

# Internationalisation at Home through Critical Virtual Exchange

Mirjam Hauck<sup>1</sup>, Ana Cristina Biondo Salomão<sup>2</sup>, Müge Satar<sup>3</sup>  
& Gustavo Primo<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Open University | <sup>2</sup>Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP) |

<sup>3</sup>Newcastle University

*Virtual Exchange* (VE) refers to structured online collaborative learning between geographically and/or culturally diverse groups of students, aimed at fostering intercultural dialogue through digitally mediated project work. VE is a research-informed practice and serves as a valuable tool in advancing Internationalisation at Home (IaH) in Higher Education (HE), integrating intercultural dimensions into curricula, and expanding opportunities for global learning beyond physical mobility. However, despite its potential, we argue that VE is not inherently inclusive or equitable, as it is influenced by Western hegemonies and inequalities in access to technology, socio-economic and socio-political factors, and often also institutional constraints. Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) has emerged in response to these concerns, focusing on addressing epistemic injustices, promoting inclusive participation, and aligning educational practices with global challenges, such as the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). CVE emphasises equitable access to technology, prioritises the needs of underrepresented students, and encourages the systematic integration of local contexts into global learning projects. CVE also advocates for translanguaging, thus promoting multilingualism and multimodal communication as essential components of intercultural exchanges. This article draws on Hauck's CVE framework (Hauck, 2023; Hauck, 2025) and presents and interrogates the tenets of CVE. We use VE project examples from the Global South that "gesture towards" CVE involving HE institutions from Angola, Brazil, and Mexico to illustrate new opportunities in VE when focusing on equitable exchange student project work. Our predominantly conceptual contribution highlights the importance of VE project design that prioritises social justice, addresses power imbalances, and fosters socio-politically relevant intercultural dialogue, i.e., CVE, that can contribute to the decolonisation of HE in the shape of critical IaH.

**Keywords:** virtual exchange, collaborative learning, internationalisation at home, social justice, equity, inclusion, decolonisation

## 1. Introduction

*Virtual exchange* (VE) stands for “pedagogically-structured online collaborative learning between groups of students in different cultural contexts and/or geographical locations” (O’Dowd, 2018, p.2; for a more expansive framing of VE, see Section 2). It combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue with the broad reach of digital technology (EVOLVE, 2020) and is an umbrella term for educational interventions also referred to in the literature as Telecollaboration, E-Tandem/Teletandem, Online Intercultural Exchange, Globally Networked Learning, Global Virtual Teams, and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (O’Dowd, 2018).

VE is a research-informed practice and a strong catalyst in advancing the internationalisation of Higher Education (HE) curricula, known as *Internationalisation at Home* (IaH) (Beelen & Jones, 2015; O’Dowd & Beelen, 2021) which, in turn, has been defined as “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” (Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69). Unsurprisingly, many have come to consider VE as a significant IaH strategy (Hauck, 2020).

Another reason for the growing popularity of VE as an educational intervention in HE in particular, is the fact that the exchanges are known to prepare students for the globalised digital workplace as they focus on developing transversal skills like problem solving, teamwork and leadership, languages and communication, critical and innovative thinking, and media and information literacy (Crawford, 2021).

However, VE and VE-based IaH are not by default equitable and inclusive (Hauck, 2023; O’Dowd, 2023; Wimpenny et al., 2022). Like other forms of online or blended/hybrid education, they are affected by Western hegemonies and influenced by inequalities in access to and experience with technology, institutional constraints (e.g., lack of support and incentives for educators), gender, race, age, English language dominance, and socio-political and geopolitical challenges first highlighted by Helm (2020). These inequalities have only started to be explored in more detail in VE and IaH research and are therefore not yet systematically represented in VE and IaH literature and practice.

This contribution sets out to address this gap. It belongs to the emerging field of critical VE (CVE) (Hauck, 2020, 2023; Klimanova & Hellmich, 2021; Nicolaou, 2021) that aims to ensure more equitable, inclusive, and socio-politically relevant student exchange experiences and endeavours to tackle epistemic injustices and coloniality in and through VE. CVE, as understood by Hauck (2023, 2025), is concerned with equitable access to technology, inclusive student participation, public engagement, translanguaging practices, and the systematic alignment of student

project work with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015) which also strongly focus on reducing inequality (see Section 3). While it is primarily a conceptual contribution to the field of VE, we introduce examples from the Global South to illustrate the suggested approach.

As mentioned in the rationale for this special issue of the AILA review, one of the footprints of coloniality is the way in which western-northern thinking is often accompanied by universalist assumptions that privilege eurocentric perspectives of knowledge, philosophy, and theory while invisibilising epistemologies produced on the “wrong side” of the “abyssal line” (e.g., Andreotti & Menezes de Souza, 2008; Bock & Stroud, 2021; Finardi et al., 2022, 2023) as reflected in modern Western thinking (de Sousa Santos, 2007):

The colonies provided a model of radical exclusion that prevails in modern Western thinking and practice today as it did during the colonial cycle. Today as then, both the creation and the negation of the other side of the line is constitutive of hegemonic principles and practices. (p. 10)

As a result, knowledges from the Global South tend to get overlooked, if not ignored, and leave the people from the Global South with a colonised view of themselves, i.e., convinced that they can only learn from the Global North, they tend to overlook epistemologies from the Global South. The exchanges presented in Sections 4.1 to 4.3 are – as we propose – exceptions in this context. They are instantiations of the Global South learning from and with the Global South and are thus – as we hold – successful attempts at transcending the aforementioned abyssal line.

The authors of this article represent both sides of the abyssal line (de Sousa Santos, 2007) and follow Diniz de Figueiredo and Martinez’s (2021) invitation to share our loci of enunciation as a way to decolonise western-centred epistemologies. Hauck and Satar are both white, female academics located in Europe who have lived and worked in Turkey, Germany, the UK, and the US. We have been practising and researching VE both within and outside of language education in HE, mostly in the Global North, and have only recently begun to critically interrogate the assumptions and ideologies in the discourses surrounding VE and IaH. Salomão and Primo are both white (considering miscegenation in colonised countries), one female and one male academic located in South America, who have lived and worked in the Southeast and South of Brazil. We have been practising and researching VE both within and outside language education in HE in the Global South and have tried to stimulate connections with the Global South as well as to establish more horizontal connections with the Global North. This has led us on the path to CVE – that is, VE through the social justice and inclusion lens (see Section 3).

After an introduction to VE in general and CVE in particular (Sections 2 and 3), we will present and discuss exchange examples from Angola, Brazil, and Mexico that “gesture towards” CVE and will map them against the tenets of CVE (Section 4) as introduced in Section 3. The expression “gesturing towards” comes from a group of scholars who focus on critical aspects of decolonising global citizenship education (Donnelly, 2022; Kerr & Andreotti, 2018; Stein et al., 2020). They want to signal that “we can only ‘gesture’ towards the direction of decolonization, and [that] we will undoubtedly make mistakes in the process” and discover new opportunities for learning (Stein et al., 2020, p. 45). We explicitly align with this approach and also want to exercise some epistemological humility with regard to the decolonising potential of CVE. Hence, we acknowledge from the outset that we still have some way to go before we achieve CVE as a (critical) IaH strategy. Section 5 draws this chapter to a conclusion with pointers to potential next steps in CVE practice and research.

## 2. Virtual exchange (VE)

The origins of VE lie in the fields of applied linguistics and language education, where it was initially referred to as telecollaboration (Belz, 2003). Thus, it originated as a form of computer assisted language learning (CALL) and has been hailed as an experiential learning opportunity that offers participants (semi) authentic interactions with peers, mediated by technology (Helm & Hauck, 2022). Yet, VE has been shown to provide valuable new learning opportunities for students across all disciplines, and both VE practice and research have benefitted from cross- and multidisciplinary approaches (O’Dowd, 2018). The exchange examples in Section 4 illustrate this.

Today VE is understood as “a practice, supported by research, which consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programs or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators” (EVOLVE Project Team, 2020, p. 20).

VE also draws on over 30 years of experience in educational exchange and study abroad and can prepare for, deepen, or extend physical exchanges or as shown especially during the COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2022), it can also emulate them. Having an alternative to physical exchanges is particularly relevant as outward student mobility is limited and exclusive. Only a minority of students do, in fact, spend some time abroad during their studies. Thus, it could be argued that VE is also a means to achieve a more equitable and inclusive education, remov-

ing much of the cost of studying internationally, which disproportionately impacts socially disadvantaged students who may experience financial constraints and/or students with care responsibilities.

VE happens in a variety of digital spaces, including social networking sites and institutional learning management systems (LMSs). Similarly, there is a great variety of VE formats involving participants in different configurations (dyads, triads, small groups, facilitator-led, etc.) (Helm & Hauck, 2022). Most well-known are collaboratively designed and implemented exchanges, i.e., telecollaborative models and Tandem-based exchanges. Recently another format of VEs has emerged, designed and implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), whereby participants are organised into transnational groups and supported by specifically trained facilitators and/or educators, also referred to as *online facilitated dialogue (OFD)* (Helm & Hauck, 2022). Our focus here is on the telecollaborative type of VEs, i.e., exchanges that have been jointly developed and carried out by two or more university educators from the same or different disciplinary fields and who want to integrate an international and intercultural dimension into their pre-existing courses as part of an institutional IaH strategy. These VEs last on average 6–8 weeks and further the development of transversal skills (see Introduction).

Yet, VE and VE-based IaH are not necessarily inherently equitable and inclusive educational interventions. Not all learners, for example, have equal access to a reliable internet connection or sufficient hardware to participate in VE (Alami et al., 2022). This digital divide can reproduce or perpetuate existing exclusion or even create new (digital) inequalities (Satar & Hauck, 2022). This is not a recent insight, though. Already over a decade ago, Selwyn and Facer (2013) established that the use of digital technology in educational settings is “often not a wholly inclusive, dialogic, or equitable process in which all actors have equal power in participating” (p.14) and where all actors can determine what or how educational technology is used. Criticising a “means-end” and “deterministic” (Selwyn & Facer, 2013, p.ix) dominated integration of technology into education in large parts of the world and questioning apparently value-neutral claims made in the name of digital technologies, the authors highlight the need to identify the inequalities of access, power, and skills that impact the use of these technologies and that perpetuate social and epistemic injustices. Epistemic injustice, according to Fricker (2007), is a specific form of injustice “done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower” (p.1). It is an injustice that affects people’s ability to know things as well as their perception by others in terms of knowledge. It is essentially an issue of social power and thus both an ethical (i.e., relating to right and wrong) and an epistemic (i.e., relating to knowledge) challenge, a challenge that also exists in VE and VE-based IaH.

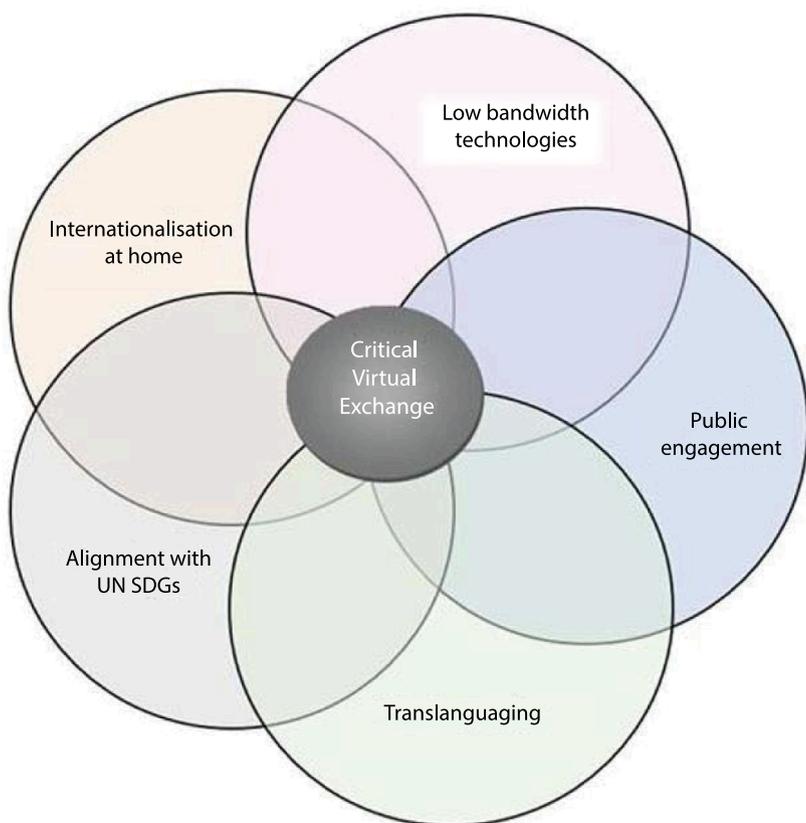
While VE has proven to be a way of widening educators' and learners' horizons, expanding knowledges and bridging epistemological gaps, it can also contribute to reinforcing existing power imbalances and inequity and – as a result – contribute to reinforcing coloniality in HE (Helm, 2020). Hence, the need has arisen to critically interrogate current VE practices, more specifically the kind of IaH these VE practices are actually supporting, and to propose an alternative way forward in VE-based IaH: critical VE – that is, VE informed by inclusion, diversity, equity, and access (IDEA) principles (Kastler & Lewis, 2021) and that opens up possibilities for critical IaH.

### 3. Critical virtual exchange (CVE)

A first attempt at conceptualising VE across the curriculum through the IDEA lens was made by Kastler and Lewis (2021) from the Stevens Initiative (<https://www.stevensinitiative.org/>). Equitable partnerships in VE programs, they propose, must include participants from minority serving institutions and institutions in non-English speaking countries. At the same time, institutional leadership needs to prioritise the creation of resources, training, and support for exchange implementers, that is, the educators. They, in turn, need to prioritise activities that explore social issues and justice topics as a part of the student VE project work. Then, exchanges need to be designed to serve all participating communities, i.e., not only the community of the lead partner, by finding common issues to deal with and/or by adapting exchange projects to local realities.

Kastler and Lewis (2021) also add that the most urgent issues are inequalities in terms of access to software and hardware and/or internet connectivity. Thus, while technology has the capacity to empower and liberate, it also has the capacity to exclude and marginalise (Darvin, 2016) and to reinforce the “abyssal thinking” that draws a metaphorical geographical line separating Northern and Southern epistemologies (de Sousa Santos, 2007, p.45). Therefore, careful consideration needs to be given to technology choices in VE.

Inspired by Kastler and Lewis (2021) and notions associated with critical CALL (Helm, 2015; Hauck, 2025), Hauck (2020, 2023) introduces critical VE (CVE), which conceptualizes VE as a vehicle for action, public engagement, and sociopolitical change. CVE is about social justice and inclusion at institutional and individual levels. Its target is student exchange experiences that are characterised by the following elements (see Figure 1):



**Figure 1.** Critical Virtual Exchange – Expanded framework (Hauck, 2025)

1. Use of low-bandwidth technologies
2. Systematic inclusion of students often underrepresented in IaH (e.g., those from low socioeconomic backgrounds)
3. Exchange topics informed by local and global, that is “glocal” (Guilherme & Menezes de Souza, 2019) challenges and aligned with the UN SDGs (United Nations, 2015)
4. Integration of local student outreach work with businesses, nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), and charities to promote transversal skills development, enhance graduate employability, and further support achievement of SDGs
5. Promotion of translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014) approaches, especially, but not exclusively, in exchanges where the learning and teaching of languages and cultures is at the centre of the exchange dialogue between participants.

What these criteria have in common is a shared concern with reducing inequalities and enhancing inclusivity in and through VE in general and in VE-based IaH in particular. VE designs that explicitly encourage *translanguaging* – that is, multilingualism and multimodal communication (Hauck, 2025) are only beginning to gain scholarly attention in VE (Reljanovic Glimäng, 2024, Satar et al., 2023). Yet, as Reljanovic Glimäng (2024) points out, “[t]he transnational, digital space not only lends itself to, but also promotes translanguaging” (p. 114). Translanguaging means seeing the different languages known by the individual as a continuum related to their life history and identity and considering the creative uses people make of language as part of their linguistic knowledge and repertoire (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014). Salomão (2022) propounds that concepts such as translanguaging and also intercomprehension (IC) (Martins, 2010, 2014; Araújo e Sá & Pinho, 2015) “might open up new spaces for understanding the ways in which the fluidity of interaction in non-formal education can be incorporated into formal educational contexts” (p. 10) such as VE. IC is an interaction practice where both speakers use their first languages and acquire oral and/or written skills due to the proximity of the languages involved, e.g., Romance languages. Drawing on Capucho (2004), Salomão (2022) explains that the practice is about “developing the capacity to co-construct meaning in the encounter between different languages and to make pragmatic use of this capacity in a concrete communicative situation” (p. 10).

Multimodal communicative competence is the ability to express ideas across a wide range of modes and semiotic resources including words, spoken or written, images (still and moving), sound, 3D models and any combinations of these (Kress, 2003). Fostering translanguaging in and through CVE means building positive attitudes towards multilingualism and multimodal communication and encouraging participants to use multiple linguistic and semiotic resources as a combined single repertoire (Clavijo Olarte et al., 2023) to communicate with their exchange partners. Examples illustrating translanguaging, IC, and multimodal communicative competence can be found in Section 4.

Next, each of the elements of the CVE framework (Figure 1) and the associations it evokes will undergo a brief critical interrogation. Concepts such as “Internationalisation” and “Internationalisation at Home” carry complexities and challenges that warrant further consideration. While they offer valuable framings for enhancing global and intercultural competencies, they must be implemented with care to avoid reinforcing colonial power dynamics and to ensure inclusivity and equity. Internationalisation can – at times – serve as a conduit for Western norms and values, overshadowing local and indigenous cultures. It can have a market-driven focus where it is viewed as a means to enhance institutional prestige and competitiveness facilitating the commercialisation of programmes to an

international market to generate revenue, rather than prioritising quality of educational experiences and fostering genuine intercultural understanding. IaH has its origins in the Global North (de Wit & Altbach, 2021) and – as a result – IaH strategies often reflect Western educational practices and priorities, potentially sidelining local needs and perspectives, which can influence how institutions in the Global South adopt and adapt these approaches.

“Low bandwidth technologies” need to be understood as a placeholder for provisions in terms of access to technology including challenges experienced by disabled students but also issues with access in a wider sense: access to devices, Internet connection, or pre-requisites regarding students’ and educators’ digital skills, their critical digital literacy in particular. The latter examines how the operation of power within digital contexts shapes knowledge, identities, social relations, and formations in ways that privilege some and marginalise others (Darvin, 2017). It also equips learners with the tools to examine the linguistic and non-linguistic features of digital media, to identify their embedded biases and assumptions (Darvin, 2017) and it leverages digital technologies for social justice-oriented action and change (Jiang & Gu, 2022; Mirra & Garcia, 2020) which aligns well with the overarching aim of CVE.

Promoting “translanguaging approaches” means encouraging VE participants to draw on their full “semiotic budget” (Hauck & Satar, 2018, p.155), that is, all modes available to them online (visual, audio, gestural, spatial) to make meaning, communicate, and interact with each other, including spoken and written language, and – in this way – help them develop and realise their multimodal communication potential. Translanguaging may also encompass interdisciplinary communication where students move across and beyond their disciplinary jargon, interactional patterns, and/or normative behaviour to fully understand and engage with their VE partners.

The 17 global objectives of “the UN SDGs” were designed to address a wide range of social, economic, and environmental challenges and to achieve the UN 2030 agenda for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). However, they have been criticised for promoting a universalist agenda that is underpinned by Global North and neoliberal interests (Arora-Jonsson, 2023) and for ultimately perpetuating the Global North–Global South divide (Blicharska et al., 2021). There are challenges associated with their implementation in diverse contexts. For example, in Africa and Latin America, extremely diverse cultural, economic, and political landscapes mean that a uniform approach may do disservice to specific local needs. Global goals can also be in conflict with local priorities and significant financial constraints can hinder the ability to invest in the infrastructure and programmes required to achieve the SDGs. Regions that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and resource depletion may struggle to achieve the

goals. It is widely acknowledged, for example, that poorer countries are hit hardest by climate change (Bhargawa & Bhargawa, 2023). Similarly, deep-rooted social inequalities, such as discrimination based on gender and income, constitute significant challenges in some parts of the world (Morgan et al., 2020). Thus, efforts to achieve the SDGs must take account of marginalised and under-resourced populations to ensure an inclusive way forward.

As regards “public engagement”, while in some projects students work with local partners and directly interact with community members, in others, direct interaction with the community may not be possible. Sevilla-Pavón and Nicolaou (2022) report on the Youth Entrepreneurship for Society (YES) project located in the Global North which explicitly took account of the participants’ wider socio-economic contexts. Business Communication students from Cyprus University of Technology worked with Management students from the University of Valencia in Spain. The aim of the YES project was to connect the respective classrooms with the outside world through the involvement of local organisations to promote the students’ transversal skills development and to help them develop a social entrepreneurial mindset. Via the HEI engagement offices at both institutions, the students were put in contact and worked with local associations and NGOs, identifying the main challenges faced by those organisations. In their cross-cultural groups, they discussed and proposed solutions to social challenges in their respective local communities and designed their own initiatives including elevator pitches and digital campaigns, which they subsequently presented in an online social entrepreneurship fair. In cases where such direct community outreach work is not possible, engagement with public issues, we propose, can be indirect, e.g., through documentaries or authentic social media content.

The following section features three examples of exchanges that “gesture towards” CVE, reflecting different aspects of the CVE framework as outlined and discussed above (Section 3).

#### 4. Exchange examples “gesturing towards” CVE

The examples in Sections 4.1–4.3 are drawn from the Brazilian Virtual Exchange Programme: BRaVE-UNESP (Salomão & Freire Jr, 2020). BRaVE-UNESP ([www.international.unesp.br/%23!/study/virtual-exchange-program/](http://www.international.unesp.br/%23!/study/virtual-exchange-program/)) was created by the Brazilian Association of International Education (*Associação Brasileira de Educação Internacional* – Faubai) with the aim of promoting an online collaborative learning model that furthers intercultural contact and knowledge sharing by connecting Brazilian undergraduate and/or postgraduate students with students from different HE institutions around the world (Salomão & Freire Jr, 2020).

The second author of this contribution is responsible for the BRaVE programme at UNESP and proposes the examples as representative of initiatives “gesturing towards” CVE in the Global South.

According to a report by the Coordination for the Improvement of HE Personnel (*Fundação Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior* – CAPES, part of the Brazilian Ministry of Education, which plays a fundamental role in the expansion and consolidation of *stricto sensu* postgraduate programs in all states of the Federation), the internationalisation of Brazilian universities (Brasil, 2017, p. 6), should focus not only on the mobility of students and teachers, but also on the integration of an international dimension into curricula, teaching, research, and outreach.

Implemented at São Paulo State University (*Universidade Estadual Paulista “Julio de Mesquita Filho”* – UNESP) in 2018, BRaVE reflects actions stipulated in the university’s Strategic Internationalisation Plan (*Plano Estratégico de Internacionalização* – PEI) to foster the creation of networks in the training of interconnected professionals for global learning and to democratise access to internationalisation opportunities for students who, for different reasons – mostly financial in nature – would otherwise not have access to an international experience.

UNESP’s track record in IaH started in 2006 with Teletandem Brasil (Telles & Vassallo, 2006), a large scale project to support second language education through synchronous VE practice. The BRaVE programme consists of an institutional strategy for internationalising the curriculum through co-designed exchanges for class to class collaboration using tasks that engage students in technology-mediated collaborative learning connected to the SDGs. It is thus aligned with the telecollaborative model of VE (see Section 2). As Salomão (2022) states, “the contact established between classes can be entirely online, with synchronous or asynchronous interactions, or in hybrid formats, seeking to create a context that emphasises learning through experience and joint knowledge construction” (p.3).

In what follows, three exchange examples including partners from Angola, Brazil, and Mexico will be introduced and mapped against the characteristics of CVE as presented in Section 3. We include information about the institutions, educators, and learners involved, the duration of the exchanges, the main exchange topic(s), the tasks the participants carried out, the online tools and applications they used, their main mode of communication (synchronous/asynchronous) and the main outcomes/products of their collaborative project work. The information stems from the VE educators’ accounts of their projects as published on the BRaVE-UNESP programme website (BRaVE-Unesp, 2025). All of them gave permission to use change their real names for the materials.

What sets this work apart from the majority of VE studies reported in the literature to date is the fact that all partners are located in the Global South. It is thus also a contribution to decolonising VE itself and to redressing the power balance in published VE research.

The examples are introduced by a brief summary of each project in the following sections while more complete descriptions are available in the appendices in Portuguese. The characteristic features of CVE mentioned in the presentation of each example have been highlighted in italics. They illustrate the aforementioned exploratory and tentative dimensions of this work, i.e., the fact that in our efforts to decolonise global citizenship education (Donnelly, 2022; Kerr & Andreotti, 2018; Stein et al., 2020) “we can only ‘gesture’ towards the direction of decolonization” (Stein et al., 2020, p. 45).

#### 4.1 Sounds and knowledges

**Project summary** (The complete description can be seen in Appendix 1)

This virtual exchange project, addressing SDG 4 *Quality Education*, aimed to promote linguistic and cultural interaction between students and teachers from Brazil and Angola. Students interviewed experts on music in each country and exchanged information in order to produce a podcast. The production and recording of podcast episodes as a common project goal facilitated the recording of the voices of students, teachers, and interviewees who shared their knowledge of the rich musical heritage of each country. Students on each side had to deal with technological limitations and were faced with the challenge of communicating through different varieties of Portuguese (Brazilian and Angolan) while trying to grasp cultural complexities.

**Technological tools used**

WhatsApp for interaction between project participants;

Google Meet for synchronous meetings between student and teacher participants;

Google Presentations to introduce the project to participants.

**Products co-created by students**

Students co-produced scripts and podcasts, which can be accessed here: <https://www.youtube.com/@unesplabfon>

The project “*Sons e Saberes: Conexões de Vozes entre Angola e Brasil*” aimed to promote linguistic and cultural exchanges between students and educators from Brazil and Angola and made use of *accessible low-bandwidth technologies to bridge the digital divide* and ensure inclusive participation. The project addressed social justice by explicitly *engaging students commonly underrepresented in IaH*. It pro-

moted diversity in musical and cultural practices *aligned with SDG 4 (Quality Education)* and facilitated direct student-expert interactions to enhance transversal skills development. Students interviewed experts on musical and cultural practice topics in each country and exchanged information in order to produce a podcast, which has the same title as the project. The production and recording of podcast episodes as a common project goal provided a unique opportunity to *make the voices of students, teachers, and local subject matter experts heard* who shared their knowledge of the musical and cultural wealth of their respective countries. This was of particular value to the *numerous student participants* for whom “Sounds and Knowledges” was their *first international learning experience*. In addition, the interviews generated *engagement beyond university walls (local outreach)* and brought authentic elements of the different cultural contexts into the collaboration.

Students on each side had to deal with technological limitations and were faced with the challenge of communicating through different varieties of Portuguese (Brazilian and Angolan) and of grasping cultural complexity. They also critically engaged with digital tools to produce podcasts while reflecting on global citizenship and cultural sensitivities. The means used for communicating and producing the podcast enhanced their digital and intercultural communication skills. The students used different varieties of Portuguese (Brazilian and Angolan) in their exchanges as well as other modes for making meaning online (audio and visual). In this way they developed their language and cultural understanding through *translanguaging* while becoming aware of distinct registers and musical diversity.

The main achievement was the creation of the podcasts capturing the voices of the participants and bearing witness to the linguistic and cultural diversity of the partner countries. According to the educators, the project’s success was evident in the positive feedback and skills development reported in the student evaluations, highlighting the value of promoting social justice and inclusion and increasing critical cultural consciousness among participants.

## 4.2 Indigenous peoples

**Project Summary** (The complete description can be seen in Appendix 2)

This virtual exchange project, addressing SDG 11 “Sustainable Cities and Communities”, aimed at highlighting the need to protect and safeguard the world cultural heritage. In their project work the students compared the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in Brazil and Mexico and came up with possible solutions while engaging in intercultural exchanges. Using communication tools such as WhatsApp, Google Meet, and Zoom, they discussed the topic, watched documentaries, and presented a final reflective

piece to the other participant groups. The outcomes indicate that the indigenous peoples of both countries suffer from racism and social inequality but that due to differing socio-political context different approaches to tackling these challenges may need to be pursued.

### **Technological tools used**

Padlet – for a personal introduction;  
 WhatsApp – for group communication;  
 Google Meet – for meetings;  
 Google Classroom – for class organisation and activities;  
 Zoom – for meetings;  
 YouTube – for watching recommended videos;  
 MS PowerPoint – for preparing the final presentation.

### **Products co-created by students**

In their cross-cultural working groups, students co-produced a final reflective work on the Indigenous Peoples of Brazil and Mexico and presented it at the closing of the project in a synchronous joint class event hosted on Zoom.

In this VE the students carried out a project on indigenous peoples in Brazil and Mexico based on the UN's understanding of the term "indigenous" (United Nations 2012):

1. Self-identification as indigenous peoples at the individual level and acceptance by the community as their member
2. Historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies
3. Strong link to territories and surrounding natural resources
4. Distinct social, economic, or political systems
5. Distinct language, culture, and beliefs
6. Form non-dominant groups of society
7. Resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities.

The project aimed at fostering mutual understanding as well as *engagement with indigenous peoples* in both countries. Participants were asked to identify and discuss the challenges faced by indigenous peoples in both countries and reflect on approaches to addressing those challenges.

Students collaborated using *accessible and freely available tools for communication* such as text messaging and videoconferencing, ensuring broad participation despite technological disparities. By focusing on underrepresented communities, the initiative directly addressed social justice and inclusion, *align-*

ing with SDG 11 (*sustainable cities and communities*). This thematic focus facilitated discussions on cultural preservation and social equality through the use of broadcast media to enhance the students' practical engagement with the topic.

The chosen methodological approach promoted intercultural understanding and critical thinking through synchronous and asynchronous communication including activities such as watching documentaries and joint class discussions. The intentional integration of *translanguaging* – both Spanish and Portuguese were used – allowed students to navigate language barriers and engage in multimodal communication, thus enriching their communication skills. By fostering *critical digital literacy* – how indigenous people are portrayed in the media – the project encouraged students to reflect on social identities and power dynamics, developing an ethical stance oriented towards *social justice*. The final presentations and written outputs, the results of the debate over the documentaries they watched and analysed together, demonstrated a commitment to overcoming language barriers and engaging in meaningful cultural dialogue.

### 4.3 Hydrology and philosophy

**Project Summary** (The complete description can be seen in Appendix 3)

This interdisciplinary virtual exchange project, aligned with SDG 6 “Clean Water and Sanitation”, aimed to explore the ideological roots of contemporary ecological and water crises, focusing on humanism and modernity. Participants from Brazil and Mexico engaged in a phased learning process, starting with individual activities including familiarisation with foundational texts and creating diagrams reflecting water consumption shared in a word cloud. The project progressed to a collaborative phase where participants used digital platforms to discuss and analyse the impact of humanism and modernity on their communities, focusing on social and ecological challenges. The project culminated in the joint creation of infographics, addressing key water security issues in both countries, including coverage rates, the impact of extreme weather events, societal participation in water resource decisions, and water tariffs. The facilitators wanted to raise awareness of the historical roots of contemporary ecological challenges to allow for a better understanding of the interrelationship between ideology and ecological sustainability.

#### **Technological tools used**

- Flip: Introduction of instructors, students, and icebreaker activity;
- Wakelet: Organising and sharing instructions and documents;
- Edpuzzle: Fun assessment tool for consolidating learning;
- Padlet: Submitting diagrams and final infographics;
- Zoom: Weekly synchronous meetings and opening/closing activities.

### Products co-created by students

Students created and submitted diagrams reflecting the main insights from assigned readings, engaged with video content and provided responses on EdPuzzle, and finally created a summarising infographic with their group reflections.

This interdisciplinary educational project explored the ideological roots of contemporary ecological and water crises, focusing on humanism and modernity. *Easily accessible applications* such as Flip, Wakelet, EdPuzzle, and Padlet, supported coordination and real-time discussions, creating a shared virtual space for the student work. Participants engaged in a phased learning process, starting with individual activities that included reading foundational texts, such as *Learning Waters* by Anidjar (2023), and creating an infographic of their water consumption. Students collected personal data on their household water usage and compared this data along with water tariffs between Mexico and Brazil. They later created diagrams which were shared in a word cloud.

The project then progressed to a collaborative phase where participants used digital platforms to discuss and analyse the impact of humanism and modernity on their communities, *focusing on social and ecological challenges*. The project culminated in the creation of collaborative infographics *using translanguaging, IC, and multimodality* to raise awareness for key water security issues in Brazil and Mexico (Figures 2a and 2b). Infographics include coverage rates, the impact of extreme weather events, societal participation in water resource decisions, and water tariffs. The facilitators aimed to raise awareness of the historical roots of contemporary ecological challenges and to create a deeper understanding of the connections between ideology and ecological sustainability. This activity was *aligned with SDG 6 (ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all)*.

Overall, the project emphasised presence and immersion through the collection of real-world data, making the learning material tangible and relevant. By comparing water consumption and tariffs, students broadened their perspectives and gained intercultural understanding in terms of access to potable and treated water in both contexts. The empirical approach of collecting and analysing data helped students develop skills in data visualisation and comparative analysis which allowed them to demonstrate the *origins of water related problems* and their *long term societal and environmental impacts*.

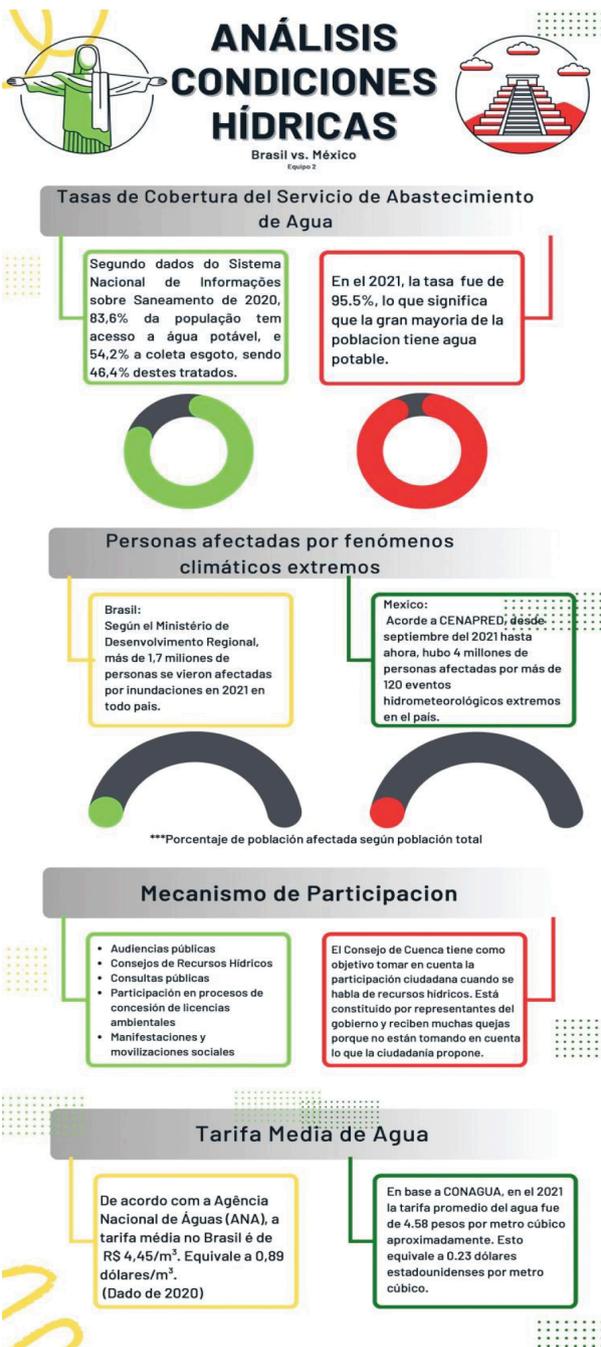


Figure 2a. Hydrology and Philosophy Infographic Group 2



Figure 2b. Hydrology and Philosophy Infographic Group 4

#### 4.4 Summary of examples

The VEs presented in Sections 4.1 to 4.3 resonate with the five elements outlined in the CVE framework (Section 3), albeit in different ways and to varying degrees. Thus, we propose, they are “gesturing towards” CVE. All three examples illustrate engagement with VE for the overall goal of IaH. In terms of low bandwidth connection, students used Whatsapp for *Voices of Brazil and Angola*, and low-data tools (text, emojis, and pictures) in *Indigenous peoples in Brazil and Mexico*. Predominantly asynchronous activities gave participants the freedom to collaborate when they were available, fostering inclusion and flexibility in their interactions and ensuring that all voices could be heard without the constraints of real-time communication which relies on synchronous applications.

In terms of public engagement, in Example 1 (Section 4.1), students spoke to experts in their community related to the topic of their collaboration, and in Example 3 (Section 4.3) students collected and collated individual data from their everyday life. In the Indigenous Peoples Example (Section 4.2), it was not possible to establish direct contact. Hence, students watched documentaries about indigenous people of each other’s countries, indirectly engaging with the local voices through media.

All three examples illustrate how the SDGs were addressed in the projects. The first example addressed SDG 4 (quality education) with the project involving teacher trainees for the promotion of academic literacy (Section 4.1). In the second example, students tackled SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) in terms of protecting and safeguarding the world’s heritage (Section 4.2). Finally, SDG 6 (sustainable management of water and sanitation) was addressed in the third example, as students reflected on sustainable management of water and sanitation (Section 4.3).

Translanguaging played a crucial role in all student project work, facilitating the seamless integration of different Portuguese varieties – Brazilian and Angolan Portuguese in the first Example (Section 4.1.) – and Portuguese and Spanish in the second and third Examples (Sections 4.2. and 4.3). Additionally, it enabled interdisciplinary language use by allowing for the negotiation of knowledge across disciplines, i.e., STEM and Humanities in the third Example (Section 4.3).

### 5. Preliminary conclusions

The exploration of Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) in this conceptual contribution to the field of VE testifies to the transformative potential of CVE in applied linguistics and its role in advancing SDGs and equity and inclusion across disci-

plines and languages. The CVE framework we draw on offers a robust methodology for critical IaH fostering diverse perspectives, intercultural communication and understanding, and inclusive approaches through accessible, technology-mediated interactions. This is especially relevant in tackling the lasting effects of colonialism in language education and across the curriculum, as CVE challenges hegemonic educational practices (included in VE itself), promotes epistemic diversity, and can contribute to transcending the “abyssal line”.

The three examples presented and discussed illustrate the application of the framework within a Global South context and are meant to be a source of inspiration for other educators who decide to “gesture towards” the direction of decolonisation in VE-based *critical* IaH. These examples, ranging from linguistic exchanges between Brazil and Angola to discussions on indigenous peoples in Brazil and Mexico, demonstrated how CVE can effectively engage underrepresented communities and facilitate critical dialogue on social justice and inclusion issues. By aligning exchange topics with SDGs, such as Quality Education (SDG 4) and Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11), CVE projects contribute to a more inclusive and equitable global education landscape. The use of low-bandwidth technologies and translanguaging approaches highlights the practical strategies employed to bridge digital divides and linguistic barriers, ensuring broader participation and meaningful engagement.

The relevance of CVE in drawing attention to epistemic injustices and deconstructing colonial legacies in VE-based *critical* IaH is evident in its emphasis on equitable partnerships and inclusion of diverse voices and knowledges in VE. Incorporating CVE into applied linguistics research and practice offers a way to critically examine and deal with the power imbalances that permeate HE practices in particular, at times also in VE. By fostering an environment that encourages critical reflection and dialogue on global and local challenges and by using accessible technologies and a variety of semiotic/linguistic resources, CVE supports the development of a more connected and inclusive global society that values diversity.

Future practice and research in VE should focus on expanding CVE across the curriculum and HE institutions globally, ideally accompanied by longitudinal studies that allow to demonstrate its impact in terms of social justice and inclusion and its contribution to the decolonisation of HE curricula. This should involve addressing inequalities in access to technology and ensuring that all participants have the resources required for full participation.

Another avenue for applied linguistics research in particular, is exploring the interface between language, identity, diverse local educational practices, institutional and national policies, and how these dynamics influence learning outcomes in CVE-based critical IaH. Finally, in line with Satar et al. (2024), we argue that

further research is needed to challenge monolingual assumptions and the dominance of English in VE and to propagate a “translanguaging principle” in transnational and multilingual CVE.

Overall, the CVE framework presented in this article offers a powerful foundation for rethinking VE as a vehicle for social justice, socio-political change, and critical international/intercultural understanding. By prioritising IDEA and addressing local issues from global perspectives, CVE can contribute to a more equitable world where voices of the invisible are heard and read and marginalised knowledges are systematically brought to the fore. An ongoing challenge remains in how to be responsive to the diverse needs of educators and students in VE partnerships within inclusive global virtual learning communities.

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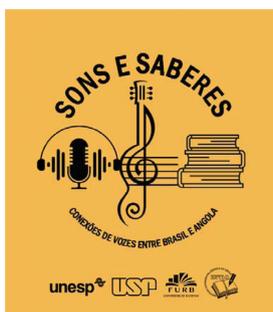
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## Appendix 1. “Sons e Saberes” activity description

*Sons e Saberes:*

*Conexões de vozes entre Brasil e Angola*



Fonte: Rômulo Borim, Ibilce/Unesp

## *Resumo do projeto*

Este projeto de intercâmbio virtual, sediado na Universidade Estadual Paulista, é parte de um projeto de pesquisa financiado pela Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP, Process: 2022/05908–0), intitulado “Aprendizes universitários em práticas contemporâneas de letramento acadêmico-científico na formação de professores de ensino básico e de pesquisadores globalizados” e que visa alcançar o ODS 4 “Educação de Qualidade”. A colaboração virtual teve como objetivo promover a interação linguística e cultural entre estudantes e professores do Brasil e de Angola. Os estudantes entrevistaram especialistas em cada país e trocaram informações para produzir um podcast, que leva o mesmo título do projeto. A produção e gravação dos episódios do podcast como um objetivo comum favoreceu a gravação das vozes dos estudantes, professores e entrevistados que compartilharam seus conhecimentos sobre a riqueza musical de cada país. Os alunos tiveram que lidar com limitações tecnológicas de cada lado e enfrentaram o desafio de se comunicar por meio de diferentes variedades do português (brasileiro e angolano) e de compreender a complexidade cultural. Apesar das dificuldades, a principal conquista foi produzir um podcast que captura as vozes dos participantes e registra a diversidade linguística e cultural dos países parceiros.

**Duração do projeto:** de outubro a dezembro de 2023, num total de 20 horas.

**Número de alunos participantes:** 31 (16 do Brasil, 15 de Angola).

## *Ferramentas digitais utilizadas*

- Whatsapp para interação entre os alunos participantes;
- Google Meet para sessões síncronas entre alunos e professores;
- Google Presentations para apresentar o projeto aos estudantes.

## *Tipo de comunicação*

A comunicação entre os estudantes foi majoritariamente assíncrona, com o apoio dos professores responsáveis pelas disciplinas e, no caso de Angola, houve também o apoio do coordenador pedagógico e do professor de TI do instituto.

## *Métodos utilizados para integrar os estudantes*

- Atividade inicial assíncrona: apresentação em áudio via grupo de WhatsApp;
- Atividade síncrona inicial: apresentação do projeto e das pessoas em salas do Google Meet;
- Atividade de troca de mensagens entre estudantes em pequenos grupos no WhatsApp: comunicação, por texto e áudio, iniciada por perguntas relacionadas ao tema de estudo de cada grupo;
- Produção escrita seguida de gravação em áudio: produção colaborativa do texto no Google Docs e gravação do áudio em celular pessoal ou no Laboratório de Fonética do Ibilce.

## *Produtos co-criados pelos estudantes*

Os estudantes co-produziram os roteiros e podcasts, que podem ser acessados aqui: <https://www.youtube.com/@unesplabfon>

## *Resultados do projeto*

Avaliação reflexiva das atividades em grupo e individualmente sobre as atividades realizadas e as experiências vividas. Principais desafios culturais encontrados: aspectos linguísticos desconhecidos da variedade do português falado em Angola; modos de interação verbal culturalmente constituídos e não compartilhados entre os participantes do projeto. Principais conquistas: superação de dificuldades de comunicação; aprendizado sobre a diversidade cultural e musical dos países envolvidos; ampliação do conhecimento sobre as variedades do português falado no Brasil e em Angola.

### *Professor(a) Brasileiro(a)*

**Cidade/Campus:** São José do Rio Preto, IBILCE

**Programa:** Pós-graduação em Estudos Linguísticos

**Departamento:** Estudos Linguísticos e Literários

**Disciplina:** Características linguístico-discursivas e práticas orais nos usos de podcast no ensino superior

### *Professor(a) Parceiro(a)*

**País/Cidade:** Angola, município de Libolo

**Instituição:** Instituto Superior Politécnico do Libolo, Angola

**Programa:** Licenciatura em Ensino Primário

**Disciplina:** Língua Portuguesa III

## Appendix 2. “Povos Indígenas no Brasil e no México” activity description

### *Povos Indígenas no Brasil e no México*



### *Resumo do projeto*

O tema dos povos indígenas do Brasil e do México é um assunto comum nas disciplinas de Gestão de Projetos Sociais (Iberoamericana) e Análise da Paisagem (Unesp). Trata-se de um tema relevante, relacionado ao ODS 11 – Cidades e Comunidades Sustentáveis, no que diz respeito à proteção e salvaguarda do patrimônio cultural mundial. O objetivo da parceria foi

discutir e comparar os problemas enfrentados pelos povos indígenas de ambos os países e possíveis soluções, além de promover trocas culturais e estabelecer contatos entre os estudantes. Utilizando ferramentas de comunicação como WhatsApp, Google Meet e Zoom, os grupos discutiram o tema, assistiram a documentários e apresentaram um trabalho reflexivo final aos outros grupos. Os resultados das discussões indicam que os povos indígenas de ambos os países sofrem com o racismo e a desigualdade social. No caso dos povos indígenas do México, há uma necessidade de legislação para demarcar terras indígenas, como ocorre no Brasil. Em ambos os países, esses povos ainda necessitam de mais políticas públicas e ações de proteção.

**Duração do projeto:** de setembro a outubro de 2021, num total de 24 horas de trabalho.

**Número de alunos participantes:** 33 (22 do Brasil, 11 do México).

### *Ferramentas digitais utilizadas*

- Padlet – para fazer uma apresentação pessoal;
- WhatsApp – para comunicação em grupo;
- Google Meet – para as reuniões;
- Google Classroom – para organização da aula e atividades;
- Zoom – para as reuniões;
- YouTube – para assistir aos vídeos recomendados;
- MS PowerPoint – para produzir a apresentação final.

### *Tipos de comunicação*

Síncrona (reuniões durante a aula ou extraclasse) e assíncrona (para as atividades escritas).

### *Métodos para promover a interação entre os participantes*

- Primeiramente, cada professor explicou sobre o projeto, destacando a oportunidade pessoal e profissional proporcionada pela parceria.
- Em seguida, cada aluno foi convidado a escrever ou apresentar um vídeo de introdução no Padlet, contando o que sabia sobre o México ou o Brasil.
- Uma lista com os nomes e números de telefone dos alunos foi usada para criar o grupo geral no WhatsApp, facilitando a comunicação entre todos.
- Cada professor inseriu as atividades na rotina de suas aulas, discutindo-as em classe, interrelacionando-as com o tema escolhido e incentivando a troca cultural entre os grupos.
- Dois documentários (“Indígenas en ciudad de México” e “Flecha Selvagem 1 – A serpente e a canoa”) foram escolhidos para serem assistidos e discutidos, o que ajudou na compreensão geográfica da problemática comum a ambos os países.

### *Produtos co-criados pelos estudantes*

Os estudantes produziram um trabalho reflexivo final sobre os Povos Indígenas do Brasil e do México de forma colaborativa e o apresentaram no encerramento do projeto, em uma aula conjunta síncrona, na plataforma Zoom, no dia 28 de outubro de 2021.

## Resultados do projeto

No encontro final, as equipes mistas, formadas por 4 a 5 estudantes de ambos os países, entregaram o trabalho escrito e apresentaram os problemas comuns dos povos indígenas do México e do Brasil, bem como possíveis soluções. De acordo com os professores, essa aula conjunta foi uma experiência incrível. Foi possível observar o empenho dos alunos em superar a barreira linguística, a qualidade da discussão sobre o tema, fruto do trabalho colaborativo, e o entusiasmo pelo diálogo cultural. No questionário de avaliação, os estudantes relataram que a parte favorita da experiência foi conhecer novas pessoas e participar das trocas culturais.

### Professora Brasileira

- **Cidade/Câmpus:** Ourinhos
- **Programa:** Geografia
- **Departamento:** Geografia
- **Disciplina:** Análise da Paisagem

### Professora Parceira

- **País:** México
- **Instituição:** Universidad Iberoamericana
- **Programa:** Técnico Superior Universitario en Gestión de Proyectos Sociales
- **Disciplina:** Gestão de Projetos Sociais

## Appendix 3. “Hidrologia, Pós-humanismo, Ética e Tecnologia” activity description

### Hidrologia, Pós-humanismo, Ética e Tecnologia

Palabras clave del texto "Introducción a la seguridad hídrica"  
/Palavras chave do texto "Introdução à Segurança Hídrica"



### Resumo do Projeto

Este projeto educacional interdisciplinar explorou as raízes ideológicas das crises ecológicas e hídricas contemporâneas, com foco no humanismo e na modernidade. Os participantes pas-

saram por um processo de aprendizagem em fases, começando com atividades individuais que incluíram a leitura de textos fundamentais e a criação de diagramas, posteriormente compartilhados em uma nuvem de palavras colaborativa. O projeto avançou para uma fase colaborativa, onde os participantes utilizaram plataformas digitais para discutir e analisar o impacto do humanismo e da modernidade em suas comunidades, focando nos desafios sociais e ecológicos. O projeto culminou com a criação de um infográfico colaborativo que abordou questões chave de segurança hídrica no Brasil e no México, incluindo taxas de cobertura, impacto de eventos climáticos extremos, participação da sociedade nas decisões sobre recursos hídricos e tarifas de água. Os facilitadores buscaram aumentar a conscientização sobre as raízes históricas dos problemas contemporâneos, levando a uma compreensão mais profunda das conexões entre ideologia e sustentabilidade ecológica. Esta atividade estava alinhada com o ODS 6 (Garantir disponibilidade e gestão sustentável da água e saneamento para todos).

**Duração do projeto:** Março a maio de 2023.

**Número de alunos participantes:** 63 (42 do Brasil, 21 do México).

### *Ferramentas digitais utilizadas*

- Flip: Apresentação dos professores, alunos e atividade de quebra-gelo;
- Wakelet: Organização e compartilhamento de instruções e documentos;
- Edpuzzle: Ferramenta de avaliação divertida para consolidar o aprendizado;
- Padlet: Envio de diagramas e infográficos finais;
- Zoom: Reuniões síncronas semanais e atividades de abertura/encerramento.

### *Tipos de comunicação*

Síncrona para as reuniões em grupo e assíncronas para as atividades escritas e outras interações.

### *Métodos usados para promover a interação entre os participantes*

Discussões em grupos: diálogo através do Flip para explorar semelhanças e diferenças entre pontos de vista;

Criação colaborativa de um infográfico: as equipes criaram e publicaram no Padlet um infográfico que resumia suas descobertas.

### *Produtos co-criados pelos estudantes*

Envio de Diagramas: Os participantes criaram e enviaram diagramas que resumiam as principais ideias das leituras designadas;

Interação com Vídeos: Os participantes interagiram com conteúdos em vídeo e forneceram respostas no EdPuzzle;

Infográfico Final: Criado colaborativamente e enviado no Padlet.

### *Resultados do projeto*

Os participantes produziram um infográfico comparando questões de segurança hídrica no Brasil e no México, incluindo o valor dos recursos hídricos, a participação da sociedade na gestão da água, o acesso ao saneamento e o impacto de eventos climáticos extremos. O projeto integrou efetivamente o estudo individual com a investigação colaborativa, utilizando ferra-

mentas digitais para aprimorar a aprendizagem e a comunicação, levando a uma compreensão mais profunda da conexão entre ideologia e sustentabilidade ecológica.

### *Professora Brasileira*

**Cidade/Câmpus:** Bauru

**Disciplina:** Hidrologia

**Departamento:** Engenharia Civil e Ambiental

### *Professor Parceiro*

**País:** México

**Instituição:** Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey

**Disciplina:** Ética e Filosofia (para alunos de Contabilidade, Negócios Internacionais, Empreendedorismo, Gestão, Marketing e Engenharia Industrial)

## Address for correspondence

Mirjam Hauck  
The Open University  
Stuart Hall Building  
Walton Hall  
Milton Keynes MK7 6AA  
United Kingdom  
mirjam.hauck@open.ac.uk  
 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2123-6931>

## Co-author information

Ana Cristina Biondo Salomão  
School of Sciences and Languages  
Department of Modern Languages  
São Paulo State University (UNESP)  
Brazil  
ana.salomao@unesp.br

Müge Satar  
School of Education, Communication and  
Language Sciences  
Newcastle University  
United Kingdom  
muge.satar@newcastle.ac.uk

Gustavo Primo  
Brazilian Virtual Exchange Program (BRaVE)  
Brazil  
gustavo.primo@unesp.br

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