Virtual exchanges in higher education: developing intercultural skills of students across borders through online collaboration

Intercambios virtuales en educación superior: desarrollo de las habilidades interculturales a través de la colaboración en línea

Patrícia Scherer Bassani iD
Feevale University
patriciab@feevale.br

Ilona Buchem iD
Beuth University of Applied Sciences
buchem@beuth-hochschule.de

RESUMEN

El intercambio virtual se ha definido como una forma de movilidad virtual cuyo objetivo es ampliar el alcance y ámbito de los programas tradicionales de aprendizaje intercultural. Este artículo presenta un ejemplo de un intercambio virtual llamado InterCult - Competencias Interculturales - que pretendía dar la oportunidad a los estudiantes de Alemania, Francia y Brasil de explorar aspectos interculturales a través de la colaboración en línea, es decir, aprender las diferencias entre la propia cultura y otras culturas mediante la comunicación y el trabajo conjunto en tareas mediante el uso de medios digitales. El trabajo de investigación se dividió en tres fases: diseño del proyecto, intercambio virtual y evaluación. Los datos recogidos durante el intercambio virtual incluyeron el análisis de conversaciones en línea en grupos internacionales, discusiones cara a cara durante las clases al final de cada actividad en grupos nacionales, los videos producidos y compartidos en la comunidad en línea, reuniones en línea entre los profesores, y los resultados de la encuesta en línea. Los datos se analizaron desde tres perspectivas: tecnología; implicación y trabajo colaborativo; competencias interculturales. Los resultados mostraron que este tipo de experiencia es extremadamente importante para una generación que tendrá que trabajar en equipos y contextos multiculturales.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Relaciones internacionales; intercambio cultural; innovación; tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación; telecomunicación.

ABSTRACT

Virtual exchange has been defined as a form of virtual mobility which aims to expand the reach and scope of traditional intercultural learning programs. This paper presents an example of a virtual exchange called InterCult - Intercultural Competences - which aimed to give an opportunity for students from Germany, France, and Brazil to explore intercultural aspects through online collaboration, i. e. to learn differences between own culture and other cultures by communicating and working on tasks together by using digital media. The research path was divided into three phases: project design, virtual exchange, and evaluation. The data collected during the virtual exchange involved the analysis of online conversations in international groups, face-to-face discussions during the classes at the end of each activity in national groups, the videos produced and shared in the online community, online meetings between the teachers, and the results of the online survey. Data were analyzed based on three perspectives: technology; engagement and collaborative

work; intercultural competences. Results showed this type of experience is extremely important for a generation who will have to work in multicultural teams and contexts.

KEYWORDS

International exchange; cultural exchange; educational innovation; information and communication technologies; telecommunication.

Main contributions of the article and future investigation lines:

- The paper presents a virtual exchange experience involving higher education students from three countries (Brazil, France, and Germany) to foster online intercultural skills.
- The learning environment is a very important issue in virtual exchange experiences and is also a challenge.
- The results of the study revealed how the perceptions related to cultural differences changed during the course of the virtual exchange. Thus, this proposal can inspire new and different international online

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Unesco (2013), intercultural competences refer to "having adequate relevant knowledge about particular cultures" which encompasses a "general knowledge about the sorts of issues arising when members of different cultures interact". Besides, intercultural competences embrace "receptive attitudes that encourage establishing and maintaining contact with diverse others" (p. 16).

There is a rich conceptual and theoretical landscape about intercultural competences. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) presented a review of intercultural competence theories and models, and they organize the different models into 5 categories: compositional, co-orientational, developmental, adaptational, and causal processes.

Compositional models are characterized as schemes or typologies presenting a relevant list of attitudes, skills, and knowledge necessary for a competent interaction. However, there is not an indication of relationship between these components. Co-orientational models mainly focus on the comprehension of the outcomes of an interactional process. These models emphasize the "foundational importance of achieving some minimal level of common reference through inter-action" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 21). Through this perspective, the premise for the interaction between people from different cultures and backgrounds take for granted the value of mutual understanding, which means that "some base level of co-orientation toward the common referential world" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 15) is important. The Intercultural Competence Model developed by Byram (1997) is an example of a co-orientational model. Developmental models draw attention to the idea that competence evolves over time considering that relationships are capable of becoming more competent throughout time. We can though, have different levels of intercultural developments (e. g. initial, intermediate, and mature). Adaptational models "tend to emphasize the process of adaptation itself as a criterion of competence" (p. 24). According to these models, intercultural competence moves from an ethnocentric perspective to a more ethnorelative perspective and this movement reveals the idea of adaptation as a condition for intercultural interactions. Casual path models "attempt to represent intercultural competence as a theoretical linear system" where each variable influences and is influenced by other variables (the model focuses on component connections) (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Despite the differences between the models identified by Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), the authors state that any comprehensive model of intercultural competences addresses a minimum of 5 components: a) motivation (e. g. openness to others; openness to new information);

b) knowledge (e. g. knowledge of more than one perspective; knowledge of alternative interpretations); c) skills (e. g. ability to communicate interpersonally; relationship building; cultural empathy; interpersonal diplomacy); d) context (e. g. environmental situation, host contact conditions); e) outcomes (e. g. collaboration across; communication competence) (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009).

Another perspective for thinking about intercultural competences could be found in the Hofstede's study about the six dimensions of national culture. The Hofstede model of national culture encompasses six dimensions. The model by Hofstede has been used to explain differences of cultural values, perceptions, and identity (de Mooij & Hofstede, 2010). These cultural dimensions "represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other" (Hofstede Insights [HI], 2019). The six dimensions are: power distance; uncertainty avoidance; individualism versus collectivism; masculinity versus femininity; long term versus short term orientation; and indulgence versus restraint, as explained bellow.

Power distance is an index of how a society handles inequalities among people. Uncertainty avoidance index analyses how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known considering the beliefs and behaviors. Countries with a high uncertainty avoidance index are more intolerant to unorthodox behavior and ideas while those with a lower index have a more relaxed attitude towards behaviors and ideas. Individualism versus collectivism is a dimension which shows the difference between a society where individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families and a society in which the individuals have a wider vision of taking care of each other. In masculinity versus femininity dimension the culture is measured based on preferences for achievements and competition (masculinity) or for a preference for cooperation based on teamwork, harmony, and empathy (femininity). Long-term versus short-term orientation in an index of how society handles traditions/norms and new challenges. A culture with high scores in long-term orientation emphasizes traditions and customs and tends to view changes as negative. On the other hand, short-term oriented cultures are much more accepting of change. Indulgence versus restraint index refers to the idea that each culture addresses in different ways the basic and natural human drives related to enjoying life and having fun. Indulgence stands for a society that allows enjoying and restraint stands for those societies which regulate and control those impulses (HI, 2019).

In this study, we understand that cultural differences can be recognized and intercultural competences can be fostered by virtual exchanges. Virtual Exchange (VE) is a concept which refers to the engagement of a group of students who are geographically separated, in online intercultural interactions mediated by technology-enabled activities, focused on communication and interaction, with support of educators (O'Dowd, 2018, Evolve, 2019).

This paper presents an example of a virtual exchange called InterCult - Intercultural Competences - which aimed to give an opportunity for students from Germany, France, and Brazil to explore intercultural aspects through online collaboration, i. e. to learn differences between own culture and other cultures by communicating and working on tasks together by using digital media. The virtual exchange aimed to foster the discussion involving the challenges and opportunities for working and studying within international and intercultural groups, supported by higher education teachers as moderators and facilitators. The key research question addressed by the virtual exchange was, how cultural differences can be recognized and fostered in higher education, especially in online/virtual settings.

2. VIRTUAL EXCHANGES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are many expressions to identify online collaborative learning processes within intercultural settings. A literature review conducted by O'Dowd (2018) presents six different expressions related to virtual exchange initiatives: tele-collaboration; online intercultural exchange; collaborative online international learning (COIL); global virtual teams; globally networked learning environments; and e-tandem or tele-tandem (Figure 1).
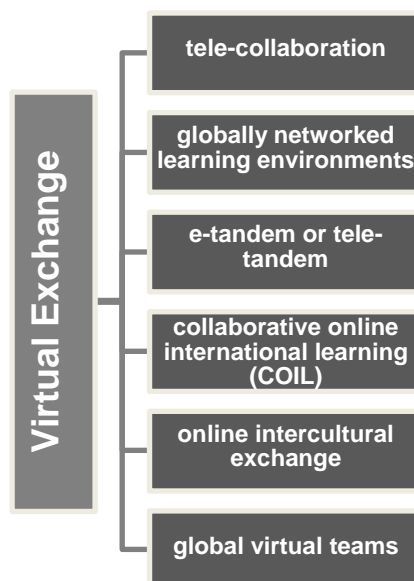
Figure 1. Types of virtual exchanges
Source**:** adapted from O'Dowd (2018)

It is important to highlight the difference between virtual mobility and virtual exchange. The concept of virtual mobility has been defined in the Erasmus + programme guide as "a set of ICT supported activities, organized at institutional level, that realize or facilitate international, collaborative experiences in a context of teaching and/or learning" (Erasmus + programme guide, 2018). Virtual exchange has been defined in the Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange brochure as a form of virtual mobility which aims to expand the reach and scope of traditional intercultural learning programs, is technology-enabled and uses the broad reach and scope of new media technologies to bring geographically distant people together (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, 2019). Virtual exchanges focus on a dialogue in which participants learn from each other, as opposed to content-driven learning, and are designed as pedagogical processes (Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange, 2019).

Virtual exchange has been also defined in the EADTU Mobility Matrix which aligns with current mobility schemes of the European Commission and extends current mobility schemes with the new form of virtual mobility called open virtual mobility (EADTU, 2018). Open virtual mobility is the focus of the European strategic partnership Erasmus+ Open Virtual Mobility1 founded by the European Commission (2017 - 2020) to enhance the uptake of different forms of virtual mobility in higher education in Europe (Buchem et al., 2018). In the EADTU Mobility Matrix, virtual exchange is defined as an exchange by mobility online, following similar rules as a physical exchange and always based on a bilateral or multilateral agreement. As opposed to this formal view on virtual mobility which requires a bilateral or a multilateral agreement between participating universities, the open virtual mobility project has proposed a new concept, which includes more open forms of mobility which work without an institutional agreement. The concept of open virtual mobility takes into account current Open Educational Practices such as MOOCs and OERs created in higher education settings allowing access and use without a formal, organisational agreement (Firssova & Rajagopal, 2018). From this perspective, open virtual exchanges aim at providing international academic experiences through various forms of open online learning activities.

2.1. Different approaches to virtual exchange in higher education

Beside the differentiation between virtual exchanges and open virtual exchanges, O'Dowd (2018) identified 4 general approaches to virtual exchanges in higher education:

---

1 http://www.openvirtualmobility.eu/

a) Subject-specific virtual exchanges (type 1). This approach covers foreign language learning initiatives and is also known as tele-collaboration, online intercultural exchange or e-tandem;

b) Subject-specific virtual exchanges (type 2). This approach focuses on initiatives which foster online intercultural skills necessary for the workplace. This kind of approach is also known as global virtual team;

c) Shared-syllabus virtual exchange. This approach offers an opportunity to students from different universities to develop intercultural competences providing them with the possibility of working together on a shared content. Although it is not a unique methodology, the COIL approach, developed by the COIL Institute for Globally Networked Learning in the Humanities, has become dominant. COIL projects usually connect two or more classes of similar course content in different countries, and the professors/instructors of the partner universities design the course modules to engage the students in communication and collaboration together;

d) "Service-provider" virtual exchange. This approach involves initiatives promoted by different organizations which are engaged in the development of the curriculum and the online environment directed to all levels of education (primary and secondary education, higher education).

In this paper we present a virtual exchange project which was inspired by an open approach to virtual exchanges (i. e. not requiring an inter-organisational agreement), and the subject-specific exchange (type 2) approach (i. e. an experience to foster online intercultural skills directed to workplace issues). The research path is described in the next section.

3. METHODOLOGY

In this paper we present the results of a case study carried out with higher education students. The study was conducted as an open virtual exchange initiative to foster intercultural skills addressing workplace issues and aimed to address this specific research question: How cultural differences can be recognized and fostered in higher education, especially in online/virtual settings?

The project, called InterCult: Intercultural Competences, involved students from three countries and three different undergraduate programs:

a) Germany: bachelor program in civil engineering, module "Intercultural competencies";

b) France: bachelor program in agronomy engineering, module "English";

c) Brazil: bachelor program in information systems, module "Collaborative systems", and Teacher Training program in Portuguese/English, module "New technologies applied to language learning".

The first edition of InterCult took place in 2016 involving 85 students. The students worked in small interculturally mixed groups with at least one participant from each country per group. The educators from the three participating universities created an online community using Google+ as a digital tool for conversations and interactions. Students were also free to choose other communication tools and channels (e. g. WhatsApp proved to be popular in a number of student groups) if they did not feel comfortable using Google+. The communication between the students was carried out in English, which was the second language for all groups of students participating in the project.

At the beginning and at end of the intercultural virtual exchanges, students answered an online survey which was based on the items proposed by Hofstede. The results of the survey revealed how the perceptions of students related to cultural differences changed during the course of the virtual exchange.

The research path was divided into three phases: project design, virtual exchange, and evaluation (Figure 2).
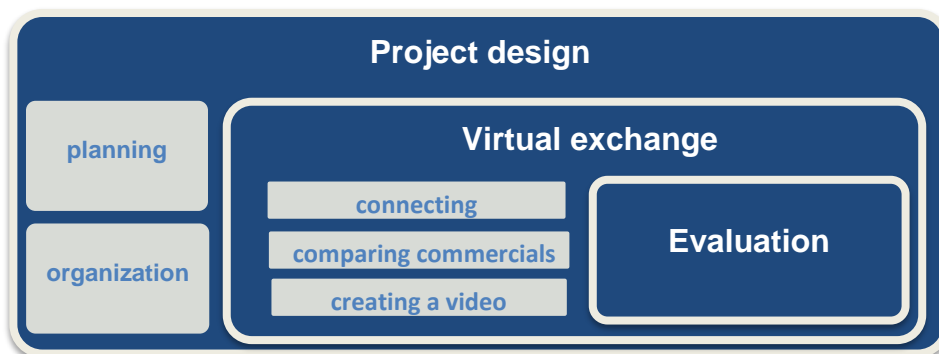
Figure 2. Research path

The project design phase comprised the design of the virtual exchange proposal. This phase was divided into:

a) Planning. This phase was carried out by the three professors which were involved in online collaborative synchronous (Skype) and asynchronous (e-mail) exchanges to outline the activities and definitions about the online learning environment. Google Docs and Google Spreadsheets were used to organize the collaborative working and for the documentation of the proposed activities. This phase was carried out 1 month before the actual virtual exchange.

b) Organization. This phase was carried out in partnership with the students with the purpose of organizing the groups. Each group was composed by students from the three participating universities/countries. The tool Google Spreadsheets was used to organize the groups. The Google+ platform was used to host the InterCult community and each group created their own discussion space inside the community. During this phase, which took place at the beginning of the virtual exchanges, the students had to answer a preliminary online survey.

The data collected during the project design phase involved the online observation of the process of group formation within the community and the results of the online survey.

The virtual exchange phase was carried out over 6 weeks. The students, organized in interculturally mixed groups, were challenged to participate in the following three activities collaboratively designed by the participating educators:

a) Connecting, i. e. exchanging information about daily lives and discussions about things students had in common;

b) Comparing commercials from Germany, France, and Brazil, i. e. students watched and analyzed commercial videos of the same company, each having a different approach to address cultural characteristics; students discussed the videos based on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (Hofstede, 2011) as a theoretical model which underpinned the virtual exchange;

c) Creating a video, i. e. recording of a short video of 2-3 minutes using a smartphone, tablet or a digital camera to show a situation (e. g. a meeting, a class, a work group) involving characters from the 3 cultures: Germany, France, Brazil, and visualizing possible intercultural differences.

At the end of each activity students discussed their experiences in their regular on-site classes, in WhatsApp groups and also with all the participants in the online Google+ community. At the end of the project the students answered a second online survey.

The data collected during the virtual exchange involved the analysis of online conversations in international groups, face-to-face discussions during the classes at the end of each activity in national groups, the videos produced and shared in the online community, online meetings between the teachers, and the results of the online survey.

The evaluation phase took place parallel to the virtual exchange phase. During the whole project, the professors were involved in online collaborative synchronous (Skype) and asynchronous (e-mail) exchanges. The data collected during this phase involved online observation of the ongoing process of the virtual exchange.

The results are presented below.

4. RESULTS

The InterCult project took place in 2016 during March and June. The results are described in detail below.

4.1. The project design

The project design phase was carried out during 4 weeks (March to April 2016). The project planning involved the professors in regular virtual exchanges by e-mail and Skype.

The Google+ platform was used to host the InterCult2 community (Figure 3). All activities were shared in the online community (task 1: connecting; task 2: comparing commercials; and task 3: creating a video). Besides, each professor presented and discussed the activities with the students during their on-site regular classes.
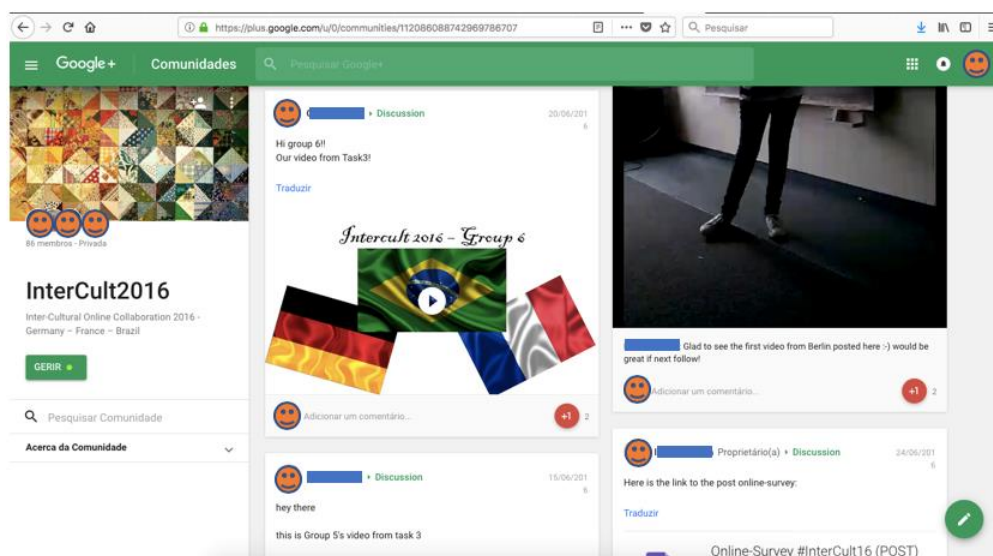
Figure 3. Google+ InterCult community
Source: authors' database

A Google Spreadsheet was used to organize the intercultural mixed groups. After that, the students had to create the groups for discussions and collaborative work.

The organization of the groups within the community took longer than expected due to a number of issues including:

a) the process of creating a group in Google+ involved 3 actions: one person needed to create the group; the students needed to ask to be approved; the owner needed to approve them;

b) some students were engaged in the project only during on-site classes and this caused delay, considering that we had only one meeting per week;

c) the time zone made it impossible to perform synchronous meetings. The classes in Brazil occurred during the night shift (started at 7:30 pm) and the Europe time zone is 4 hours in advance.

An interesting outcome of this process was that groups decided to move to Facebook.

The preliminary online survey encompassed 15 questions and was answered by 76 out of 85 students (approx. 65%) (Table 1).

Table 1. Preliminary online survey

---

2 Unfortunately it has been discontinued and there is no possibility of accessing the community.

	Question	Possible answers
1	I am well-prepared to meet and work with technologists and engineers from different countries.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
2	I have no problem understanding the feelings of people from other cultures.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
3	I can change my behavior to suit different cultural situations and people.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
4	I know the ways in which cultures around the world are different.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
5	My employers will expect me to work effectively in multicultural teams.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
6	Cultural differences between team members are usually not significant enough to worry about.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
7	I want to do international work as part of my career.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
8	I cannot learn about other cultures before I learn about my own culture.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
9	Because cultural diversity is just a fact of life, calling attention to cultural differences is unnecessary and potentially divisive.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
10	I have skills that allow me to work effectively with people who define problems differently than I do.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
11	The success of technology and engineering projects lies entirely in the technical domain.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
12	Technology and engineering rely on numbers, computer code, and procedures, which makes working with teams from other countries more straightforward than in other fields.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
13	A top-quality engineering product or service can be used or implemented successfully anywhere in the world.	Strongly agree (1 2 3 4 5) Strongly disagree
14	Which country are you from?	Germany – France – Brazil
15	What is your gender?	Male – Female - Other

The group profile (nationality) consisted of 30 students from France (39,5%), 30 students from Germany (39,5%), and 16 students from Brazil (21,1%). According to their gender: a) male: 37 (48,7%); b) female: 38 (50%); c) other: 1 (1,3%).

The results of this first survey showed that students understand the importance of intercultural issues on workplace, but they don't feel well prepared to work with people from other countries (Figure 4) and they need to improve intercultural skills (Figure 5).

1. I am well-prepared to meet and work with technologists and engineers from different countries.
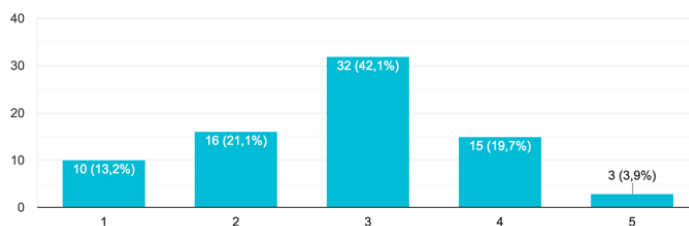76 respostas

Figure 4. Preliminary online survey results

10. I have skills that allow me to work effectively with people who define problems differently than I do.
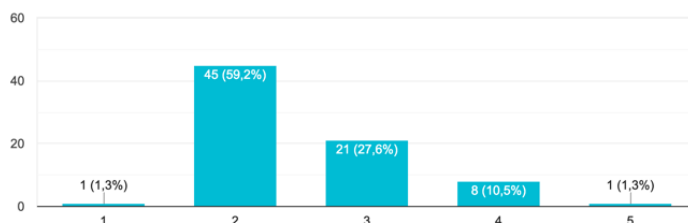76 respostas

Figure 5. Preliminary online survey results

4.2 The virtual exchange

The virtual exchange, which took place from April to June 2016, was organized into three tasks: a) task 1: connecting; b) task 2: comparing commercials; c) task 3: creating a video.

During the first task students worked on two activities:

a) Introduction. Students introduce themselves to the group by posting a few words to introduce themselves, e. g. Who you are? What do you do? What do you like? Students could include a picture of their group and/or of themselves.

b) Conversation. Students engage in free online conversation following such questions as: Ask your international partners as many questions as you like about their daily life (i. e. What do you generally have for breakfast, lunch and dinner? What time do you take each meal? You are five minutes late for an important meeting. How stressful is that to you?).

At the end of each activity students discussed their experiences in their regular on-site classes and also with all the participants in the online Google+ Community (Figures 6 and 7).
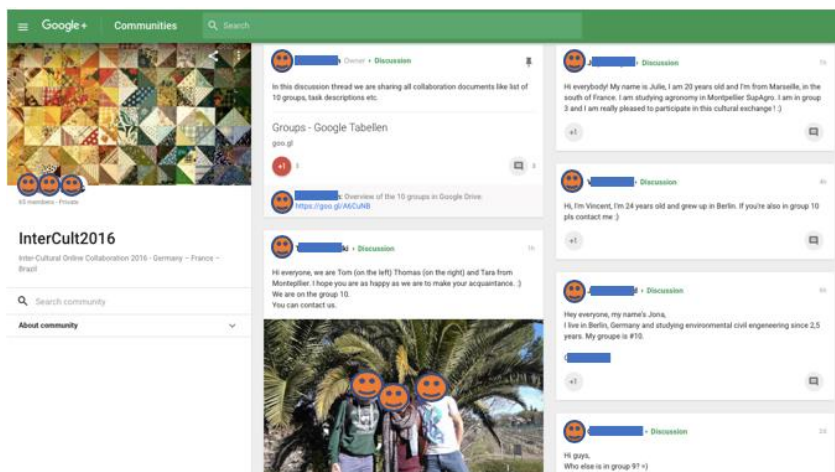
Figure 6. Example of an introduction in the Google+ community by French students
Source: authors' database

- Brazilian group created the community on G+;
- Curious things:
- French students use the surname; they give honest opinion about clothes; they are more respectful with higher-ups in educational settings.
- German students seem to be more informal in educational settings, like Brazilians; they said they cross the street when the traffic light is read except when there is a child nearby.
- Foreign students were impressed by the fact that Brazilian students don't find time to exercise. On the other hand the Brazilian were surprise to know that foreign students have time for sports. Brazilians students usually work during all day and study at night.

Figure 7. Example of document produced by Brazilian students
Source: authors' database

The second task involved the analysis and comparison of commercials. We selected commercials from the Stihl company from the three countries (Brazil, France, and Germany) each having a different approach to address cultural characteristics.

First, the students watched and discussed the videos in their national group addressing such questions as: Which commercial do you like best? Why? Do you feel your own "national" commercial is typical of your country? If so, in which ways? Do you think the other commercials could work in your country? Why/Why not? Can you see some stereotypes at work here?

Second, students analyzed the videos based on Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions addressing such questions as: How are those dimensions reflected (or not) in your country commercial (including situation, characters, attitudes, dialogues, humour, catchphrase, slogan?).

At the end, each national group reported their findings in the Google+ community (or in a Facebook group). Students from France and Germany created videos and students from Brazil organized a report (Figure 8).

Group 2
- the conversation happened on Facebook;
- the discussion was very focused on questions about the videos – they didn't focus on Hofstede scale ;
- the French video was the most voted;
- Brazilian students were surprised with the French video – they didn't expect that kind of commercial.

Group 3:
- The French video was the one preferred by the group;
- the German video was too serious;
- the French video is very similar to Brazilian beer commercials (women and seduction);
- stereotypes are more visible in the German video;
- foreign students said that the Brazilian commercial looks like Brazilian soap operas.

Figure 8. Example of document produced by Brazilian students
Source: authors' database

The third task involved the creation of a video expressing the theme of "cultural clash in the work place" as an inspiration and point for reflection. Students were asked to look at themselves through other people's eyes. The proposed activity included the following steps:

a) Imagine a situation where French/Brazilians/Germans or colleagues with other nationalities have to work on a joint professional project;

b) With what you have learnt since the beginning of this project, express how cultural differences can get in the way. Find a way to come up with a final resolution to the situation.

c) Make it fun but relevant!

The students used different approaches for creating videos such as comic style and video style (Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9. Example of video from France
Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK-w-gZIHRk

Figure 10. Example of video from Germany
Source: authors' database

4.3 Evaluation

At the end of the project the students were invited to answer a second online survey (the same as proposed in the beginning – Table 1). This online survey was answered by 19 out of 85 students (approx. 22%). The number of respondents was much smaller than in the first survey, which made it difficult to make a final comparison. Nevertheless we identified some differences. Data showed that students seemed to feel more confident to work with people from other countries (Figure 11) and that they made progress with intercultural skills (Figure 12).
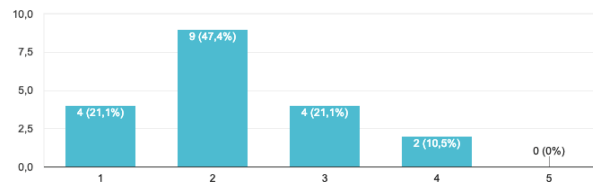
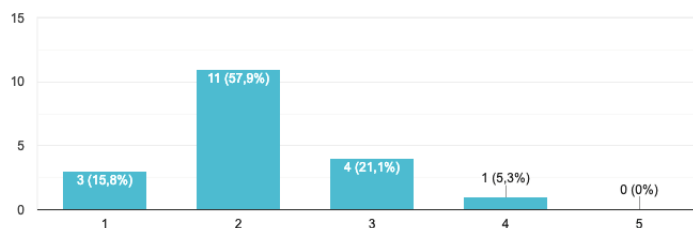*Figure 11. Online survey results (post)*

Figure 12. Online survey results (post)

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper aimed to present an example of a virtual exchange called InterCult - Intercultural Competences, with the purpose of giving an opportunity for students from Germany, France, and

Brazil to explore intercultural aspects through online collaboration. The project aimed to address this specific research question: How cultural differences can be recognized and fostered in higher education, especially in online/virtual settings?

The data collected during the process provided feedback on interesting intercultural differences and similarities and also revealed interesting issues for discussion and debate. Data were analyzed based on three perspectives: technology; engagement and collaborative work; intercultural competences.

The first issue that we would like to highlight refers to technology. In this project, the community was hosted by Google+. Google+ proved to be a limited environment for the proposed virtual exchange because of its characteristics: the process of group formation, not many mechanisms of social presence (there is no possibility of message exchange between participants). Considering these limitations, some groups decided to move to Facebook or use WhatsApp for communication. The learning environment is a very important issue in virtual exchange experiences and is also a challenge. Different countries have different concerns about privacy issues and there are legal difficulties of using the virtual learning environment of the universities for projects like this. For example, it is difficult to create virtual rooms with students who are not formally enrolled in courses, and also there are limitations of providing personal data to other universities. Thus, initiatives like Erasmus+ Open Virtual Mobility are relevant for promoting a learning environment for virtual exchange projects.

The second issue addresses the student's engagement and collaborative work. The analyzes of the process showed that students were involved in the activities mainly during the classes, which caused delay in the proposed schedule. Moreover, the students, during the face-to-face discussions within national regular on-site classes, complained about the international students' delay in posting comments and/or answers. Some students were not confident about their English skills which also caused a lack of engagement. The high differences between time zones made difficult a proposal for a synchronous activity and all collaborative work was based on asynchronous communication and cooperation.

According to Spitzberg and Changnon (2009), motivation, knowledge, skills, context, and outcomes are important components in a comprehensive model of intercultural competences. We understand that the students involved in InterCult project were really motivated but they didn't have a real engagement when out of the classroom and from this fact, we can infer a number of issues including the learning environment (Google+), the lack of English skills, and time zone.

The third issue addresses the intercultural competences. The content of the virtual exchange focused on real life and workplace issues. The results of the survey revealed how the perceptions related to cultural differences changed during the course of the virtual exchange. However, the small number of respondents in the post online survey makes it difficult to provide a more detailed analysis of the process.

The videos produced by students showed that stereotypes are very strong. Even though there was a reflection about cultural differences based on Hofstede's model, the videos emphasized preconceived ideas and concepts.

This first InterCult experience has inspired other editions (Table 2).

Table 2. InterCult editions

Edition	Platform/tools	Countries
2017	Facebook	Brazil, France, Germany
2018 (case 1)	Facebook	Brazil, France
2018 (case 2)	Canva	Brazil, Germany, Hungary United States

We understand that this proposal can inspire new and different international online projects. At a time when globalization and the development of technologies has been making communication across borders so easy, we believe that students need to gain some insights into

culture (their own and other people's) in order for them to avoid cultural clash once faced with foreigners.

We believe this type of experience is extremely important for a generation who will have to work in multicultural teams and contexts. According to Unesco (2013, p. 7), "globalization shrinks the world, bringing a wider range of cultures into closer contact than ever before" and, as a result, "cultural diversity and intercultural contact have become facts of modern life" (p. 7). Through this perspective, we understand that acquiring intercultural skills is crucial both on personal and professional levels.

6. LINKS

Video produced by students: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DK-w-gZIHRk

Online survey: https://forms.gle/gncWcvwUWxzW1nZF8

7. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

8. REFERENCES

Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communication competence. NewYork: Multilingual Matters.

Buchem, I., Konert, J., Carlino, C., Casanova, G., Rajagopal, K., Firssova, O. and Andone, D. (2018). Designing a Collaborative Learning Hub for Virtual Mobility Skills – Insights from the European Project Open Virtual Mobility. En Zaphiris, P y Ioannou, A. (Eds.) *Learning and Collaboration Technologies. Design, Development and Technological Innovation* (pp. 350-376). Springer International Publishing AG, Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol. 10924.

De Mooij, M. y Hofstede, G. (2010). The Hofstede model: applications to global branding and advertising strategy and research. *International Journal of Advertising*, 29(1), pp. 85–110. DOI: 10.2501/S026504870920104X

EDTU   (2018).   EADTU   Mobility   Matrix.   Retrieved   from https://eadtu.eu/documents/Publications/VM/2018_-_EADTU_Mobility_Matrix.pdf

Evolve (2019). Retrieved from https://evolve-erasmus.eu/about-evolve/what-is-virtual-exchange/

Erasmus   +   Programme   Guide   (2018).   Retrieved   from https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmusplus/sites/erasmusplus2/files/erasmus-plus-programme-guide2_en.pdf

Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange (2019). Erasmus+ Virtual Exchange. Intercultural Learning Experiences.   Retrieved   from https://europa.eu/youth/sites/default/files/eyp/eve/attachments/eve_12_page_brochure_-_pdf.pdf

Firssova, O., & Rajagopal, K. (2018). Open VM Competence Framework. Retrieved from https://www.openvirtualmobility.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/openVM_O1_A1_FINALOct2018.pdf

Hofstede, G. (2011). Dimensionalizing Cultures: The Hofstede Model in Context. *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture*, 2(1). https://doi.org/10.9707/2307-0919.1014

Hofstede insights (2019). Retrieved from https://www.hofstede-insights.com/models/national-culture/

Spitzberg, B., & Changnon, G. (2009). Conceptualizing Intercultural Competence. In Deardorff, D.K. (Ed.). *The SAGE Handbook of Intercultural Competence* (pp. 2-52). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.

UNESCO, 2013. Intercultural competences: conceptual and operational framework. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000219768.locale=en

O'Dowd, R. (2018). From telecollaboration to virtual exchange: state-of-the-art and the role of UNICollaboration in moving forward. In Fuchs, C.; Kennedy, C.; Satar, H. M. (Eds), *Journal of virtual exchange 2018* (pp. 1-23). Research-publishing.net. https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2018.jve.1

INFORMATION ABOUT AUTHORS

Patrícia B. Scherer Bassani
Feevale University

Professor and researcher at Feevale University (Brazil). Faculty member of the Post-Graduate Program in Cultural Diversity and Social Inclusion. PhD in Educational Technology.

Ilona Buchem
Beuth University of Applied Sciences

Professor for communication and media at Beuth University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences. PhD in Business Education Studies.