

Integrating Virtual Exchange into the University Classroom: A Workshop for University Educators

1. WHAT IS VIRTUAL EXCHANGE (VE)?

Virtual exchange (VE), also commonly referred to as telecollaboration or Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), is a broad term used to describe different approaches to engaging students in online intercultural collaboration projects with partners from different cultural contexts within their programmes of study and under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators. Virtual Exchange has become a very popular way for teachers across all subject areas to internationalise their classrooms and to give their students first-hand experience of intercultural communication and using their digital skills.

2. AIM

The aim of the course is to familiarize participants with Virtual Exchange as a pedagogical activity for engaging students in authentic intercultural collaborative projects with international partners.

3. OBJECTIVES

- Introduce the concept of Virtual Exchange and how it is being employed in university contexts.
- Make the participants aware of the potential learning outcomes of Virtual Exchanges.
- Offer a practical guide to the steps for setting up and running a Virtual Exchange in university education.
- Provide materials and activities to help teacher trainers prepare to engage their students in a telecollaborative exchange project.

4. METHODOLOGY

Participants will be required to read about, observe and discuss the different aspects of running a Virtual Exchange project. They will examine and analyse different models of telecollaborative task design, assessment and strategies for integrating the exchanges into their coursework. There will be opportunities for general discussion and debate about the underlying principles and issues related to Virtual Exchange, including English as Lingua Franca, students' digital literacies and intercultural communication breakdown.

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5. PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The course should be of interest to teachers involved in university education who are interested in internationalising their courses and also in preparing their students for the global workplace. A high level of digital literacy is not required to take part in the course. However, an openness to working with and learning about online technologies is a prerequisite. The course will be run in English.

6. TRAINER

Robert O'Dowd is Associate Professor at the University of León (Spain). He has taught at universities in Ireland, Germany and Spain and has over 40 publications on the application of Virtual Exchange in university and pre-university education settings. One of his most recent books is the co-edited volume *Online Intercultural Exchange: Policy, Pedagogy, Practice* for Routledge. He recently coordinated INTENT – an award-winning project financed by the European Commission aimed at promoting Virtual Exchange in European Higher Education and he was the founding president of the UNICollaboration academic organization for telecollaboration and virtual exchange (www.unicollaboration.org). He has been invited to be plenary speaker at international conferences in the USA, Asia and across Europe and he is co-editor of the Peter Lang book series *Telecollaboration in Education*. He was recently invited to be co-editor a special edition of the prestigious journal *Language Learning & Technology* on Virtual Exchange in foreign language education.

He has extensive experience in the evaluation of Virtual Exchange programmes and he was lead researcher on the European Commission's Erasmus+ KA3 project *Evaluating and Upscaling Telecollaborative Teacher Education* (EVALUATE) (<http://www.evaluateproject.eu/>). This was a European Policy Experimentation which studied the impact of Virtual Exchange on over 1000 student teachers involved in Initial Teacher Education across Europe. He collaborates with other experts in the UNICollaboration organisation to offer comprehensive evaluation studies of Virtual Exchange programmes. Robert's publications are available here: <http://unileon.academia.edu/RobertODowd> and you can follow him on Twitter @robodowd.

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7. PROGRAMME

DAY 1	
09.00–14.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions: Colleagues introduce themselves and their professional contexts • What is Virtual Exchange? What contribution can it make to university education? • Examples of Virtual Exchange projects in University Education • Coffee break • Designing effective tasks for your Virtual Exchange in your subject area (group work)
14.00–15.30	Lunch
15.30–18.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What communication technologies to use in your Virtual Exchange? • Virtual Exchange and issues of assessment • Coffee break • Integrating the Virtual Exchange into your course and curriculum • Preparing a Virtual Exchange for your context (group work)

DAY 2	
09.00–12.00	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exploring online resources and communication tools (laptops/tablets necessary) • Dealing with intercultural problems and language issues in Virtual Exchange • Coffee break • Finding a partner class for your Virtual Exchange – online networks and communities • Participants make short presenting explaining how they could integrate Virtual Exchange into their own courses (group work)