

VE Project Content

Students taking an “Introduction to TESOL” course offered by Assist. Prof. Dr. Aysel Sarıcaoğlu Aygan at the Social Sciences University of Ankara, Turkey and preservice teachers taking a school pedagogy seminar on intercultural teaching and learning with digital media offered by Kristina Förster at the University of Würzburg, Germany were brought together via a virtual exchange (VE) project in Spring 2021. VE is a popular student-centered pedagogical practice involving online teaching and learning activities that allow for constructive communication and collaboration between students from geographically distant cultural contexts.

Over five weeks, eight intercultural teams engaged in asynchronous and synchronous activities following a Project-Based Learning (PBL) process. They co-developed an understanding of intercultural dialogue and applied its principles to their own translational collaborative learning processes. They also tele-collaboratively created lesson plans around global perspectives after identifying a topic that would be relevant both for them as future teachers as well as for the group of learners they wanted to address. The teams defined learning goals and aligned them with learning activities that would support students in reaching those goals as well as with assessments that would evidence learning. Students co-developed their projects on the portfolio platform Mahara, which not only provided a safe space for individual reflection and team interaction but also contributed to developing their learning technology skills.

Via this VE project, course instructors Aysel Sarıcaoğlu Aygan and Kristina Förster had an opportunity to provide global connections for their students as well as enhance their knowledge and skills in several areas including intercultural communication, virtual collaboration, learning technologies, and lesson planning. “A VE learning environment is equally demanding for students and educators because of its complexity. But at the same time, it can lead to a deep subject-specific and transversal level of personal growth,” said instructor Förster regarding the value of VE experiences. Students from partner classes also reflected positive perceptions not only through their written reflections on Mahara but also several times in their communications with the instructors. “So far we are grateful for opportunities like these to meet other people, as you can't really meet new people right now, which may be a problem, which we also talked about, as every one of us lives in a kind of social bubble with their friends and family, or neighbors and peers around them but doesn't get the opportunity to get out of it, experience different discussions with people or other ideas which may put them in another one's shoes,” wrote Team 4 in their journal, well illustrating the importance of such social connection opportunities for students, especially in times of a global pandemic like Covid-19.

Course instructors Aysel Sarıcaoğlu Aygan and Kristina Förster will have a chance to share their own perspectives regarding the opportunities and challenges of this VE project within their own teaching context in the GoTEd-Week [on Perspectives for an International Teacher Education](#) on June 15-17, 2021.