International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) 2021 special issue: editorial

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We are excited to bring you this Special Issue of the Journal of Virtual Exchange, the third volume to publish articles resulting from the International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) 2021. This special issue features two research articles and one practice report presented at IVEC 2021. Each manuscript underwent a double-blind review, followed by rigorous editing and revising. The Virtual Exchange (VE) research in this special issue ranges from VE in pre-service teacher education to faculty inequity in the context of VEs.

This issue shares various insights, which are rarely presented or associated with VE. As we design and implement our VEs, there are critical aspects experienced in various countries, creating unusually challenging environments. Countries that suffer from violence and conflict present difficult and taxing realities for students as well as teachers. What may be seamless otherwise may turn into extremely demanding situations, highlighting inequalities that are exigent and require an inconceivable level of effort.

This volume begins with an article by Fuchs, Snyder, and Tung which focuses on task design in VE. The VE involved US-based student teachers creating writing tasks for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in China through the mediation of their classroom teachers. The authors investigated what the EFL teacher mediated with the students during the task design stage (design, implementation, and evaluation). They also examined the possible impact of this mediation on the completion or noncompletion of the tasks set. The researchers share their views on the affordances of mediated task design in a teacher education context and call for research on specific aspects of VE task design.

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Dietrich’s article deals with challenging aspects of teacher education in a VE setting. The author explores the perspectives of TESOL graduate students paired with adult learners of English in a conflict country. Dietrich showed that the VE created opportunities for the pre-service teachers to examine their beliefs about their interlocutors and question prejudices and stereotypes about their students’ home country and about living in a conflict country. The author discusses how a VE involving students from conflict countries can be beneficial for pre-service teachers.

The third piece, a practice report by Jiménez Figarotti, Subbarao, and Bagatelia, brings to light an overlooked challenge of faculty (in)equity. VE mostly focuses on the students, emphasizing the benefits of their participation as the main goal of the exchange. However, the issue of faculty inequity, and therefore the challenges created by the forces of invisible violence in the Global South participants' societies, is a topic brought to light in this article. Unaware of these realities, the Global North’s focus is on the implementation, while faculty in the Global South face challenges that seem insurmountable at times, and only by virtue of the faculty's commitment and dedication are VEs made possible and successfully implemented.

We hope you find these articles useful. As co-editors of this special edition, it has been a joy to serve.