



Simulation through virtual exchange in teacher training

La simulación a través de intercambios virtuales en la formación de profesorado

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Abstract

The project presented here reports a learning experience based on virtual exchange and simulation. It aims to know the potential of virtual exchange amongst pre and in-service teachers, and of web-based simulation to broaden the knowledge of future English as a Second Language or Foreign Language teachers (ESL/EFL) on educational issues such as active methodologies, including flipped classroom, shared teaching through Lesson Study, classroom management and the potential of storytelling. For this reason, pre-service teachers in Valencia carry out a simulation through virtual exchanges with future teachers, in-service teachers and university teachers from seven countries: Austria, Norway, Tunisia, the United States, Argentina, England and Romania. Mixed teams are created and a calendar for synchronous meetings is designed through Microsoft Teams. After the exchanges, the pre-service teachers from Valencia hold a reflection session 'debriefing' and answer individually a Likert questionnaire about their experience. Furthermore, in-service teachers and university teachers participate in another reflection session to comment on aspects of the proposal. This session, with the contributions from the professionals, gives shape to the following study.

Keywords: simulation; virtual exchange; teacher training; ESL; EFL

Resumen

Experiencia educativa a través de intercambios virtuales y simulación. Tiene por objeto conocer tanto el potencial de los intercambios virtuales entre docentes y futuros docentes como el de la simulación asistida por ordenador, para ampliar los conocimientos de futuros docentes de inglés sobre temas educativos como las metodologías activas, entre ellas 'flipped classroom'; la docencia compartida mediante Lesson Study, el manejo de aula y el potencial del 'storytelling'. Es por ello que futuros docentes de Valencia realizan una simulación mediante intercambios virtuales con otros docentes en formación, docentes en activo y profesores universitarios de siete países: Austria, Noruega, Túnez, Estados Unidos, Argentina, Inglaterra y Rumanía. Se crean equipos mixtos y se diseña un calendario para las reuniones sincrónicas a través de Microsoft Teams. Tras los intercambios, los estudiantes de Valencia llevan a cabo una sesión de reflexión y responden individualmente a un cuestionario Likert sobre su experiencia. Por otro lado, los docentes en activo y los profesores universitarios participan en una sesión de reflexión para comentar aspectos de la propuesta. Dicha sesión con las contribuciones de los profesionales da cuerpo al siguiente estudio.

Palabras clave: simulación; intercambio virtual; formación de profesorado; inglés como segunda lengua; inglés como lengua extranjera

1. INTRODUCTION

At the present times, European universities together with the European Commission are progressively interested in training students in the digital skills and intercultural communication. Initiatives such as Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (2018) or The EVALUATE Group (2019), amongst others, are gaining more visibility, probably due to the present sanitary crisis. They offer a springboard of possibilities for the students through virtual interactions and a working experience in a diverse cultural context (O'Dowd, 2017). Amongst the virtues of virtual exchange, authors such as Grau and Turula (2019); Sevilla Pavón and Haba Osa (2016), Vinagre (2016), highlight the growth of employability skills, and digital media literacy, the development of critical thinking and language and communication skills. Traditionally, one way of offering the possibility of acquiring these skills in Higher Education was through the mobility programmes, although the amount of students engaged in these programmes is still rather low. However, several studies conducted by Papatsiba (2005), Paige et al (2009), Stone and Petrick (2013), Potts (2015) and more recently, O'Dowd (2020), argue that physical mobility does not necessarily guarantee the development of intercultural competence and enhanced transnational identity, which are very often the goals of internationalization mobility programmes. In Papatsiba's own words (2005), mobilising students in order to gain a sense of European identity "remained a somewhat random result of experiential learning" (p.183).

Another way to acquire international competence and a more global mind-set is through virtual exchange on campus and within course curricula according to Beelen and Jones (2015) and O'Dowd (2020). This is known as "Internationalization at Home" (IaH) and the related concept of "Internationalisation of the Curriculum" (IoC) (De Wit, 2016; O'Dowd, 2016, 2020). This shift in focus is considered practical and democratic at the same time. It provides every student with the opportunity to gain international experience and interact in diverse cultural contexts without having to travel (De Wit, 2016).

Virtual exchange, thus, refers to the engagement of groups of learners in online intercultural interactions and collaboration projects with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programmes (O'Dowd, 2018, 2020). Virtual exchange has also been defined as a form of virtual mobility which aims to expand the reach and scope of traditional intercultural learning programs (Bassani & Buchem, 2019; O'Dowd, 2020).

In line with this, according to the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange brochure, Virtual exchange has been defined as a form of virtual mobility that through the use of technologies can bring an unprecedented number and diversity of people together in meaningful cross-cultural learning experiences. With a broad reach within and far beyond Europe's borders, it can bridge more important cultural divides, giving young people exposure to a variety of different world views and beliefs (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, 2019). Among other objectives, The Erasmus + Virtual Exchange project aims at promoting various types of Virtual Exchange as a complement to Erasmus+ physical mobility, allowing the inclusivity of more young people to benefit from intercultural and international experience.



Over the past 20 years, Virtual Exchange has been used in different fields and contexts of university education such as foreign language education (EVALUATE¹), business studies (Osland et al, 2006; Duus & Cooray, 2014; Lindner, 2016), and has developed different models and approaches with very different learning objectives. Thus, O'Dowd (2017) classifies four approaches to Virtual Exchange in Higher Education:

- a) Subject-specific Virtual Exchange (approach 1) – foreign language learning initiatives. This approach focuses on the foreign language education, that is, the exchanges proposed by foreign language educators between language learners in different countries to give them semi-authentic experiences. Examples of such approach have been named in different ways such as e-tandem (O'Rourke, 2007), telecollaboration (Belz, 2003; Guth & Helm, 2010), or online intercultural exchange (O'Dowd, 2007; O'Dowd, & Lewis, 2016).
- b) Subject – specific Virtual Exchange (approach 2) - This second approach has an important focus on the intercultural aspects of the language learning and has a greater integration of the online exchanges into classroom activity, study programs and in the credit system (O'Dowd, 2013; Hauck & MacKinnon, 2016). This approach of Virtual Exchange was called telecollaboration (Belz, 2003) and it includes many different tasks which enhance the intercultural skills of the working or professional environment (Belz, 2002; Belz, 2005; O'Dowd, 2005). Furthermore, a significant project, the INTENT project (O'Dowd, 2013) financed by the European Commission, has been carried out to achieve a greater awareness of telecollaboration among the academic world and to foster the integration into university education. One of the main outcomes of this project was the development of the UNICollaboration platform (www.unicollaboration.eu) that fosters partnerships between university educators and mobility coordinators and has also offered training for designing and implementing Virtual Exchange programs.
- c) Shared syllabus approaches to Virtual Exchange – This approach is based on the common work of a shared subject and develops a wide range of skills including intercultural competence and critical thinking at the same time providing the students with different cultural perspectives (Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008). The main difference with the previous approaches is that this is not only used in the context of language learning because it includes many different fields and subjects and that a great emphasis is put on analysing different cultural and national experiences of subject content. There is an outstanding Virtual Exchange worth to be mentioned within this approach and that is the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). The COIL approach to Virtual Exchange was developed by Rubin in 2004 and his colleagues at the State University of New York (SUNY) network of universities (Rubin & Guth, 2016). This model involves the collaboration between the teachers in two different universities

¹ EVALUATE Project retrieved from <http://www.evaluateproject.eu/>



which design course modules for their students to work together and engage in communication.

- d) “Service-provider” approaches to Virtual exchange – This approach involves different organisations which provide ready-made Virtual Exchange programs for several educational levels such as primary, secondary and higher education. The previous approaches included initiatives from independent teachers or educators therefore this is main difference with the present approach. One of the best examples of this model is the *Soliya Connect Programme* which connects students from the West with students from the Muslim world where they discuss about socio-political issues and develop critical thinking, intercultural communication and media literacy skills (Helm, 2016). There is another example of this “service-provider” approach and that is the *Sharing Perspectives Foundation* which is a non-profit organization offering various programmes for collaboration including contemporary topics such as political science, law, economics and social science.

After the revision of the different approaches or models we present a study that attempts to add a new perspective to this educational approach and to contribute to the innovation and inclusion in higher education.

The current situation in the context of the Covid -19 has challenged the education system around the world and has obliged educators to adapt to an online mode of teaching unanticipatedly (De Benito, García, & Moral, 2020; Gros & Durall, 2020). Many universities that were offering a face to face traditional pedagogical approach had no option but to adapt entirely to online teaching–learning. Therefore, Virtual Exchange is acquiring a more relevant position as an alternative methodological approach and as a form of inclusive mobility for students that are unable to participate in physical mobility programs due to different reasons such as high costs of travelling and living in a foreign country or socio-economic, health-related or political issues (Buchem et al, 2018). The intrinsic collaborative, experiential and cross-curricular learning that Virtual Exchange has proven to offer becomes an ideal tool to foster interaction between students and educators worldwide, as well as to promote the internationalisation of higher education not only in Europe but also among other continents.

The present study describes an initiative carried out with pre-service teachers who integrate Virtual Exchange (V.E) and Simulation. This is an attempt to gain a more international learning experience, having participants involved in education from different geographical parts of the world.

V.E. “is based on student-centred, international, and collaborative approaches to learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through interaction and negotiation with students from other cultures” (Baroni et al, 2019, p.8-9).

We believe that the integration of simulation gives an added value to the whole virtual exchange experience. That is, to simulate is to pretend to be or imitate somebody or something. Technically speaking, a simulation represents a set of ‘norms that define a specific model that reflects reality’ (Shirts, 1975, pp. 76). It is ‘a model of events, items or processes



that do or could exist' (Feldman, 1995, pp. 347). A simulation, then, refers to an activity in which participants are assigned duties and are given enough key information about the problem to carry out these duties without play-acting or inventing key facts (Jones, 2013).

It would be appropriate to distinguish now a simulation from a role-play as, in some cases, both are taken synonymously. A simulation is a reality in itself (Angelini, 2017, 2021). This means that participants respond to action/situations with their own judgment and knowledge as they would in real life. Role-plays, instead, have typically been associated with 'dramatic' activities, mainly by teachers, probably due to confusion in the literature arising from their relationships with play, games and simulation (Jones, 2013). In fact, McSharry and Jones (2000 p. 73) referred to role-play as a product of 'play', 'games' and 'simulation'. However, they noted the increasing intellectual rigour involved as students move from play, to games, and on to simulations. Baruch (2006) linked role-playing with drama and the ability to act out a role. Role-plays usually present more guided/scripted actions, where participants have less opportunity to intervene or show their critical thinking.

Other authors instead refer to role-playing or role-play simulation as simplified types of simulations that only include a few chosen factors from reality. Accordingly, they fall under the category of low-fidelity simulations (simplified models that only include a few chosen factors drawn from reality) as opposed to high-fidelity simulations (a true-to-life experience where participants can discover underlying principles and develop specific and soft skills). High-fidelity simulations have traditionally represented replicas of on-the-job tasks and thus they have been categorized as scoring high on fidelity (Massoth et al, 2019; Thiagarajan, 2003).

Simulations are appropriate for addressing issues related to education, environmental threats, sustainable economy or human rights. Through simulations, participants are involved in a reality in which they have to find solutions to certain problems or situations. They must do so by learning about the topic related to the scenario, proposing ideas, negotiating and making decisions. Participants are exposed to reading material, audio-visual resources and recent online news to familiarise themselves with the relevant topics (Crookall & Oxford, 1990; Duke, & Greenblat, 1981; Greenblat, 1988; Angelini & García-Carbonell, 2019).

The simulation used in our study presents a complete scenario that describes a fairly new school with very clear aims. It indicates the following (Angelini, 2021)

- recommended number of team members,
- type of participants,
- English level,
- simulation scenario (briefing information),
- general goal,
- profiles and individual goals,
- facilitator's instructions,
- educational challenges,
- summary,
- debriefing proposals process.

Thus, the project we present aims to know the potential of virtual exchange amongst pre and in-service teachers, and of web-based simulation to broaden the knowledge of future English as a Second Language or Foreign Language teachers (ESL/EFL) on educational issues such as active methodologies, including flipped classroom, shared teaching through Lesson Study, classroom management and the potential of storytelling. It seizes V.E. and simulation benefits to offer a complete learning experience and aims at providing reasoned and theoretically based solutions to the problems posed by simulation scenarios; producing a joint report with participants from other universities; and fostering multicultural, communicative and media skills. The simulation used is 'The National School of Valtance' that can be consulted in Annex.

2. LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The project aims to bring together 3rd year pre-service teachers from Universidad Católica de Valencia with students of teaching degrees from the following institutions:

- Pädagogische Hochschule NÖ, Austria
- Tunis Virtual University, Tunisia
- University of Carthage, Tunisia
- University of Stavanger, Norway
- North-eastern Illinois University, U.S.A
- Millis College, U.S.A
- Universitatea Babes-Bolyai, Romania
- Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina
- University of London, U.K

Eight mixed teams were created by the facilitators from the coordinating country (Spain); and a flexible schedule was designed in order to comply with the 4 synchronous meetings via Microsoft Teams.

Participation was compulsory for the 52 students attending the teaching degree from the coordinating country as the project is part of the course syllabus. Instead, participation was voluntary for the participating students from foreign universities as seen in table 1.

In order to foster participation and reward the effort, certificates were given to all students.



Table 1. Project participants.

University	Faculty	Type	Subject	# Students and University teachers
Spain. Universidad Católica de Valencia	Education	Compulsory	EFL/ESL methodology	52 pre-service students 8 university teachers
Pädagogische Hochschule NÖ	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	1 pre-service student 2 in-service teachers 2 university teachers
Tunis Virtual University	Education	Optional	Advanced English	2 pre-service students 1 in-service teacher 1 university teachers
University of Stavanger	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	3 pre-service students 2 in-service teachers 1 university teacher
Northeastern Illinois University	Special Education, Teacher Training	Optional	Teaching Degree	2 pre-service students 2 in-service teachers 2 university teachers
Willis University	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	2 pre-service students 1 university teacher
University of Carthage, Tunisia	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	8 pre-service students 1 university teacher
Universitatea Babeș-Bolyai, Romania	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	1 university teacher
Universidad de Buenos Aires, Argentina	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	1 university teacher
University of London, U.K	Education	Optional	Teaching Degree	1 university teacher

Pre-service teachers from all the participating institutions had the materials at their disposal through their university coordinators in charge of their training. The leading university prepared a tentative schedule in order to guarantee that all pre-service teachers were prepared for the simulation in due time. Table 2 shows the suggested schedule used.



Table 2. Proposed schedule

Dates	Tasks	Participants
Week 1 Sept 14 th Week 8 Nov. 2 nd	Specialized literature analysis, discussion and exemplification.	Pre-service teachers
Week 6 Oct 19 th	Virtual Exchange 1. Synchronous Meeting: Simulation scenario and adaptations. Mixed Teams making	University teachers/coordinators; In service teachers
Week 9 Nov. 9 th	Virtual Exchange 2. Synchronous Meeting: <i>Briefing + Getting to know each other.</i>	Pre-service teachers University teachers/coordinators In-service teachers
Week 10 Nov. 16 th	Scenario analysis Profiles assignation Virtual Exchange 3. Synchronous Meeting: Simulation <i>'The National School of Valtance'</i>	Pre-service teachers University teachers/coordinators In-service teachers
Week 11 Nov. 23 rd	Virtual Exchange 4. Synchronous Meeting: <i>Debriefing in teams</i>	Pre-service teachers University teachers/coordinators In-service teachers
Weeks 12-13 Nov. 30 th - Dec 7 th	Virtual Exchange 5. Synchronous Meeting: <i>Debriefing by experts</i>	Pre-service teachers University teachers/coordinators In-service teachers

The materials used in this educational experience were:

- a. 'The National School of Valtance' simulation (see the complete simulation in ANNEX A);
- b. Microsoft Teams for the virtual exchange interactions
- c. Specialized literature to train pre-service teachers prior the V.E interactions (ANNEX B).

For the simulation, the scenario and profile roles were given to the students in each team in advance. For the present project, the profile roles were also assigned by the leading university (Spain) after consultation with the coordinators from the other institutions during Week 6: Pedagogical advisors (participants from abroad), Head of the School (pre-service teacher from Spain); English as a Second Language teachers (pre-service teacher from Spain). In this way, we could assure that the Spanish pre-service students had experienced people in their teams.

Facilitators created the Microsoft Teams sessions so they could follow up the synchronous interactions and check participation with no intervention in their discussions. After the



interactions, students conducted a debriefing session and individually answer a Likert questionnaire (scale 1-unsatisfied/5 totally satisfied) and an open question about their experience. Moreover, the university teachers also participated in Weeks 12-13 debriefing sessions in order to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the proposal. In this way, after piloting this experience, a more solid framework could be designed to reapply in the future.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was coordinated by the Faculty of Education, Universidad Católica de Valencia 'San Vicente Mártir'. The main objective of the study was to interpret the data from experts (in-service teachers and university teachers) in order to arrive at themes and categories that shed light on how virtual exchange and web-based simulation can broaden the knowledge of future English as a Second Language or Foreign Language teachers (ESL/EFL) on educational issues such as active methodologies, including flipped classroom, shared teaching through Lesson Study, classroom management and the potential of storytelling'.

A qualitative analysis of the experts' perceptions was conducted. The debriefing sessions were recorded in order to recall their comments and transcribe them for the present study. In-service teachers and university teachers' feedback was first classified into initial categories (and subcategories) until saturation of the data; educational realities awareness (sub-categories: content-based lessons, competence-based lessons, behavioural and learning challenges); collaborative work across borders (sub-categories: motivation, autonomy, language restrains); simulation interaction (sub-categories: content-knowledge, anxiety, fluency); and overall perceptions of the experience.

The main conceptual categories were defined and analysed with the software application ATLAS.TI, version 9. We will refer to in-service teachers and university teachers as 'advisors'. Last but not least, it is worth-mentioning that qualitative research has long reached a height, especially in social sciences, where the role of participants and their perceptions are highlighted by their own discourse (Goetz & Le Compte (1988), Vallés (1997, 2002); Sandín (2003), Harris (2005), or Twining et al, (2017), among others.

4. RESULTS

In order to prove the potential of virtual exchange amongst pre and in-service teachers and of web-based simulation to broaden the knowledge of future English as a Second Language or Foreign Language teachers (ESL/EFL), we proceeded to analyse the transcriptions of the advisors' perceptions on the whole experience.

The advisors' perceptions on Virtual Exchange + Simulation yielded two broad categories: the potential of virtual exchange in education and the simulation scenario in pre-service teacher training.

As for the first category, '*the potential of virtual exchange in education*', has brought interesting reflections. All the advisors showed their satisfaction with the idea of connecting pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and university teachers through a common task.

The virtual exchange was an amazing opportunity to gain more knowledge on a variety of issues related to teaching; I personally enjoyed the idea of improving teaching worldwide! Also I was honoured to get the chance to meet all the brilliant ladies in my team! It was very enriching! (A5)

This was an interesting and innovative project. As a lecturer, it gave me plenty of fresh ideas for working with my own students. (A9)

It was a really nice experience and I met nice people. It was informative and I really liked the exchange of ideas, general educational situations and the informal chat. It's a great experience to broaden one's horizons. I would definitely take part again in such a simulation or informal virtual meeting. You can get a lot out of it and you reflect your own work, which is really important to stay or get professional, in my opinion. (A11)

With this pilot experience, the potential of V.E could be observed in the accessibility to technology. Tools were familiar to all participants. It also involved inclusive, intercultural collaboration and dialogue amongst the three active sectors represented (pre-service teachers, in-service teachers and university teachers). Educational experiences like the one presented here help bridge differences and inspire action with a long term positive impact on relationships.

Another benefit highlighted is that the learners were the focus of attention in the experience. The core of every interaction was the dialogue where participants were the main recipients and the main drivers of knowledge based on their own experiences.

Pre-service teachers acted as true professionals, they participated in the discussions and some objected ideas based on the training course and the literature studied. (A2)

However, this pilot experience helped identify some flaws in the application. Some advisors suggested keeping separate meetings at the beginning between the Head of the School and the participants performing 'the parents' in future simulations. This would mirror reality more closely as parents very rarely meet the whole professional school staff. This is a change that will be considered in future experiences. Yet, in order to guarantee that all the sectors are represented, the synchronous sessions will count with all the profiles interacting, parents profiles included.

To finish, V.E represented a structured educational experience that fostered mutual understanding over the educational issues depicted in the simulation scenario. It helped participants to engage in constructive conversations and to highlight its intercultural value through a common task -simulation- to deal with. Understanding and awareness can be said to not spontaneous consequences of the contact between different groups of people. There must be something to work on together in order to boost intercultural thinking.

For the second category of analysis, *the simulation scenario in pre-service teacher training*, most of the advisors highlighted the great value of simulations to tackle educational issues.

It was really beneficial to share different point of views about the educational delivery worldwide in order to try to improve it in the future. (A3)

I am so happy to had such a chance and I definitely would do it again! All the participants are professional and confident and have a wonderful view on education! (A6)

The simulation confirmed that all our student teachers struggle with similar issues on their journey to become teachers. All the teachers I participated with brought their full smart, empathetic, generous spirit to the dilemmas of practice. I appreciated their authentic, curious questions. There are some cultural differences that are harder to bridge in a short visit just as there would be if I, as a CA educator teaching in a densely populated urban county would have if I was talking briefly with teacher in a different city in another State in the US. But overall the issues with my European counterparts were the same dilemmas of practice. Bravo to all of the teacher candidates that participated. (A7)

However, some advisors indicated some changes and adaptations that the simulation should include in future applications. They suggested more briefing clarifications and commitment on the part of the participants performing the roles of English as a Second Language teachers (ESL) and Head of school. They observed lack of interaction and discussion amongst some participants in their teams.

I enjoyed sharing teaching and learning experience with the members of team 8. Students were very motivated to and interested in the educational approaches I spoke about. However, they did not discuss much among themselves. (A10)

The students seemed to use the topics of the simulation as a spring board to spark discussion around certain issues; however, I think that perhaps next time they could make more use of the roles given in order to carry out the simulation more effectively and to fully take advantage of its benefits. (A14)

It was also suggested that the participants performing the Head of the school chair the virtual exchange following a more guided plan, spotting the educational challenges.

The simulation provided a great opportunity for all participants to share their concerns about their educational realities, and to build off of one another to provide adequate solutions. The profiles were not clearly identified in the simulation. The variety of members in each team was especially interesting, as it allowed for a good range of discussion. (A15)

I really liked the experience. However, in my group there were certain misunderstandings, for example, the Head did not lead the meeting. Instead, the Head and the ESL teachers only posed questions to the advisors. (A16)

It could be inferred that participants in the roles of English as a Second Language teachers or Head of School may have felt inhibited interacting with participants from abroad, especially



university teachers who were experts on some of the educational challenges treated. Some of the pedagogical advisors had to chair the meetings.

As regards the profiles, the advisors noted that a more controversial role profile may be included in the simulation. They suggested 'the parents' role profile. In this way, more discussions in line with specifications on methodological choice may work better.

Along with this, the advisors agreed on the adaptation of the briefing scenario by adding some policies in times of crisis, teaching strategies and online learning. They found this sanitary crisis provides the right framework to tackle these topics. They also coincided on the benefits of discussing cultural differences amongst the educational challenges: how other cultures tackle cultural differences.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The pilot experience presented here facilitated a virtual dialogue amongst educational practitioners who highly contributed to evidence the virtues and weaknesses of the proposal. The integration of virtual exchange and simulation has been widely accepted by the experts who highlighted the development of cross-cultural collaboration as the strongest benefit. Through discussing educational issues with participants from abroad, they were able to have insights on other educational realities and viewpoints. The contribution to the field is aligned with the critical awareness developed through comparing and contrasting their knowledge and reality to those of the participating members of their teams.

With this proposal we have aimed to prove that virtual exchange and simulation bring unique value to higher education because it allows students to work in virtual international teams, in a diverse cultural context to gain international experience. As one of the advisors stated:

The virtual exchange and simulation both provided a great opportunity for all participants to share their concerns about their educational realities, and to build off of one another to provide adequate solutions. The variety of members in each team was especially interesting, as it allowed for a good range of discussion. I really appreciate this format, as it was absolutely new to me it was also a bit challenging in my role as a pedagogical advisor. In my point of working collaboratively across borders was absolutely a great win --> changing ideas and problems.
(A15)

Some adaptations to the pilot experience were suggested, namely a more systematic briefing instruction, profiles understanding and separate interactions, especially for one of the most controversial profiles (parents) in order to better plan strategies to discuss in the general meeting with the rest of the school members. With this project we have also found a great potential to foster digital media literacy and intercultural communication skills to enhance language abilities and to broaden students' horizons without the need to travel in these times of pandemic. A further study will analyse pre-service students' perceptions on the experience through the recorded virtual interactions and the Likert scale questionnaire.



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ANNEX A

The National School of Valtance

- 1. Team members:** 4-5 participants. Multiple teams can participate at the same time.
- 2. Type of participants:** pre-service teachers; educational corporations
- 3. English level:** B1+ and above
- 4. Time allotted:** Background study: 20 minutes; Action: 40-60 minutes
- 5. Learning outcomes**

It is important to note that other learning outcomes than the ones presented below may be addressed in accordance with the general course outcomes.

Thematic approach:

- To learn and reflect about:
 - teaching methodologies in ESL- language teaching/skills/
 - classroom management
 - shared teaching and open classrooms
 - storytelling and drama in the language class
 - others

Sociolinguistic approach:

- to develop social and language abilities to debate, negotiate and make decisions
- to control simple and some advanced grammatical forms
- to improve pronunciation at the segmental and suprasegmental levels
- to manage a wide range of vocabulary when speaking on a specific topic
- to produce extended stretches of appropriate language fluently

6. Briefing sheet

At the National School of Valtance we take our responsibility seriously in order to prepare children for life in the 21st century. The acquisition of fundamental values lies at the heart of everything we do and all areas of the curriculum are a vehicle for underpinning these values.

The school aims to expose every child, every day, to experiences that will help them understand the need for mutual respect, tolerance and understanding of people from different cultures. We pride ourselves on our success in this area as we see our students embrace difference with respect and integrity.

In order to achieve our values and goals, National School of Valtance will:



- have only an initial fee of 140 € to cover administrative costs;
 - maintain a school culture of excellence in teaching, student achievement, innovation and self-advancement;
 - maintain a supportive, healthy and secure environment for teaching and learning;
 - utilise technology and innovative pedagogy to advance student learning;
 - raise student awareness and engagement in social, environmental and inter-cultural activities, both within and outside the academic programmes of study;
 - provide excellent facilities and resources to support the programmes of study, minimizing negative environmental impact;
 - recruit, develop and retain teachers and support staff, who inspire students, contribute to the professional learning community and are positive role models for our students;
 - maintain stable and effective governance focused on financial soundness, operational efficiency and the long-term advancement of the school;
 - engage parents, alumni and the local and wider community in support of the school.
- Early Years Foundation Stage

The Pre-School caters for children from 18 months to 4 years of age and follows the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. The main approach of the Early Years Foundation Stage is to recognise and develop the many ways in which children express themselves. This involves following a curriculum rich in language, movement, play, painting, drawing, sculpture, music, role play and most importantly outdoor experiences in the natural environment.

- The Primary School

The Primary School aims to offer a balanced curriculum that promotes the acquisition of key skills through inquiry based learning. The IB philosophy and approaches to learning provide a curriculum that is engaging, relevant, challenging and significant to learners.

This thirst and enthusiasm leads children to developing the self-confidence and capacity to realise their expectations. Children are on a journey, discovering themselves and their future place in the world.

We achieve this special environment by employing inspirational teachers who respect every child and believe that whatever background or prior learning the child has, he/she has the capacity to excel.

We design fun learning experiences that build on children's prior knowledge and interests challenging their thinking. Learning experiences are both individual and collaborative, with every child encouraged to be a team player and a valued member of his/her class, year group, the school and society at large. Languages are fostered, English being taught through English lessons, Physical Education and Arts and Crafts.

- Head of the National School of Valtance
- ValPE, the Valtance Pedagogical Advisory Board
- ValPAR, the Valtance Parent Association
- ValED, the Valtance English Department (x2)



The inquiries and requests for clarification are classified into:

1. Teaching methodologies in ESL- language teaching
2. Classroom management
3. Shared teaching through lesson study
4. Storytelling and drama in English

Inquiries and requests for clarification

1. Teaching methodologies in ESL- language teaching/skills/

Innovation characterises The National School of Valtance. Teachers are annually trained in the latest methodologies and teaching resources. However, the school is finding it difficult to reach an agreement on which methodologies are actually best for the different subjects. It is true that educational practices, teaching methods, and curriculum vary from school to school; nevertheless, in The National School of Valtance, there exists a basic concept of education. Children are required by law to attend an educational institution whose responsibility is to impart knowledge and understanding of the traditional subjects: mathematics, Spanish, Valencian, English, social studies, and sciences. A certain level of non-traditional teaching style and subject emphasis has been tolerated but recently non-standard educational movements have become widespread, such as flipped teaching, project-based approaches, service learning, thinking-based learning, and other active methodologies.

The ValPE, the Valtance Pedagogical Board, have criticised the lack of consensus as their children seem not to understand how to proceed in class and at home.

As regards English teaching, the ValED, the Valtance English Department, finds it difficult to carry out a real L2 immersion. They rely on the differentiation of language skills and they assume they should develop more efficient techniques to implement communicative lessons.

By adopting the C-Wheel approach by Carol Read (2008), in which they take account of the whole child, they are likely to be more effective and successful in their work as language teachers. However, ValPE experts have compared the C-Wheel to the CLIL 4Cs (Coyle et al, 2010) in the way that content, cognition, communication and culture are embedded in a whole range of considerations about the child's overall development and needs, and would be very interested to know what ValED teachers think about this.

Regarding skills, ValPE wonders why 75% of the students surveyed highlight listening and speaking as their biggest problems. Would it be partly because of the demands of listening and speaking; and partly because of the way speaking is often taught and listening strategies are not taught consistently?

ValPE requires more specifications about the development of listening and speaking skills, and how they are both related. They maintain that it is important to plan and organize a listening lesson in order to support students and help them succeed at listening in English. How can teachers help these students develop their listening skills and identify where they need to improve?

As for speaking, classroom-based speaking practice seem not to prepare students for the real world. It usually consists of language practice activities (discussions, information-gap activities etc.) or is used to practise a specific grammar point. Neither teaches patterns of real interaction. So what can ValED teachers do in the classroom to prepare students for real interaction?



Pronunciation is very often neglected. In line with developing speaking, how can pronunciation be improved?

Reading and writing can be especially hard for students. Can ValED consider a few approaches to making classroom reading more communicative? That is, by integrating reading with other skills, so that students can see its value.

Writing, unlike speaking, is not an ability people acquire naturally, even in our first language - it has to be taught. Unless L2 learners are explicitly taught how to write in the new language, their writing skills are likely to get left behind as their speaking progresses. But teaching writing is not just about grammar, spelling, or the mechanics of the Roman alphabet. Learners also need to be aware of and use the conventions of the genre in the new language.

What strategies are ValED teachers going to employ to teach grammar, vocabulary and writing?

2. Classroom management

Ten formal complaints have been registered about ineffective learning environment during English lessons. ValPAR, the Valtance Parent Association, has required measures to control discipline and the management of the classes during the English lessons bearing in mind that teachers are supposed to maintain order and to keep the group on task and moving ahead. How can ValED teachers anticipate when misbehaviours are likely to occur and intervene early to prevent them? The most effective interventions must be subtle, brief and almost private. They should not, therefore, interfere with classroom activities.

ValED teachers are to specify:

Class rules, students' seating, eye contact, learning students' names, teacher talk, drawing attention, giving instructions, using pair and group-work, setting time limits, tasks for early finishers, whole class feedback, and using whiteboard.

3. Shared teaching through lesson study²

The National School of Valtance is committed to teacher development. It is very common to see two or more teachers within the same classroom. Children seem used to being observed while they are learning. However, ValPAR, the Valtance Parent Association seem to question the presence of teachers and practice teachers in the classrooms to just observe their children. They also criticize the fact that so many people inside a classroom disturb some children with shorter attention span. ValPAR is asking for the educators' reconsideration of the usefulness of shared teaching. On the contrary, the ValPE and the Head of the School have expressed their support for lesson study. How could they disseminate the benefits of lesson studies?

4. Storytelling and drama in English

² Lesson study is collaborative approach of classroom inquiry in which several teachers observe, plan, teach, revise and share the results of a single class lesson



ValPE and the Head of the School find that storytelling in English is a great way to allow students to express themselves freely and creatively in an authentic way.

However, more specifications are required from ValED about the following in light of the Christmas festival they are organizing:

How to choose and prepare a story, how to use transition activities during storytelling, how to use flashcards or story-cards effectively, how to introduce games and pre/post telling activities, how to develop language skills.

7. General Objective

Those who work at the National School of Valtance must try to analyse different points of view with sound arguments and negotiate innovative strategies and proposals so that the National School of Valtance can guarantee a solid thriving model of education in the specific field addressed (English).

**Notes must be taken to elaborate a complete report (including bibliographic references to support the improvements).

8. Profiles

8.1

PROFILE 1. Head of the National School of Valtance

Background

The Head of the National School of Valtance runs an institution that places the wellbeing of its students and the interests of the community at the heart of everything the school does.

The school mission is to foster “Enjoyment, Aspiration, and Achievement”, where students thrive in a nurturing yet challenging environment.

Latetly, the Head of the National School of Valtance has received numerous complaints and inquiries about certain measures and decisions taken by the ValED, the Valtance English Department. An important factor is that the Head of the National School of Valtance is a linguist and has taught English as a foreign language for more than 15 years before becoming the Head of this school.

Goal

The Head of the National School of Valtance must analyse the weaknesses in the approach to teaching English at the school, drawing on English teaching methodology experts at school in order to satisfy the needs of each party, guaranteeing the high quality standards.

8.2

PROFILE 2. ValPE, the Valtance Pedagogical Advisory Board



Background

ValPE, the Valtance Pedagogical Advisory Board provides a range of services to the school and community in support of instructional activities that impact on student achievement and success. ValPE assists the school by providing:

- support and guidance in the implementation of active learning methodologies;
- training and support for teachers and principals in effective instructional strategies and models via workshops, symposiums and other professional activities;
- support to teachers in the development of learning and evaluation situations that can be used in the classroom;
- examples of effective technology integration in the curriculum that enhance student learning;
- help in the writing of lesson plans, lesson studies, standards and procedures, professional development project proposals, and other projects.

These coming weeks are extremely demanding as they have to prepare 'the Standards for Students' Learning and Practice' to be presented to the Council for Education Accreditation. Unfortunately, ValPE has been overwhelmed with complaints regarding methodological aspects in the English classes. Now, an urgent meeting must help shed light on these aspects; otherwise, ValPe may not be able to finish 'the Standards...' on time. They have already taken too long with the initial draft. Time is tight.

Goal

ValPE, the Valtance Pedagogical Advisory Board must analyse different aspects concerning English teaching in light of the several complaints received by students, students' parents and some teachers who require more guidance. ValPE, together with the School Committee, must urgently come up with sound solutions.

8.3

PROFILE 3. ValPAR, the Valtance Parent Association

Background

ValPAR, The Valtance Parent Association is the structure through which parents/guardians in the school can work together for the best possible education for their children.

ValPAR can advise the Head of the school and the School Committee on policy issues and incidents that may require a review of school policy, e.g. bullying, safety, homework, enrolment, behaviour problems etc.

ValPAR is a support for parents in the school.

ValPAR can invite speakers to address the parents on issues which are topical or relevant.

ValPAR is not a forum for complaints against either an individual teacher or parent. The Complaints Procedure is the mechanism for this. Unfortunately, ValPAR has resorted to the Complaints Procedure by meeting with the Head of Valtance School and ValPE. Some students and teachers from the English Department (ValED) have detected a sort of mild disagreement, some may suggest 'irritation' related to methodological and procedural choices.



The main representative of ValPAR is a teacher of English in another school in the region and the Head of Valtance School trusts her/him.

Goal

ValPAR, The Valtance Parent Association have detected misbehaviour during the English lessons that hinders students from learning more effectively. ValPAR has to elucidate the core problems and help find a reasonable solution.

8.4

PROFILE 4. ValED, the Valtance English Department (2 members allowed)

Background

ValED, the Valtance English Department is dedicated to fostering student success by providing a solid exposure to the target language and maximizing intellectual potential in each individual within a nurturing yet academically challenging environment.

As a result of studying at the National School of Valtance students will communicate effectively, access information by various means, think critically and solve problems in a timely manner, successfully meet state standards, and achieve success through efficient organizational and time management skills. The rich educational experience provided by the English Department will train children who will become active, fulfilled, positive and resourceful young adults.

The great demands in today's society to have a good command of the English language have led ValED to design a proposal for quality education in English. Some uncertainties, though, have brought about a cascade of inquiries and complaints from several sectors that may jeopardize the ValED programme. Action must be taken to better clarify the different aspects under supervision. ValED representatives have a great deal of experience in teaching English. Some are planning to apply for an international scholarship to better learn about other educational systems.

Goal

ValED, the Valtance English Department has to meticulously refine their proposal for quality education in English in light of the several complaints received. Sound academic justification of the measures is required.

ANNEX B

Specialized literature

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