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## Introduction

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# Introduction

**Anna Turula<sup>1</sup>, Malgorzata Kurek<sup>2</sup>, and Tim Lewis<sup>3</sup>**

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The following collection of short papers is an outcome of the Third Conference on Telecollaboration in Higher Education hosted by Pedagogical University in Krakow, Poland, from the 25th to the 27th of April 2018. After the two previous editions of the conference, the first one held in Leon in 2014 and the second in Dublin in 2016, we have been offered another opportunity to gain an insight into the current state of telecollaboration, aka Virtual Exchange (VE), a rapidly developing form of learning which engages students from geographically and culturally distinct academic institutions in meaningful computer-mediated tasks.

The conference took as its main theme the role of telecollaboration and VE in service of social inclusion and global citizenship, and pointed to the learning potential of VE across academic disciplines. It attracted as many as 154 novice and experienced VE researchers and practitioners from 27 countries. As always, it was extremely inspiring and thought-provoking to join this vibrant community of colleagues from all over the world and share their excitement for VE during academic and social encounters. While the former assured high quality research input, the latter helped the participants expand their social networks and form new partnerships – the very essence of VE projects.

The conference provided space for highly varied research and practice presentations, with three outstanding and inspiring keynote-speeches by professors Steve Thorne, Barbara Lewandowska Tomaszczyk, and Francesca Helm. Following the theme of the conference and based on the major conference

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strands, the papers collected in this volume offer theoretical and practical considerations on the most recent stage of development of VE. A number of papers describe specific VEs, reflecting on ways of improving them through modifications to task design, as well as through the use of different tools and techniques. Some of these chapters are practice reports offering invaluable insights into telecollaborative initiatives carried out over several years by experienced educators. The papers have been restricted in length to 2,000 words, which justifies their compact format. This limitation posed a significant challenge in terms of assuring both clarity and comprehensibility of contributions, and our appreciation for authors' attempts to meet both criteria is all the greater. It is also important to note that, as VE is increasingly used across various academic disciplines, a large group of chapter submissions reflect on the lessons learnt in the delivery of actual class-to-class exchanges.

In the first paper, **Daniela Caluianu** describes the evolution of a telecollaboration project between a Japanese university and a university in Romania. She focusses on the unexpected benefits and challenges emerging in VE projects and shows how adjusting task design to create space for reflection within the exchange can improve cross-cultural understanding and student self-awareness.

**Alastair Creelman** and **Corina Löwe** discuss an internal project at Linnaeus University, Sweden, whose aim is to facilitate international networking and online collaboration for the purpose of promoting virtual mobility. A special focus of the chapter is the careful selection of tools: in this case, a self-evaluation tool, enabling faculty to highlight potential development areas, as well a toolbox for digital collaboration. The authors emphasise the importance of mainstreaming VE in the process of internationalisation and highlight incentive-, strategy-, and culture-related factors as the main challenges that need to be overcome.

In their practice report, **Régine Barbier** and **Elizabeth Benjamin** present an online international learning exchange project involving students of French and International Relations at Coventry University and Networks and Telecommunications Engineering students at the Université de Haute- Alsace in

Colmar, France, which has been running since 2014. The chapter discusses the aims of the project, the impact of modifications made in its two recent iterations, as well as ways of providing the best VE experience to the participants.

**Juan Albá Duran** and **Gerdientje Oggel**'s chapter reports upon an exchange between Dutch students of Hispanic literature and a Chilean group enrolled in a course on journalism. Apart from discussing the challenges of an interdisciplinary telecollaborative project, the authors look at various contextual – socio-political, syllabus-related, and personal – constraints of the exchange and detail the lessons learnt from them. As they point out, the ability to deal with such constraints can be greatly increased if the instructors are prepared for them by adequate teacher training.

**Johanna Lochner**'s chapter offers an overview of nine different virtual school garden exchange projects demonstrating how the global perspective of education for sustainable development can be integrated into primary education. Drawing on the data and experiences gathered in nine iterations of the project carried out within the span of 20 years, the author shows how digital media can be harnessed to make primary and secondary level learners explore various aspects of gardening.

On a more practical note, **Malgorzata Marchewka** and **Reeta Raina** describe how a large-scale VE between FORE School of Management, India, and Cracow University of Economics, Poland, helped enhance the understanding of managerial problems in modern business as well as facilitating cross-cultural communication, and developing positive attitudes to cooperation and sensitivity to cultural differences. The authors focus on the practical aspects of organising a large-scale VE project, including task design, the selection of tools, and the roles of teachers and their interventions.

**Alexander Knysh**, **Anna Matochkina**, **Daria Ulanova**, **Philomena Meechan**, and **Todd Austin** discuss results from two co-taught courses in Islamic studies shared as a VE between the University of Michigan, USA, and Saint Petersburg State University, Russia. They emphasise the uniqueness of the experience, which

gave their students the opportunity to extend their language and communication skills as well as exposure to source material and educational approaches that they would have been otherwise unlikely to encounter.

Another group of chapters, while referring to actual VEs, place more stress on the authors' reflections on different aspects of telecollaboration and their importance to the success of the exchange.

In their chapter, **Marta Giralt** and **Liam Murray**, of the University of Limerick, argue that given appropriate task design and taking into account the specificity of the environment, preparatory pre-mobility telecollaborative exchanges can benefit from gamification to strengthen students' motivation to participate in such programmes.

A less common model of telecollaboration is presented by **Suzi Marques Spatti Cavaleri** who provides insights into the Institutionally Integrated TeleTanDem programme, as practised at the Rio Preto campus of the Federal University of São Paulo, Brazil. In her contribution, the author discusses the role of feedback and offers a model of assessment practice implemented in an exchange of this kind.

**Rachel Lindner** and **Dónal O'Brien** explore the classroom/workplace connection, investigating the potential of telecollaboration in the business context. They argue that such projects can provide students with valuable pre-workplace experience giving them the skills needed to operate successfully in Global Virtual Teams – culturally, geographically, temporally, and functionally dispersed workgroups typical of the context they describe.

**Martin Štefl** zooms in on an experience with an asymmetric online intercultural exchange between three different groups of students of various business studies in Czechia, Hungary, and France. He observes that asymmetry can frequently be noted in different VEs and is not necessarily unwelcome, nor detrimental, to the aims of the telecollaboration.

Finally, a series of chapters explore innovative approaches to VE research methodology and, based on instructors' own experiences, propose innovative solutions in this area.

**Marco Cappellini**, of the Université d'Aix-Marseille, proposes a methodology for the empirical investigation of the link between the sociocultural and linguistic dimensions of interaction in eTandem via desktop videoconferencing. He shows how such a methodological framework can lead to intriguing and original research insights into telecollaboration.

**Teresa MacKinnon**, of Warwick University, offers insights into the data coming from auto ethnographic accounts of the participants of the Clavier Online Intercultural Exchange. She shows how the data were analysed using a grounded theory approach and analyses the discovery process undergone by the researcher, in interacting with the data, in her attempt to grapple with the complexity of the process.

Finally, **Julia Renner** of the University of Vienna, reports on a study of vocabulary learning in synchronous, multimodal eTandems focussing on Mandarin Chinese. The researcher adopts an emic, conversation analytic perspective and triangulates self-reported data from learner diaries with recordings of actual eTandem conversations.

As shown above, the papers published in the current collection offer insights into multiple aspects of VE, including design, implementation, and innovative research methodologies. The authors whose papers are collected here provide the reader with a broad sweep of perspectives on this complex, yet extremely stimulating learning environment, thus confirming the growing role and potential of VE in a wide range of higher education contexts.

As the editorial team, we are grateful to all the authors for sharing their inspiring contributions and do hope that their experiences will attract the attention of other academic researchers and educators at all levels to VE, inspiring them to

embrace VE projects in an even wider range of disciplines and contexts. The open access accessibility of the current publication will hopefully assure this.

Last but not least, we would like to thank the team of reviewers who were kind enough to form our scientific committee for sharing their expertise in the process of scrutinizing all the papers. We also appreciate the incredibly smooth cooperation we have received from Research-publishing.net, whose publishing efficiency and professionalism added greatly to the current shape of this publication.



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