

Virtual Exchange for Future Teachers: A Project-based Learning Design



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Problem and Background

- In the present teacher education program, the majority of pre-service L2 teachers are specializing in **Spanish**.
- However, the instructor delivering the second language pedagogy course **does not speak Spanish**.
- The Canadian university has an **established relationship** with a university in Spain.
- The university in Spain has many future **English Language teachers** in their education faculty, who need support in English language learning .
- The granting opportunity for a **virtual exchange (VE)** (O’Dowd, 2020) supported the hiring of a bilingual (Spanish/English) teaching assistant (TA).

Participants

- Total of participants: 32 instructors, TA, and students
- Faculty included:
 - One (1) BEd instructor from Canada.
 - Two (2) BEd instructors from Spain.
 - One (1) Faculty of Education Dean from Spain.
 - One (1) bilingual TA (English and Spanish) (EdD graduate student) with teaching experience in foreign languages.
- VE Students included:
 - Eleven (11) students from Canada.
 - Sixteen (16) students from Spain.



Key Learnings

At the beginning of the VE, the TA and instructors from Spain had to help the students connect with each other after they were partnered up. The communication was done through Slack, WhatsApp, email, D2L (online platform), and Zoom.

The VE provided intercultural communication and language practice for the students and the faculty from Spain (e.g. speaking English). Additionally, the VE provided a design partnership among the Canadian instructor and TA with the Spanish partner instructors.

During the VE, the students were expected to attend two classes through Zoom and two sessions (minimum) with their VE partner(s), they expressed their desire to meet more times. However, some students met with their VE more than five times to complete their project, practice the language, and expand their pedagogical knowledge (Rets et al., 2020).

The Choiceboard provided opportunities for students to maximize their knowledge and skills, increase their motivation, and deliver final products that were creative and unique. The instructors from Spain continue to use this Choiceboard as a template for other projects and courses.

The TA provided some training to the instructors and students from Spain to increase their **technological literacy** using Zoom and D2L since they use other platforms in Spain.

Students liked the opportunity to communicate with other future foreign language teachers from another country to learn more about each others’ cultures and share ideas about teaching and learning. Some students continued their connection after the VE was done.

While, some projects were completed in English and Spanish, the TA and instructor from Canada **assessed their final projects**. The students liked to have very **descriptive feedback**.

Learning Design

- The VE was **embedded in a course** in both countries, where students were assessed with the project.
- **Student** from both countries were **partnered** after submitting an introductory video about themselves.
- Student partners met during an **overlapping portion** of their respective **semesters**, both synchronously and asynchronously.
- The **bilingual TA** delivered two Zoom sessions: one in English and one in Spanish.
- The design for the courses were built around **project-based learning** (Stoller, 2006) all modelled around a **Choiceboard**.
- The **VE projects** involved researching and sharing specific topics of L2 pedagogy and language use.
- The students **demonstrated their learning** through a final product that included a multi-modal assignment that allowed choices and inspired creativity.

The image shows a digital interface for 'Project-based Learning'. On the left is a 'CHOICE BOARD' with eight topics: Topic 1 (Assessments in L2 Teaching), Topic 2 (Language), Topic 3 (Inclusion), Topic 4 (Being a New Teacher), Topic 5 (Alberta ESL Benchmarks), Topic 6 (Virtual Exchange), Topic 7 (Identity), and Topic 8 (Second Language Learners). A 'START HERE' button points to the 'Involvement Log' (Topic 3). On the right is a 'Module 3 portfolio' with a list of instructions: 1. Start in the middle. The involvement log is compulsory. 2. Review the optional choices (Topics 1-8). You must do 3-11 with your Virtual Exchange partner for a total of 4 pairs to your portfolio (3 choices and the involvement log). 3. Click on the chosen box for a topic. 4. Follow the instructions. 5. Click "Home" to return to the main board. 6. You must choose three of the optional choices to go with your compulsory log. 7. See the rubric to review (D2L -> Content -> Rubrics) the criteria. Below the portfolio is a 'Canada & Spain' section with the Canadian and Spanish flags. At the bottom, there is a note: 'If completed all the tasks required for Learning Assignment No.3, please click on the Exit button' with an exit icon.

References

- O’Dowd, R. (2020). A transnational model of virtual exchange for global citizenship education. *Language Teaching*, 53(4), 477–490. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444819000077>
- Rets, I., Rienties, B., & Lewis, T. (2020). Transforming pre-service teacher education through virtual exchange: A mixed-methods analysis of perceived TPACK development. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10494820.2020.1826983>
- Stoller, F. (2006). Establishing a theoretical foundation for project-based learning in second and foreign language contexts. In G. Beckett & P. C. Miller (Eds.), *Project-based second and foreign language education: Past, present, and future* (pp. 19–40). Information Age Publishing.