, 2008; O’Dowd, 2006). Virtual Exchange in foreign language education has traditionally taken the form of one of two models—each one reflecting the principal learning approaches prevalent in foreign language education at the time. The first well-known model was e-tandem, which focused on fostering learner autonomy and learners’ ability to continue their language learning outside of the language classroom. The second model is usually referred to as Intercultural Telecollaboration or Online Intercultural Exchange (O’Dowd, 2007) and reflects the emphasis in the late 1990s and early 2000s on intercultural and sociocultural aspects of foreign language education.

In the e-tandem model (O’Rourke, 2007), two native speakers of different languages communicate together with the aim of learning the other’s language, and messages are typically written 50% in the target and 50% in the native language, thereby providing each partner with an

opportunity to practice their target language and, at the same time, provide their partner with authentic input. Appel and Mullen explain this principle of reciprocity in the following way:

... this entails that each partner should communicate as closely as possible to half in his/her mother tongue and half in his/her target language. This grants both learners the opportunity to practise speaking and writing in their target language and listening to and reading text written by their native speaking partner (2000, p. 292).

These exchanges are also based on the principle of autonomy, and the responsibility for a successful exchange rests mainly with the learners, who are expected to provide feedback on their partners' content and/or on their foreign language performance. In this sense, tandem partners take on the role of peer tutors who correct their partners' errors and propose alternative formulations in the target language. The role of the tutor or class teacher in the e-tandem model is usually minimal. For example, learners are often encouraged to take on responsibility for finding their own themes for discussion, correcting their partners' errors, and keeping a learner diary or portfolio to reflect on their own learning progress.

In the late 1990's a second model or approach to Virtual Exchange in foreign language education began to appear which was characterised by a stronger focus on intercultural aspects of language learning and communication and by a greater integration of the online exchanges into classroom activity. This form of Virtual Exchange was to become broadly known as 'telecollaboration'. The term was coined by Mark Warschauer in his publication *Telecollaboration and the Foreign Language Learner* (1996) and a special edition of the journal *Language Learning & Technology* was dedicated to the subject in 2003 where Belz identified the main characteristics of foreign language telecollaboration to be "institutionalized, electronically mediated intercultural communication under the guidance of a languacultural expert (i.e., teacher) for the purposes of foreign language learning and the development of intercultural competence" (2003, p. 2).

The telecollaborative model of Virtual Exchange strives to integrate the online interaction comprehensively into the students' foreign language programs and involves international class-to-class partnerships in which intercultural projects and tasks are developed by the partner teachers in the collaborating institutions. For example,

students' contact classes are where online interaction and publications are prepared, analysed, and reflected upon with the guidance of the teacher. Foreign language telecollaboration also places the emphasis of the exchanges on developing intercultural awareness and other aspects of intercultural communicative competence, in addition to developing linguistic competence.

One of the best known intercultural approaches to telecollaboration is the Cultura model (Furstenberg et al., 2001; O'Dowd, 2005). This model for intercultural exchange uses the possibility of juxtaposing materials from two different cultures together on webpages in order to offer a comparative approach to investigating cultural difference. When using Cultura, language learners from two cultures (e.g. Spanish learners of English and American learners of Spanish) complete online questionnaires related to their cultural values and associations (see figure 1). These questionnaires can be based on word associations (e.g. What three words do you associate with the word 'Spain?'), sentence completions (e.g. A good citizen is someone who ...) or reactions to situations (e.g. Your friend is 22 and is still living with his parents. What do you say to him?). Each group fills out the questionnaire in their native language. Following this, the results from both sets of students are then compiled and presented online (see figure 2). Under the guidance of their teachers in contact classes, students then analyse the juxtaposed lists in order to find differences and similarities between the two groups' responses.

Instructions:  
What other words do you associate with each of the following?  
For each word, write the first two or three free associations that come to you mind (they can be nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.)  
Please separate the words by commas.

NOTE: the answers to the above surveys will remain strictly anonymous.

Religion

God

Homosexual marriages

Bull fighting

Spain

Hispanic

USA

Figure 1: Online questionnaire form for US students in a Spanish-US exchange. (The same form would be available in Spanish for the Spanish students.)



Las respuestas de los estudiantes de León están en la columna de la izquierda; las de los estudiantes de Princeton, en la de la derecha.

## UNITED STATES

obama, comida basura, militares	Flag, America, Southerners
Obama, comida rápida, patriotismo	Hope, Confidence, Strength
bandera, Obama, NY	American, patriotism, free
hamburguesa	America, country, Freedom
armas, cañón del Colorado, libertad	Freedom, Democracy, Possibilities
rascacielos, comida basura, patriotismo	Freedom, Home, Diverse
rascacielos, comida basura, patriotismo	diversity, freedom, powerful
Nueva York, animadoras, fútbol americano	citizen
multicultural, hamburguesas, libertad	home, safe, big
bandera, patriotismo, sandwich	America, Freedom, Immigration
NBA, Nike, Hollywood	country, federation, power
Obama, fast food, patriotism	diverse, proud, powerful
Obama, fútbol americano, tecnología	Red, Patriot, Obama
fashion	Dream, Desire, Faith
Hamburguesas, Nueva York, bandera estadounidense	home, large, diverse
Obama, Empire State, Nueva York.	Patriotic, powerful, politics

Figure 2: Example of collected responses by the Spanish and US students to the term 'United States' in a Spanish-US exchange.

Having completed this analysis, students from both countries meet in online message boards to discuss their findings and to explore the cultural values and beliefs that may lie behind differences in the lists. For example:

- Student 1 from Spain: Most of the words used to describe the United States are: fast food, Obama and patriotism. Are you surprised with our answers?

- Student 1 from USA: Hi! I am particularly interested in the theme of fast food. This past summer I recognized how many fast food chains exist in Spain, such as Burger King and McDonald's. From my experiences with friends..., I had heard of students who eat fast food quite regularly that were not US citizens. It is intriguing for me to see how many people responded with the impression of fast food or junk food when hearing the word United States.

- Student 2 from Spain: On the one hand I think that this is because your country is really big, but on the other hand, maybe your tastes are about this kind of food. This is one of the most important reasons that the USA has got more than the 50% of its citizens with obesity, and the obesity is a really big problem talking about the health. What do you think?

- Student 2 from USA: ...I think that perhaps the most important factor contributing to the national problem of obesity and the proliferation of fast food is the steep cost of healthy food, which might not be immediately apparent. America's reputation of prosperity might hide the hundreds of millions of Americans that cannot afford fresh fruits and vegetables. For many, fast food is the only economically viable option, and a significant contributor to nationwide health problems

Following the initial experiments between Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Institut National des Telecommunications in Evry, France in 1997, the original developers of the Cultura initiative produced a set of guidelines for educators intending to use Cultura in their own classrooms. This teacher's guide explained that although the model was flexible, there were five basic principles that all teachers using Cultura should follow. These are the following:

- The two schools involved in the Cultura partnership should be similar so that students can work with partners of the same age and with similar life experiences.

- While students should use the target language during class time and to write their essays, the language used to complete the questionnaires and the forums should be the first language and not the target language. The authors of the teacher's guide explain this choice in the following way:

We wanted to make sure that students were able to express their thoughts in all their complexity as fully and as naturally as possible. This often surprises other foreign language teachers who have always thought of Web-based exchanges as a way for students to test their linguistic abilities. But this was not our purpose. And what students may 'lose', by not writing in the target language, is largely offset by the gains they make by getting access to a rich, dynamic and totally authentic language. (Cultura Homepage, 2004).

- The interaction on the forums should always be asynchronous. This allows time for reflection and analysis of what the other students say.
- Culture needs to be completely integrated into the classroom and a large part of the work needs to take place in the classroom.
- The project needs to take place over a sufficient amount of time in order to achieve validity. They suggested a minimum of eight weeks.

In addition to the questionnaires, learners are also supplied with online resources such as opinion polls and press articles from the two cultures, which can support them in their investigation and understanding of their partner class's responses. The developers of this model (Furstenberg et al. 2001, Furstenberg, 2016) report that this contrastive approach helps learners to become more aware of the complex relationship between culture and language and enables them to develop a method for understanding a foreign culture. In this model, as in most foreign language telecollaborative initiatives, although the data for cultural analysis and learning are produced online, the role of contact classes and the teacher is considered vital in helping the learners to identify cultural similarities and differences and also in bringing about reflection on the outcomes of the students' investigations on the Cultura platform. Cultura has become a very popular model of telecollaborative learning in foreign language classrooms and it continues to be widely used today. However, some exchanges (such as that reported in O'Dowd, 2005) do not strictly adhere to the original model's guidelines, and have, for example, encouraged students to use their target language during their online forum interactions.

The end of the 2010's has seen foreign language Virtual Exchange gradually diverge in two paths. The first of these paths has led telecollaborative exchanges away from formal language learning and engage learners in language and cultural learning experiences by immersing them in specialized online interest communities or environments that focus on specific hobbies or interests. Very often, this was justified by perceived weaknesses of the class to class model. Hanna and de Nooy (2009: 88), for example, argue that in class-to-class telecollaboration, "...[i]nteraction is restricted to communication with other learners, a situation that is safe and reassuring for beginners and younger learners, but somewhat limiting for more advanced and adult learners, who need practice in venturing beyond the classroom" (2009,

p. 88). The authors propose that it is more authentic and more advantageous to engage learners in interaction in authentic second language (L2) discussion forums such as those related to L2 newspaper and magazine publications. Their own work focuses on engaging learners of French as a foreign language in discussion forums of French magazines such as *Nouvel Observateur*. The authors compare class-to-class telecollaboration with their model and suggest that class to class telecollaboration lacks authenticity as learners are not motivated by a genuine interest in exchanging ideas but rather by an obligation to get good marks for their online interaction. In contrast, by engaging learners in online discussion forums with native speakers “interaction takes place in a context driven by a desire to communicate opinions and exchange ideas rather than by assessment or language learning goals” (p.89).

Thorne, Black, and Sykes (2009) describe the potential for intercultural contact and learning in online fan communities, where learners can establish relationships with like-minded fans of music groups or authors and can even use Web 2.0 technologies to remix and create new artistic creations based on existing books, motion pictures, and music. Learners also have increasing opportunities to use their foreign language skills and hone their intercultural communicative competence through participating in online multicultural communities such as multiplayer online games and public discussion forums.

Of course, models of Virtual Exchange which function at this level of integration require learners to assume greater responsibility for how their linguistic and intercultural learning progresses online as they are given greater freedom in their choice of potential intercultural learning partners and environments—many of which, as has been shown, may be completely independent of organized classroom activity. Thorne (2010) describes this form of telecollaborative learning as “intercultural communication in the wild” (p. 144) and speculates that it may be “situated in arenas of social activity that are less controllable than classroom or organized online intercultural exchanges might be, but which present interesting, and perhaps even compelling, opportunities for intercultural exchange, agentive action and meaning making” (p. 144).

The second, alternative path in foreign language Virtual Exchange involves attempts to integrate telecollaborative networks more

comprehensively in formal education. The argument here is that if Virtual Exchange is such a valuable learning experience, then it should not be used as an “add-on” activity but rather as a recognized, credit-carrying activity which is valued and supported by university management. Based on this belief, reports have emerged of how universities are integrating Virtual Exchange into their study programs (O’Dowd, 2013), the use of alternative credit systems for students’ telecollaborative work (Hauck & MacKinnon, 2016), and about the development of competence models for telecollaborative learning (Dooly, 2016) and for teachers engaged in telecollaborative exchanges (O’Dowd, 2015). Between 2011 and 2014 the INTENT project was financed by the European Commission to achieve greater awareness of telecollaboration around the academic world and to look for ways for its integration into university education. One of the main outcomes of this project was the UNICollaboration platform ([www.unicollaboration.eu](http://www.unicollaboration.eu)) where university educators and mobility coordinators can establish partnerships and find the resources necessary to set up telecollaborative exchanges. Since then, UNICollaboration has established itself as an academic organisation ([www.UNICollaboration.org](http://www.UNICollaboration.org)) and holds regular bi-annual conferences for practitioners from all disciplines who are interested in Virtual Exchange.

### **Subject-specific Virtual Exchange (2): Business Studies Initiatives**

Another discipline which has recognised the relevance and potential of Virtual Exchange is Business Studies, in particular in the areas of International Business and International Marketing. In modern business contexts, online communication is widely considered as offering a cost effective way of conducting business, as a manner to reduce power differences in team work and to enable physically disadvantaged employees have greater access to the virtual environment than the physical workspace (Heller, Laurito, & Johnson, 2010). As online communication becomes increasingly common in many organizations, a growing number of educators are looking to Virtual Exchange as a tool to prepare students of Business Studies to successfully work and collaborate online with colleagues and customers in other locations. The central interest here is in developing in students the necessary competences to work in what are commonly described as Global

Virtual Teams (GVTs) and to give them first-hand experience in online international collaboration in professional contexts. GVTs are defined as “geographically dispersed teams that use Internet-mediated communication to collaborate on common goals, and typically consist of members who have diverse cultural backgrounds and who have not previously worked together in face-to-face settings” (Taras et al., 2013).

A review of practice in this area would suggest that Virtual Exchange initiatives are, in comparison to foreign language telecollaboration, relatively scarce and under-researched, but the reports that do exist provide an insight into how Virtual Exchange is being introduced into the discipline. Duus and Cooray (2014), for example, describe a project for students of Marketing which brings together business students in the UK and India to take part in a simulation which involves working in online virtual teams and setting up a new business in India. Lindner (2016) reports on an exchange between business studies students at the University of Paderborn in Germany and Masaryk University in Brno in the Czech Republic which involved students collaborating online with their international partners to create a website which compared a product, service, or managerial innovation across two cultures. Osland et al. (2004) present the Globally Distant Multiple Teams project (GDMT) which brought groups of German, Austrian and American students together in virtual teams in online communication using e-mail, chat rooms, and other online communication tools. Students were asked to prepare a report or develop a website comparing a product, service, or organizational feature across their countries. For example, one group compared differing marketing approaches and consumer attitudes related to soft drinks in Germany and the United States.

However, probably the largest Virtual Exchange initiative emerging from Business Studies is the X-Culture project. X-Culture was launched in 2010 by Dr. Vas Taras of University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA when he began to look for a partner class for his International Business course and realised the interest among colleagues in such online collaborative projects. In the first year of exchanges, universities from 7 countries took part in X-Culture exchanges, but by 2015, almost 4,000 master’s and undergraduate students from over 100 universities in 40 countries were participating in

the initiative. Since 2013, a number of companies have worked together with X-Culture to provide real-life business challenges as the focus for the virtual exchanges. Taras believes that the cooperation with the business community makes the initiative more practical and motivating for students and also provides the corporate partners with creative solutions to their challenges.

The model works in the following way: Students from the participating classes are put into global virtual teams which usually involve six students from different countries. They are then assigned real international business challenges such as designing a marketing strategy for a company which is collaborating with X-Culture. These challenges usually involve different tasks such as carrying out a survey of key stakeholders, an industry and competition analysis, market selection and analysis etc.

The students then spend the semester working on those assignments. Teachers receive regular reports on students' work and progress and, upon successful completion of the exchange, students receive X-Culture certificates. Although the requirements and deadlines of the final report are outlined in detail, the international student teams are allowed to choose their online communication tools and can decide themselves about how to coordinate their team work and how the workload should be distributed. In reference to the decision not to use one specific online platform for the exchanges, Taras explains:

“We made a decision not use a proprietary platform [e.g. Moodle, Canvas etc.] for communication. Instead, we provide our students with a training on how to use the available online collaboration and communication platforms, such as Dropbox, Google Docs, Slack, Trello, and the like. The students can choose to communicate only via email or Skype, but we teach them how to use these more powerful and free platforms and most teams use these more advanced tools. The logic here is that (1) there is no point in trying to develop our own platform what there are number of extremely powerful tools are already available, and (2) we want our students to be able to use the tools they used in X-Culture even after the project is over.” (personal correspondence, 26.06.2017)

The model is based on an interesting combination of services provided by the X-Culture platform itself and the work of the teachers who have involved their students in the exchange. For example,

although most of the coordination, online communication, and performance monitoring are managed centrally by X-Culture, teachers are asked to regularly communicate with their students and provide coaching and guidance. Teachers are also expected to integrate the exchange into their normal teaching and to devote a small amount of time in each lecture to discuss student progress and to address concerns and answer questions. They are also expected to assess the students' final projects which they submit at the end of their virtual exchange.

The model differs to many other Virtual Exchange initiatives in that X-Culture collects the online interactions of the students and makes this available to colleagues who wish to carry out research on the data. A significant body of research is now beginning to emerge from the platform which looks at issues such as study global virtual teams, international collaboration and experiential learning (<http://x-culture.org/publications-etc/>). Teachers are encouraged to get involved as research collaborators and co-authors of these publications, thereby creating a rich community of both research and practice.

The project website provides some interesting insights into how the X-Culture model is continuing to grow and diverge. For example, various symposia have been held at conferences and on the premises of corporate partners. These symposia are attended by both teachers and students and give participants an opportunity to meet face-to-face with their virtual team partners.

#### **Conclusion. Reflections on the subject-specific model**

Although both Foreign Language and Business Studies Virtual Exchange initiatives share a belief in the importance of online intercultural collaboration as a part of student learning in their respective areas of study, significant differences do exist between the two disciplines. The first obvious difference is the underlying reason why Virtual Exchange is important. While foreign language approaches tend to see the development of intercultural communicative competence as an end in itself, initiatives from Business Studies tend to see intercultural competence as something which is necessary in order for students to be more successful in their professions. Linder explains succinctly these differing perspectives in the following way:

“...[W]hat is striking in Business and Economics discourse is that competence in communicating across cultures (cross-cultural competence) is viewed as a means to an end (the end being productivity



or, ultimately, profit) whereas in telecollaboration, competence in engendering understanding between cultures (intercultural competence) is the humanistic end in itself” (Lindner, 2015)

Another striking difference between Foreign Language and Business Studies approaches to Virtual Exchange are the underlying theoretical models which are often used to understand the complexities of online intercultural interaction and collaboration. For example, it was seen earlier than sociocultural approaches to education and models of intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997) have driven foreign language telecollaboration practice and research. In these approaches, intercultural communication breakdown is generally viewed as an opportunity for learning and reflection and for ‘teachable moments’ in the classroom. For example, one of the pioneers of research in foreign language telecollaboration, Julie Belz, goes so far as to argue that “the clash of cultural faultlines in telecollaborative learning communities ...should not be smoothed over or avoided based on the sometimes negative results of a study such as this one; indeed, they should be encouraged” (Belz, 2002, p.76).

In contrast, many Business Studies initiatives appear to be based on quantitative approaches to cultural dimensions of national cultures (e.g. Hofstede, 2001) and seek to explore how cultural differences which lead to breakdown in online communication can be overcome or solved (see, for examples, discussions in studies by Gonzalez-Perez et al., 2014 and Taras et al., 2013). Richardson is wary of this approach and writes “the first step in a cosmopolitan agenda for online education is to get away from overly simplistic categorisations in order to develop a more sophisticated understanding of cross-cultural interactions” (2016, p.115).

Inevitably, it is likely that Virtual Exchange will continue to grow in different directions, depending on practitioner-driven, institutionally-led and outsourced initiatives. The important issue is that the practitioners and promoters of these different forms of Virtual Exchange work closer together to promote the overall goal of increasing the number of students who benefit from online intercultural exchange as part of their university education.

## References

- Barrett, M. (2015). *Competences for democratic citizenship and intercultural dialogue: the education of globalized citizens in a digitalized world*. Keynote address presented to the National Guidelines for Education–Conference 2015, ‘Educating for Global Citizenship in a Digital Society’, organised by the National Council for Teacher Education (Norway), Centre for ICT in Education and the European Wergeland Centre, Oslo, Norway, March 12th-13th 2015.
- Beelen, J. and Jones, E. (2015a). Redefining Internationalisation at Home. In Curaj, A., Matei, L., Pricopie, R., Salmi, J., Scott, P. (Eds.) *The European Higher Education Area: Between critical reflections and future policies*. Springer International.
- Belz, J. (2003). Linguistic perspectives on the development of intercultural competence in telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology*, 7(2), 68-99. <http://www.lltjournal.org/item/2423>
- Byram, M. (2008). *From foreign language education to education for intercultural citizenship: Essays and reflections*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Council of Europe (2016). *Competences for democratic culture - Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Cummins, J., & Sayers, D. (1995). *Brave new schools. Challenging cultural literacy through global learning networks*. St. Martin’s Press.
- De Wit, H. (2011). Internationalization Misconceptions. *International Higher Education*, number 64: Summer 2011 6-7.
- De Wit. (2013). COIL – Virtual mobility without commercialisation. *University World News*, Issue 274, 1 June 2013.
- De Wit, H. (2016). Internationalisation and the role of online intercultural exchange. In R. O’Dowd & T. Lewis (eds.), *Online intercultural exchange: policy, pedagogy, practice*. Routledge: New York, 192–208
- Deardorff, D. & Jones, E. (2012). Intercultural competence: An emerging focus in international higher education. In Deardorff, D., de Wit, H., Heyl, J. & Adams, T. (Eds) *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education* (pp. 283-303). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE publications.

- Dooly, M. (2016). 'Please remove your avatar from my personal space': competences of the telecollaboratively efficient person. In R. O'Dowd & T. Lewis (Eds), *Online intercultural exchange: policy, pedagogy, practice* (pp. 192-208).
- European Commission. (2013). *European higher education in the world. Communication from the commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions*. European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52013DC0499&from=en>
- European Parliament. (2015). *Internationalisation of Higher Education*. A study by Hans de Wit, Fiona Hunter, Eva Egron-Polak and Laura Howard. [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL\\_STU%282015%29540370\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2015/540370/IPOL_STU%282015%29540370_EN.pdf)
- Furstenberg, G., Levet, S., English, K., & Maillet, K. (2001). Giving a virtual voice to the silent language of culture: the culture project. *Language Learning & Technology*, 5(1), 55-102. <http://www.lltjournal.org/item/2342>
- Grandin, J. M., & Hedderich, N. (2009). Intercultural competence in engineering: Global competence for engineers. In D. K. Deardorff (Ed.), (pp. 311-362). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Guth, S., & Helm, F. (Eds). (2010). *Telecollaboration 2.0: language, literacies and intercultural learning in the 21st Century*. Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0351-0013-6>.
- Hanna, B. & J. de Nooy. (2009). *Learning language and culture via public internet discussion forums*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hauck, M., & MacKinnon, T. (2016). A new approach to assessing online intercultural exchange: open badges for soft certification of participant engagement and task execution. In R. O'Dowd & T. Lewis (Eds), *Online intercultural exchange: policy, pedagogy, practice* (pp. 209-234). Routledge.
- Hudzik, J. (2011). *Comprehensive Internationalization*. Retrieved from [www.nafsa.org/cizn](http://www.nafsa.org/cizn)
- IIE. (2015). *Generation Study Abroad*. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/Programs/Generation-Study-Abroad>

- International Association of Universities. (2012). *Affirming Academic Values in Internationalization of Higher Education: A Call for Action*. International Association of Universities: Paris.
- Knight, J. (2008). *Higher Education in Turmoil. The Changing World of Internationalization*. Rotterdam, the Netherlands: Sense Publishers.
- Knight, J. (2011). Five Myths about Internationalization. *International Higher Education*, number 64: Summer 2011, 14-15.
- Leask, B. (2009). Using formal and informal curricula to improve interactions between home and international students. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13:2, 205-221.
- Leask. (2015). *Internationalization of the Curriculum in Context*. London, UK: Routledge.
- O'Dowd, R. (2006). *Telecollaboration and the development of intercultural communicative competence*. Langenscheidt.
- O'Dowd, R. (Ed.). (2007). *Online intercultural exchange: an introduction for foreign language teachers*. Multilingual Matters.
- O'Dowd, R. (2013). Telecollaboration and CALL. In M. Thomas, H. Reindeers, & M. Warschauer (Eds), *Contemporary computer-assisted language learning* (pp. 123-141). Bloomsbury Academic.
- O'Dowd, R. (2015). The competences of the telecollaborative teacher. *The Language Learning Journal*, 43(2), 194-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2013.853374>
- O'Rourke, B. (2007). Models of telecollaboration (1): E(tandem). In R. O'Dowd (Ed.), *Online intercultural exchange: an introduction for foreign language teachers* (pp. 41-62). Multilingual Matters.
- Richardson, S. (2016). *Cosmopolitan learning for a global era*. Routledge.
- Thorne, S. (2010). The intercultural turn and language learning in the crucible of new media. In S. Guth & F. Helm (Eds), *Telecollaboration 2.0: language and intercultural learning in the 21st century* (pp. 139-165). Peter Lang.
- UNESCO (2014). *Global citizenship education: preparing learners for the challenges of the twenty-first century*. Paris: UNESCO. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002277/227729e.pdf>

Warschauer, M. (Ed.). (1996). *Telecollaboration in foreign language learning*. Second Language Teaching and Curriculum Center, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.

УДК 372.881.111.1

<https://doi.org/10.25076/vpl.33.02>

А.П. Авраменко, М.А.Тишина  
Московский государственный университет  
имени М.В. Ломоносова

### МОБИЛЬНЫЕ ТЕХНОЛОГИИ ДЛЯ РАЗВИТИЯ СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНОЙ КОМПЕТЕНЦИИ

*В статье рассматривается вопрос интеграции мобильных технологий в обучение иностранным языкам с целью развития социокультурной компетенции. Проанализированные дидактические свойства мобильных технологий обладают значительным потенциалом для реализации основных принципов формирования и развития социокультурной компетенции. Также рассмотренные типы мобильных приложений (совместные, справочные, мультимедийные и коммуникативные) могут быть использованы для создания различных видов проблемных заданий. Далее в статье описан эксперимент по обучению школьников 10-11 классов представлению русской культуры на английском языке. На основе анкетирования сделаны выводы о положительном отношении учащихся к использованию мобильных технологий в различных видах проблемных заданий, а также выявлены достоинства и недостатки применения мобильных технологий для развития социокультурной компетенции на уроках английского языка. Главными достоинствами являются возможность обучения культуре работы с информацией, индивидуализация обучения и использование разнообразных аутентичных материалов в аудиторной работе. Основные недостатки связаны с возможными техническими проблемами при работе с мобильными устройствами.*

*Ключевые слова: методика преподавания иностранных языков, ИКТ в образовании, мобильные технологии в обучении, социокультурная компетенция*