

## Editorial

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Welcome to the International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) 2022 Special Issue (SI) for the Journal of Virtual Exchange! In this SI, arising from projects presented at the International Virtual Exchange Conference, hosted at CEU Cardenal Herrera University in Valencia, Spain in 2022, we discover the many benefits of collaborative education, exploring the intersections of technology, intercultural exchange, and educational innovation. We, the guest editors, are proud to have participated in bringing you, the reader, this captivating exploration of two creative, insightful research articles and four enlightening practice reports that showcase the potential of virtual engagement.

Our journey begins with a noteworthy Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) research project by Appel and colleagues, to share perspectives on the healthcare systems of the United States and Spain. This initiative focused on mental health education and research outcomes provided invaluable insights into the student expectations, experiences, and perspectives. Significantly, it enabled students to exchange knowledge and experiences, particularly in the context of COVID-19, illuminating the pandemic's impact on mental health.

Our next research article in this special issue comes from Shiffman, and puts the spotlight on the application of virtual exchange in graduate and adult learning programs. Shiffman presents a comprehensive literature review and the results of an in-depth research project involving graduate learners between a university in the United States and Spain. The author uncovers the vast, often untapped, potential of virtual exchanges for graduate and adult learners. She suggests that these programs present unique opportunities for mature students to immerse themselves in international

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perspectives, enriching their professional and personal lives without the constraints of physical travel.

We are proud to present a number of thought-provoking practice reports in this special issue. We kick off with an article about a virtual exchange program between two universities with a veterinary studies program. The work, carried out by Chicharro Alcántara and colleagues, exemplifies how virtual collaboration can enhance both personal and professional development. Students from different academic and cultural backgrounds brought together via this initiative, reported that they experienced significant growth in global engagement and intercultural skills, crucial competencies in today's interconnected world.

Ganassin and colleagues reveal details about an innovative idea for a virtual summer school on multilingualism and intercultural learning, which integrated virtual exchange into a co-design virtual summer school. Postgraduate students from across Europe collaboratively produced video-case studies, co-creating a rich and varied discussion on educational experiences. This initiative serves as a pioneering model for collaborative, digitally integrated learning, challenging the conventions of traditional education.

Matus-Mendoza brings us our next practice report, describing in detail the methodology, outcomes and analysis of two telecollaborations connecting students from universities in the Americas. The project, tailored to resonate with the needs and expectations of Generation Z students, centered around global migration issues and served to broaden students' worldviews and emphasized the importance of diverse perspectives in international dialogue. The authors conclude that such interactions are crucial in nurturing informed, empathetic global citizens.

The final article in the special issue deals with the important concepts of intercultural competence and racial cognizance in literature. Van Blommestein and Bellot shine a light on cultural identity and intercultural competence between students from very different cultural and social backgrounds. Their project unraveled the complex layers of racial and ethnic identities in students using online tools as an outlet to allow students to express their feelings and beliefs. This underscores the need for a comprehensive, intersectional approach to understanding these critical issues.

In conclusion, this special issue shows how virtual exchange can transcend the boundaries of traditional education, enhancing student knowledge acquisition and contributing to the development of valuable skills for the future. The articles present a tapestry of insights that illuminate the multidimensional impact on learners of all ages, from graduate students and adult learners, to

university students engaging in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) projects, to youth participating in course-based virtual exchanges.

Crucially, the collection emphasizes the cultivation of intercultural competence, fostering a global mindset that transcends geographical limitations. The practice reports showcase how virtual collaborations can shape not only academic knowledge but also personal and professional development. The articles demonstrate the challenges of multilingualism, global migration, and cultural identity within the educational environment and, finally, advocate for a paradigm shift in education; towards inclusivity, empathy, and the development of skills crucial for navigating our interconnected world. We invite you to immerse yourself in these stories, learn from them and continue to search for new mechanisms to transform education at all levels.

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