Internationalisation of teacher education in Europe: The untapped potential of virtual collaboration

Political recommendations from the EVALUATE Project

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“EVALUATE”: A European Policy Experimentation to evaluate the impact of class-to-class Virtual Exchanges on student-teachers involved in Initial Teacher Education.

It ran from 2017-2019
Premises that the project was based upon

- The world is increasingly co-dependent and interconnected but also marked by deep inequalities, fear of the ‘other’ and homophily
- Education is where we have the greatest chance to shape future societies
- Engaging with difference outside our schools/universities and communities can support positive engagement with difference within our communities
- Mobility is not accessible to all university students, and students of education are amongst the least mobile in Europe (2.6% of students of education are from abroad – Eurostat 2020)
- Future teachers need to experience virtual exchange in their university studies in order to successfully implement VE in their practice as teachers when they work in schools
What is class-to-class virtual exchange?

- The engagement of groups of students in **online intercultural interaction and collaboration**…
- …*with students* from other cultural contexts or geographical locations….
- …*as an integrated part* of course work….
- …*and under the guidance of educators* and/or **expert facilitators**.
What does class-to-class Virtual Exchange look like at university level?

- Teachers from 2 or more different countries come into contact and develop a joint curriculum for an exchange which will be integrated into their respective courses.

- Students from the different classes work together online, discussing issues related to their curricula and collaborating to create projects and presentations.

- The teachers guide students in their online interactions and in their reflections on this experience.

- At the end of the exchange, students receive academic credit for their work by submitting portfolios, essays or making presentations.
Guiding Research Question:

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

Intercultural competences

Technological, pedagogical and content skills (TPACK)

Foreign language competence

Student-teachers working in transnational teams to create lesson plans and projects together online
What were the main findings?

- Virtual Exchange acts as a **driver for innovation** and **international learning** in the university classroom.
- Virtual Exchange is a **complex** learning activity which requires **integration** into a formal educational framework as well as **guidance** from educators.
- The success of Virtual Exchange depends on **person to person engagement**.
- The growth of Virtual Exchange depends on the provision of **increased training and support** from institutions and educational decision makers.
Recommendations from the project (2019)
Higher Education Institutions can…

- increase the number of teacher-training programmes
- offer teachers recognition for their investment in VE: extra credit or time release for VE
- award students ECTS for participating in VE
- mention participation in VE in European Diploma Supplement
- make VE part of their internationalisation at home strategy and invest staff and resources
Regional & National Ministerial Authorities can…

- provide funding for further teacher training programmes
- incorporate Virtual Exchange into the Public Authorities’ projects and initiatives.
- mention and recommend Virtual Exchange in Public Authorities’ publications and strategy papers.
- Promote Virtual Exchange to counterparts in other regions/countries and to other educational decision makers in EU to foster and strengthen collaboration.
The European Union and Erasmus+ can...

- raise awareness of and invest in VE as a valid part of universities’ internationalisation policies and ensure its integration into the Erasmus Charter.
- provide funding for VE ‘planning visits’ for teachers to meet and work with their partner teachers.
- increase funding for projects and research initiatives on VE initiatives
- encourage greater collaboration between VE initiatives at university level and pre-university level (e.g. eTwinning).
2020 Recommendations

- International collaboration is more important than ever
- Ensure continuity of quality VE programmes with proven success
- Monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of new initiatives
- Invest in people and pedagogy NOT just technology and platforms, data analytics and content

Image from: nursingschoolsnearme.com/.
Free online teacher training courses at Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange
The EVALUATE consortium was comprised of public authorities, universities and a university network
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**Public Authorities:**
Spanish Ministry For Education, Culture And Sport, Spain
La Junta De Castilla Y León, Spain
Ministry Of Education In Portugal
Ministry Of Human Capacities, Hungary
Ministry of Science, Research and the Arts Baden-Württemberg, Germany

**Universities:**
Universidad de León, Spain (Lead partner)
Universitat Atonoma De Barcelona
Instituto Politécnico De Castelo Branco
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**University Network:**
Compostela Group Of Universities (Spain)
Thank you!

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