

ACTIVE METHODOLOGIES AND VIRTUAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMS: AN
EXPLORATORY STUDY ABOUT CONVERGING POINTS

*METODOLOGIAS ATIVAS E INTERCÂMBIOS VIRTUAIS: UM ESTUDO
EXPLORATÓRIO SOBRE PONTOS DE CONVERGÊNCIA*

*METODOLOGÍAS ACTIVAS Y PROGRAMAS DE INTERCAMBIO VIRTUAL: UN
ESTUDIO EXPLORATORIO SOBRE PUNTOS DE CONVERGENCIA*



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ABSTRACT: This article discusses the points of convergence between some of the most well-known active methodologies (AM) (Morán, 2015) and virtual exchanges (VE) initiatives (O'Dowd, 2018), especially initiatives aimed at Higher Education. This is a theoretical reflection, of an exploratory nature, carried through a bibliographical review conceived from the identification of commonalities between AM and VE. Our reflections suggest significant similarities between them, and a VE may sometimes show congruence with more than one AM. The e-tandem and Teletandem VE (Vassallo; Telles, 2006) present similarities with the peer instruction AM modality, as well as the Soliya VE (n.d.), while the VE X-Culture has a strong resemblance to the project-based and problem-based learning AM. Finally, the COIL (Rubin, 2017) and BRaVE (Salomão, 2020) VE also operate in a very similar way to the project-based learning modality. Finally, it is possible to infer that EV programs and AM can contribute in a similar way to learners due to the points they have in common.

KEYWORDS: Active methodologies. Virtual exchange. Online learning.

RESUMO: Este artigo discute os pontos de convergência entre algumas das metodologias ativas (MA) (Morán, 2015) mais conhecidas e iniciativas de intercâmbios virtuais (IV) (O'Dowd, 2018) de maior proeminência, em especial aquelas voltadas para o Ensino Superior. Trata-se de uma reflexão teórica, de cunho exploratório, por meio de revisão bibliográfica concebida a partir da identificação de pontos em comum entre MA e IV. A reflexão sugere significativa similaridade entre eles, podendo um IV mostrar, às vezes, congruência com mais de uma MA. Os IV e-tandem e Teletandem (Vassallo; Telles, 2006) apresentam similitude com a modalidade de MA de instrução por pares, assim como o IV Soliya (sem página), enquanto o IV X-Culture tem forte semelhança com as MA de aprendizagens baseada em projetos e baseada em problemas. Por fim, os IV COIL (Rubin, 2017) e BRaVE (Salomão, 2020) também operam de maneira muito similar à aprendizagem baseada em projetos. Por último, é possível concluir que os IV e os Métodos Ativos (MA) podem contribuir de maneira semelhante para os aprendizes, devido aos pontos em comum entre eles.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Metodologias ativas. Intercâmbio virtual. Aprendizagem on-line.

RESUMEN: Este artículo analiza los puntos de convergencia entre algunas de las metodologías activas (MA) más populares (Morán, 2015) e iniciativas de intercâmbios virtuales (IV) (O'Dowd, 2018), en particular iniciativas dirigidas a la Educación Superior. Se trata de una reflexión teórica, de carácter exploratorio, a través de una revisión bibliográfica concebida a partir de la identificación de puntos en común entre las MA y los IV. La reflexión sugiere una similitud significativa entre ellos y, en ocasiones, un IV puede mostrar congruencia con más de una MA. Los IV e-tandem y Teletandem (Vassallo; Telles, 2006) presentan similitud con la modalidad de aprendizaje basado en pares, así como el IV Soliya (n.d.), mientras que el IV X-Culture tiene una fuerte similitud con las MA de aprendizaje basado en proyectos y basado en problemas. Finalmente, los IV COIL (Rubin, 2017) y BRaVE (Salomão, 2020) también funcionan de manera muy similar al aprendizaje basado en proyectos. Finalmente, es posible inferir que los IV y las MA pueden contribuir de manera similar a los aprendices debido a los puntos compartidos entre ellos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Metodologías activas. Intercambio virtual. Aprendizaje en línea.

Introduction

Globalization is a phenomenon as old as the earliest human efforts to connect with people and objects geographically distant. The current process, however, is more recent and dates back to the last decade of the past millennium (Ianni, 1994), with the internet playing a crucial role in this process and its ramifications. The repercussions have been felt in all spheres of our lives and continue to be, considering that the only constant in the 21st century is change. It is presumable, therefore, that the changes provoked and facilitated by the internet and its resources have also reverberated in the field of Education.

According to Paiva (2015), the technologies adopted in the classroom often reflect the prevailing approaches at a given time and the available resources. Once, books were also an innovative technology and brought their challenges (Burke, 2002). In the contemporary era, these technologies and challenges are represented by ICTs (Information and Communication Technologies). ICTs are the common denominator of the two pillars of this article: active methodologies and virtual exchanges. Active methodologies have certainly been empowered by ICTs, and virtual exchanges have been made possible by them.

The motivation for this article arises from the need to discuss the potential of active methodologies to "develop critical capacity, reflect on practices, provide and receive feedback, learn to interact with peers and teachers, as well as explore personal attitudes and values" (Valente, 2018, p. 28, our translation), and whether virtual exchanges can contribute similarly based on the points they share in common.

Another common point is the transformative potential that both carry for new pedagogical approaches by creating learning environments that integrate ICTs into curricular activities (Valente, 2018), an objective also sought by some virtual exchanges (O'Dowd, 2018). It is important, however, to emphasize that the focus should be on the new possibilities offered by ICTs, not on the technologies themselves (Valente, 2018).

Therefore, this article aims to reflect theoretically and exploratorily, through bibliographic research, to identify the points of convergence between the proposals of the most well-known modalities of active methodologies and the main virtual exchanges, especially those directed at Higher Education.

The next section will present a definition of active methodologies (Morán, 2015, 2018; Valente, 2018). After this definition, some of its most well-known modalities will be listed. Then, a definition of virtual exchange will be provided (O'Dowd, 2018), and some of the main

initiatives in this area will be highlighted, with special attention to those focused on Higher Education. Particularly, virtual exchanges implemented at UNESP, such as Teletandem (Vassallo; Telles, 2006) and BRaVE (Salomão, 2020), will be emphasized.

Active Methodologies

According to Morán (2015), the standardized school as we know it today, which evaluates all students equally and demands predictable results, does not take into account that knowledge construction is based on cognitive, personal, and social skills and requires competencies such as proactivity, collaboration, and personalization. Traditional teaching methods, based on Education, in Paulo Freire's words, as "banking," where the teacher is the holder of knowledge and "deposits" this knowledge into receptacles yet to be filled, were coherent when access to information was difficult.

Currently, with facilitated access to the internet and other technologies, learning has become flexible and can occur at any time and place and with many different people (Morán, 2015; Santaella, 2014), aiming, therefore, for teaching less centered on the teacher, privileging an active posture on the part of the learner. Dewey⁴ advocated that Education should form competent and creative citizens capable of managing their own freedom and that learning should occur through action: learning by doing.

In this context, the use of different strategies and active teaching methodologies has expanded and gained prominence in various educational settings, highlighting the need for adaptation both by teachers and students. The amount of information currently available in digital media and the ease offered by technologies favor teaching and learning mediated by active methodologies. Before specifically addressing this subject, a definition of the term methodology is necessary. According to Bacich and Morán (2018, p. 4), methodologies "are broad guidelines that guide teaching and learning processes and materialize in concrete, specific, and differentiated strategies, approaches, and techniques." Therefore, teaching methodology is the application of different methods in the teaching-learning process to achieve the intended objectives.

Bacich and Morán (2018) also provide a clear and direct definition of active methodologies (from here, AM), which, for the author, are teaching strategies that place the

⁴ See: Dewey (1944). *Democracy and education*. New York: *The Free Press*.

student as the protagonist of their learning, constructing their learning in a flexible, interconnected, and hybrid way and developing their autonomy so that the teacher, formerly the holder of knowledge, now plays a role as a mediator in this process. AM breaks with the traditional conception we have of the relationship between teacher and student, creating space for new dynamics of learning in which both teacher and student are active individuals in the construction of knowledge. According to Almeida (2018, p. 17), "active methodology is characterized by the interrelation between education, culture, society, politics, and school, being developed through active and creative methods, centered on student activity with the intention of facilitating learning."

Similarly to Morán and Almeida, Valente (2018) states that AM constitutes pedagogical alternatives that highlight the student in the teaching and learning process and involve them in learning through discovery, investigation, or problem-solving. For the author, the fact that these methodologies are active is linked to the implementation of pedagogical practices that include students and engage them in practical activities in which they are protagonists of their learning. Thus, in AM, learning occurs from situations in which the student can think, conceptualize, reflect, and construct knowledge about the content involved in the activities they carry out, develop critical thinking, learn to interact with peers and teachers, as well as explore personal attitudes and values (Valente, 2018).

Unlike a traditionalist and passive position, in which one only copies, listens, and observes, through AM, the aim is to create learning situations in which students actively participate in the knowledge construction process, solving challenges, performing operations, reflecting, and developing their critical thinking. According to Morán (2015, p. 18, emphasis added, our translation), "The closer we learn to life, the better. Active methodologies are starting points for advancing to more complex processes of reflection, cognitive integration, generalization, and reworking of new practices."

Expanding the possibilities of learning outside the physical classroom, with scheduled start and end times and centered on the protagonism of the teacher figure, active methodologies (AM) have become both a necessity and an opportunity to democratize learning. Next, we will discuss some AM modalities.

Modalities of Active Methodologies

After presenting the definition of AM, we will now explore, based on Valente (2018), some modalities of AM, among which the most well-known are: peer instruction, problem-based learning, flipped classroom, project-based learning, and blended learning.

Peer Instruction

Developed in the 1990s by a Harvard University professor (Valente, 2018) after realizing that his traditional lectures did not achieve the expected results, peer instruction consists of privileging interaction and assistance among students themselves, who are provided with materials by the teacher before class for study and completion of activities. These activities allow the teacher to assess the points that need more attention and to use synchronous class⁵ time to address and discuss them as a group. After classes, the teacher conducts an assessment (through tests and/or feedback), which will guide the next steps. This modality favors frequent feedback.

Problem-Based Learning

The proposal of problem-based learning was led, in higher education, by a Canadian university (McMaster University) in the 1960s. As the name suggests, this modality focuses on real problems raised by students or the teacher, which must be solved by the students. Because it commonly deals directly with students (after all, it is a real problem they need to solve), problem-based learning tends to generate high student engagement, as explained by O'Dowd (2018). We highlight this modality's potential to strengthen teamwork, the ability to think critically and analyze, and the ability to solve practical problems (Nilson, 2010). The teacher may choose to conduct the assessment/feedback themselves, request peer assessment (students assess each other), or have students self-assess.

⁵ We chose to talk about “synchronous classes” instead of “face-to-face classes” due to the changes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, when many classes started to be taught online.

Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom can be divided into three phases. It is so named because it reverses both the order of traditional classes and the roles of teachers and students, and the realization of the class itself is strictly conditioned to the pre-class. In the first phase, prior to the class, the teacher selects and/or produces the materials and activities deemed relevant and makes them available in a virtual learning environment (Moodle, Google Classroom, among others). It is up to the students to consult this material and complete the proposed activities. The class (second phase) is the moment for group discussions, deepening of issues addressed in the pre-class, and synthesizing presentations.

To participate actively, it is essential to know the materials and develop the previously made available activities to have the necessary support to engage in discussions and activities, mobilizing the required knowledge and concepts. Therefore, the learner cannot contribute or benefit from contributions made by peers as they could/should without prior preparation. In the post-class (third phase), the studied topic is systematized, and there is follow-up through evaluation, discussion forums, and feedback (Valente, 2018).

Blended Learning

Blended learning bears a resemblance to the flipped classroom in terms of the complementarity between synchronous and asynchronous learning. Despite its recent increase in popularity, blended learning dates back centuries (Vidal; Maia, 2015), since attempts at correspondence teaching and learning have existed, though not under this name. The term "blended learning" only emerged in the 2000s, in educational courses aimed at businesses (Simas, 2021).

In accordance with Christensen, Horn, and Staker (2013), blended learning is a formal learning⁶, approach that is distinguished by the fact that learning occurs partially synchronously (usually in a physical classroom, potentially online in a post-pandemic context) and partially asynchronously. Asynchronous learning uses physical supports (cell phone, tablet, computer, notebook, etc.) that enable the use of digital technological resources (email, LMSs, discussion

⁶ Formal learning here refers to learning delivered by and in canonical educational institutions, such as schools, universities, etc.

forums, Google Classroom, etc.), paving the way for ubiquitous learning (Santaella, 2014), that is, learning that can take place anywhere.

Another feature of hybrid learning is that the student has some degree of control over one or more aspects related to their learning, such as time, location, or physical support, along with a portion of the teaching that is supervised (Christensen; Horn; Staker, 2013), enabling a less hierarchical power relationship between learner and teacher, so that the learner takes on an active, curious, participatory, critical, responsible stance for their learning while the teacher becomes a curator/guide/mediator.

Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, discussions that already existed about teaching and learning occurring in other spaces, physical or not, gained prominence, not only due to the potential of this form of teaching but also due to a compulsory need to learn outside the physical classroom space. After all, this environment became inaccessible, and consequently, the form of learning that took place within it also became inaccessible.

This restriction generated an urgent demand to enable other ways of teaching and learning. Because of the mentioned pandemic, however, what was expected for the future suddenly arrived and imposed itself as present. Exploring the ramifications of the impacts of the pandemic on in-person and hybrid learning is a topic worthy of separate reflection, thus escaping the intentions of this article⁷.

Project-Based Learning

Project-based learning refers to problem-based learning. Some confuse both modalities and even consider project-based learning as a form of problem-based learning. A simple yet effective way to differentiate them is that in the former, the focus is on the process, while in the latter, the focus is on the final product⁸. Project-based learning consists of identifying/proposing a problem and seeking alternatives to solve it. A characteristic of this modality is that it usually extends over the course of several classes, for weeks or months, depending on the intentions (Valente, 2018).

Once the challenge is defined, hypotheses need to be raised on how to overcome it. Next, the hypotheses need to be tested to ensure they are viable solutions at various levels (financial, economic, etc.). At this stage, the feedback from the teacher is essential to guide the

⁷ See: Arruda and Siqueira (2020).

⁸ Source: https://www.uvu.edu/otl/resources/group_work/pbl.html. Acesso em: 22 feb. 2024.

learners on how to improve the project. Finally, when the product is considered ready, it is subjected to a final test, preferably under conditions as realistic as possible. In this portion of the article, we discussed some modalities of active learning, prioritizing those that converge more strongly with the Teletandem and BRaVE IVs, initiatives implemented at UNESP.

Virtual Exchanges: Concept, Classification, Characteristics, and Points of Convergence with Active Learning Methodologies

In this section, we will begin by discussing another fundamental concept of this article: virtual exchanges (hereinafter IV), based mainly on O'Dowd (2018). Then, different IV endeavors and their relationship with active learning methodologies will be presented. The Teletandem and BRaVE IVs will be the subject of further exploration, as they are the research contexts and therefore more familiar to the authors of this article.

The author clarifies that since the early days of the internet, in the early 1990s, there have been different approaches to IV, in various educational contexts and areas, which receive different names and definitions and have different organizational structures, depending on the context and pedagogical focus underlying them.

Virtual Exchange (VE) has been, and still is, referred to as: telecollaboration; online intercultural exchange; virtual exchange; COIL; internet-mediated intercultural foreign language teaching; global networked learning environments; e-tandem or Teletandem, depending on the theoretical approach adopted by the proponents. We will resort to the schematization by O'Dowd (2018, p. 4, our translation) to visually represent the various designations for VEs.

Figure 1 - Overview of the terminology used to refer to VE initiatives



Source: adapted from O’Dowd (2018, p. 4, our translation).

For the author, while the terminological differences highlight the adaptability of VE to different contexts and pedagogical objectives, on the negative side, this myriad of names indicates a lack of awareness among researchers and practitioners regarding similar initiatives. Added to this is the difficulty in disseminating and making these initiatives (re)known among educators and individuals/entities with the power to make crucial decisions (O’Dowd, 2018). The scholar then proposes the adoption of the umbrella term “virtual exchange” to refer to actions that fit the following definition: virtual exchange is “the engagement of groups of learners in online intercultural interactions and collaboration projects with partners from other cultural contexts or geographic locations as an integral part of their educational programs” (O’Dowd, 2018, p. 1, our translation)⁹.

O’Dowd (2018) argues that “virtual exchange” is broader than “telecollaboration,” which has been the most commonly used term in Europe, especially in the field of foreign language teaching. The author further argues that the term, in addition to being more extensive, “acknowledges the validity of the enormous amount of research conducted under the title of telecollaboration” (O’Dowd, 2018, p. 4). For this reason, we adopt this designation in the title

⁹ O’Dowd (2018, p.4) warns about the distinction between virtual mobility (MV) and virtual exchange (IV). IV allows MV and concerns online educational projects with an intercultural focus, while MV refers to using online resources to participate in academic activities in geographically distant locations.

and other parts of the text, except for endeavors that self-identify differently, which explains the occasional presence of other nomenclatures.

O'Dowd (2018) provides a possible classification of various initiatives, dividing them into: a) Subject-Specific Virtual Exchange for Foreign Language Learning; b) Subject-Specific Virtual Exchange for Business; c) Service-Provider Approaches¹⁰ and d) Shared Syllabus Approaches.

It is essential to clarify that we are discussing some types of VE (the most well-known, especially in Higher Education Institutions), based on the categorization made by O'Dowd (2018), which, in turn, addresses the characteristics and objectives of these VE initiatives as they were conceptualized. It would be unfeasible to describe and discuss how all of them occur in practice, considering the plethora of branches of VE initiatives, and for this reason, we have selected the most illustrative VEs from each category.

Under a), the author allocates: e-tandem, Teletandem, telecollaboration, and other actions, emphasizing the focus on the autonomy and responsibility that learners have over their learning in these scenarios. In the field of education, since the advent of the internet, professionals involved in teaching foreign languages have been pioneers in recognizing the potential to provide contact with other language learners from around the world through "semi-authentic" communication experiences (O'Dowd, 2018).

E-tandem and Teletandem

Tandem initiatives, in Applied Linguistics, are an analogy to a type of bicycle designed to be used in pairs and therefore require joint efforts to balance and move it. In foreign language learning, "tandem" also refers to learning through bilingual partnerships, face-to-face or online (Lewis, 2020).

E-tandem is one of the two major models of VE for foreign languages; the other is telecollaboration (O'Dowd, 2018). Originating from the mid-1990s, this method is necessarily conducted online, specifically via email, which explains its name. Half of the message is written in the sender's language, and the other half in the target language. Thus, theoretically, both participants have the same opportunities to practice writing and reading in the target language, as well as providing feedback to their partner.

¹⁰ The term "approach" is used simply as a translation of "approach" used by O'Dowd (2018). For the purposes of this article, there is no intention to define or use it with any other weight than this.

According to O’Dowd (2018), e-tandem aims to foster learner autonomy and encourage them to continue seeking ways to learn outside the classroom. This increased autonomy is accompanied by greater responsibility for their own process and also for the partner’s process. Learners can choose the topics to be addressed, provide feedback to their partner, negotiate correction methods, and monitor and reflect on their progress. The role of the teacher is usually more supportive (a kind of mediator) and less centralizing. E-tandem continues to have supporters to this day.

On the other hand, initiatives like Teletandem are part of what O’Dowd (2018) considers the second model of VE in language teaching, called telecollaboration, which emerged in the late 1990s and focused on intercultural issues and efforts to integrate VE into conventional language classes. Teletandem¹¹ has been around since 2006, proposed by Vassallo and Telles (2006). At that time, Telles was a lecturer at UNESP and participated, in partnership with Vassallo, in computer-based foreign language practice sessions inspired by e-tandem. Based on their experiences in these interactions, they conceived Teletandem, which began at UNESP campuses. Today, this VE has also been implemented by other Brazilian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).

It is a synchronous, autonomous, and virtual context for language teaching and learning in which learners of different languages teach their language and learn their partner’s language through partnerships between Brazilian and foreign universities. Teletandem¹² is inspired by face-to-face tandem, which emerged in the 1960s in Germany, but in turn, is conducted via video conferencing and apps that allow for instant messaging exchanges, thus enabling practice of the four skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening, with a focus on the latter two.

Vassallo and Telles (2009) suggest weekly meetings with time equally divided for practice in each of the two languages in question. This is the first guiding principle of Teletandem, called the “language separation principle,” to ensure equal opportunities for making the most of the meetings. The second principle is autonomy, which can be understood in a broad scope (Vassallo; Telles, 2009), but in theory, learners have the autonomy to decide what, how, and for how long they want to talk about a particular topic of interest, as well as negotiating correction methods.

¹¹ For more information: <http://www.teletandembrasil.org/>. Accessed on: 17 Aug. 2022.

¹² “Teletandem” refers to the thematic project funded by FAPESP while “Teletandem” concerns the context and practices in this IV context.

The third and final principle is reciprocity and is closely linked to autonomy (Salomão; Silva; Daniel, 2009), as learners also have autonomy to negotiate the portion of responsibility and reciprocity that each will invest in the partnership (Vassallo; Telles, 2006). In addition to their purposes, it is necessary to consider the partner's needs and goals and, using their autonomy, decide the best path(s) to meet them. Vassallo and Telles (2009) also recommend leaving time at the end of each meeting to offer and receive feedback.

In Teletandem, there is still a need for the presence of a mediator. The concept of a mediator is inspired by Vygotskian ideas, and this role is commonly performed by a language(s) and culture(s) scholar (undergraduate or graduate student in Literature, Linguistics, or related fields), who positions themselves as the more competent peer during the mediation. Mediation is a moment after the meetings (the "interaction sessions") dedicated to discussing, sharing experiences and ideas, debating, and giving and receiving suggestions, and practitioners are invited to self-reflect on their learning process, taking on the majority of responsibility for their journeys.

As advocated by Vassallo and Telles (2006), in Teletandem, participants (also called interactors or learners) generally have the freedom to choose the topics they wish to address during the meetings, signaling the protagonism occupied by the learner, a fundamental premise of MA. Interactors are also encouraged by mediators to prepare for the interaction by bringing up topics they would like to discuss with their partner, such as topics of interest for specific vocabulary practice.

Occasionally, the mediator and peers may also share materials they believe could contribute to the discussions (possible topics, audiovisual media, etc.). Preparing pre-interaction material to maximize the use of meetings, which would be used to discuss these materials, aligns with the principles of flipped classrooms. It is essential to note, however, that ultimately, the decision to prepare pre-interaction material rests with the learners and the agreements made between them and their peers.

Another active methodology whose principles can be identified in Teletandem is peer instruction. Just like in peer instruction, Teletandem prioritizes exchanges among the learners themselves, with the teacher's intervention (in the case of peer instruction) or the mediator's intervention (in the case of Teletandem) occurring only when necessary. In Teletandem, an example of the mediator's role outside of mediation would be attempting to mediate a disagreement where the involved parties cannot resolve it on their own or seeking the answer to a question that remains unresolved, for illustration purposes.

Characteristics of peer instruction can also be found during the mediation, as this is when everyone comes together to share learning, doubts, knowledge, debate, give and receive suggestions, feedback, and most importantly: are invited to (self)reflect on their processes (and those of their partners).

Teletandem also involves interaction cycles with pre-assigned tasks¹³, which must be developed jointly by learners affiliated with partner institutions with the aim of producing and/or presenting a final product/project. In these more specific cases, in addition to the aforementioned MA, the IV in question will also demonstrate congruence with project-based learning or problem-based learning, depending on the focus, as elucidated earlier. Additionally, Teletandem boasts a robust research network, the output of which can predominantly be found on the initiative's website, highlighting a context that values self-reflective practices.

X-Culture

O'Dowd (2018) regards X-Culture as another facet of subject-specific IV, this time focused on the Business domain. The Business education sector was another realm to recognize the potential of IV, although in more recent and considerably less documented initiatives than the field of language teaching. The main goal of these initiatives is to prepare learners to work in online groups with people from different places, often with different cultures and languages - towards a common goal: the so-called Global Virtual Teams.

X-Culture has a website¹⁴ already segmented for each target audience, whether by age or role (researchers, sponsors, instructors, students, etc.), which will be a source of information for this section along with O'Dowd (2018). The actions take place over a semester, and assessment is done continuously through reports on students' work and progress, who, in the end, receive a certificate issued by X-Culture. Participants are free to choose the communication platforms (email, Skype, Dropbox, Google Docs, etc.) they will adopt, given the options presented.

X-Culture also advocates for teachers to maintain regular communication with students, implement IV in their classes, and set aside class time to discuss the project and learners' progress. IV also collects documentary material from online interactions as possible data for

¹³ See: Silva and Salomão (2022).

¹⁴ For more information: <https://x-culture.org/>. Accessed on: 18 Aug. 2022.

future research, a practice considered desirable for teachers, which fosters a context of (self)reflective practices.

We consider X-Culture as a virtual exchange (IV) whose premises strongly align with project-based learning, problem-based learning, and flipped classroom methodologies. This is because participants engage in activities to develop a project and present a solution to a problem similar to those they will face in real life. Additionally, this IV exhibits flipped classroom characteristics, as the project's development depends on actions that must be taken before and after the meetings.

Having looked at subject-specific IVs, next we will present Soliya, an example of what O'Dowd (2018) designates as "service-provider approaches" in group "c". Also in this group are iEARN¹⁵, *Sharing Perspectives*¹⁶ and *Global Nomads*¹⁷. The first endeavor was selected to illustrate the category.

Soliya

The Soliya Connect program inaugurates another option of IV within the service-provider approach proposed by O'Dowd (2018). This project provides students from the West with the opportunity to connect with Muslim students, aiming to develop a deeper understanding of other people's perspectives around the world on important sociopolitical issues (O'Dowd, 2018). Additionally, the program also aims to develop critical thinking, intercultural communication, and media literacy skills.

According to O'Dowd (2018), Soliya adopts a methodology in which participants, guided by pairs of trained mediators, are allocated in small groups of up to ten members from each locality and engage in dialogue in English. Credits for participation in the project are also offered to students at their respective institutions. Through synchronous video conferencing on a platform specially designed to facilitate diverse dialogue using technology and supporting inclusive discussions where everyone can be heard (O'Dowd, 2018), students participate weekly for about two months, and this forms the core of the program.

According to O'Dowd (2018, p. 17), the most striking feature of this program is "the role of the facilitator who takes part in all the online sessions and whose role it is to create a

¹⁵ For more information: <https://www.iearn.org/>. Accessed on: 18 Aug. 2022.

¹⁶ For more information: <https://sharingperspectivesfoundation.com/>. Accessed on: 18 Aug. 2022.

¹⁷ For more information: <https://gng.org/>. Accessed on: 19 Aug. 2022.

safe dialogic space for learning and to ensure that the dialogue process is constructive and meaningful”. Although Soliya began as an attempt to promote dialogue between the Western and Arab worlds after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States, the program expanded its curriculum to cover other areas, such as 21st-century skills¹⁸.

Skills such as cultural communication, collaborative problem-solving, and teamwork enable participants to engage with differences more positively and become active global citizens (O’Dowd, 2018). According to the same scholar (O’Dowd, 2018, p. 17), the Soliya curriculum has “The Soliya curriculum also has clear education goals and a specific structure to help groups reach their learning objectives and to ensure that certain learning components on cross-cultural communication are a part of everyone’s dialogue process”.

We associate Soliya with peer instruction, much like e-tandem and Teletandem, due to the prominence of knowledge exchange among learners, frequent opportunities for feedback, and the presence of a mediating figure. Additionally, the initiative fosters collaborative learning and encourages students to develop a critical and conscious perspective, as well as promoting teamwork, enabling participants to engage with differences deeply and positively, ensuring that dialogue is constructive and meaningful.

Moving on to the fourth classificatory category that O’Dowd (2018) outlines as "d": IVs with a shared syllabus approach, which, according to the author, has Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) as its most illustrative example. To this category, we will add the Brazilian initiative BRaVE (Brazilian Virtual Exchange).

COIL

COIL, as it is known today, has been practiced since 2004 (O’Dowd, 2018) by Jon Rubin and colleagues at the State University of New York (SUNY), but the term "COIL" was adopted only from 2006 onwards (Rubin, 2017). Rubin (2017) further emphasizes that SUNY does not own the COIL model, as when it was created, it was seen as an Open Educational Resource (OER)¹⁹ (Rubin, 2017), which led to the model being adopted by other institutions, albeit under different names. Indeed, it is an approach with remarkably rapid growth (Rubin, 2017), and for this reason, there is a course with essential information for those wishing to adopt this model.

¹⁸ For more information: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234311>. Accessed on: 20 Aug. 2022.

¹⁹ See: Mallmann and Nobre (2015).

Practices in COIL began in the Social Sciences as a way to put language learners in contact with native speakers of the target language (Rubin, 2017). According to the SUNY²⁰, website, COIL²¹ is “an approach that brings together students and instructors from different cultures to learn, discuss, and collaborate as part of their course” (our translation). Partner instructors are responsible for planning the experience, and students are tasked with the proposed activities. COIL “becomes part of the class,” enabling “a meaningful intercultural experience” (no page) for all involved students. The same source (project website) explains that the initiative can be undertaken in any discipline, encourages active student learning, can use any technology to achieve desired goals, has a varying duration (5 to 15 weeks), focuses on interaction and understanding between cultures, and, being part of a course, carries evaluative weight.

The methodology does not have a predefined pattern (O’Dowd, 2018). SUNY lists the four components of the IV: a) team-building phase, with ice-breaking activities to make students, language speakers, and people from different cultures comfortable with each other for online activities; b) comparative discussions and project organization where students will work collaboratively; c) execution of the planned project by learners, called the “project phase”; and d) completion, project presentation, and reflection on practices by those involved, both in terms of content and intercultural collaboration issues, thus concluding the module.

With a shared curriculum, we interpret that COIL, as well as other IVs undertaken within disciplines (X-Culture and BRaVE, which will be presented next), essentially presents the same principles as project-based learning and hybrid teaching, which, among other principles, promote collaborative learning by fostering intercultural contact and exchange of ideas among participants through project development.

BRaVE

The BRaVE Program (Brazilian Virtual Exchange), an IV initiative created by FAUBAI (Brazilian Association for International Education) and implemented at Unesp in 2018, aims to drive a form of collaborative online learning among Brazilian university students and their peers from various institutions around the world, promoting intercultural contact and the exchange of ideas (Salomão, 2020).

²⁰ For more information: <https://online.suny.edu/introtocoil/suny-coil-what-is/>. Accessed on: 17 Aug. 2022.

²¹ For more information: <https://coil.suny.edu/>. Accessed on: 17 Aug. 2022.

Unlike other language-focused programs, the BRaVE Program aims to promote intercultural interaction among undergraduate or graduate university students, with the purpose of engaging in collaborative work related to the content of the courses they are taking. BRaVE is integrated into existing courses and provides participants with the opportunity to interact with students from other universities through the internet. In this way, the program seeks to facilitate collaboration among classes, using tasks that engage students in collaborative learning through digital technologies, adopting active methodologies, and aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs)²² (Salomão, 2020).

According to Salomão (2020), its planning generally follows a sequence of activities divided into meetings that last between four and ten weeks. However, the involved teachers also have the freedom to determine the period of joint activities. Additionally, a common platform for interaction among classes is necessary to facilitate communication, which can be a synchronous tool, such as Google Meet, Zoom, Skype, and WhatsApp, or an organization and storage platform, such as Padlet, Google Classroom, and Moodle. It is also feasible to consider the use of social networks, such as Facebook and Instagram, all with the purpose of enhancing communication among participants.

Regarding practice, the first meeting usually serves as an "icebreaker" session, providing students with an opportunity to become familiar with each other and with the online environment that will serve as the virtual communication space. During this time, it is suggested that participants introduce themselves and share some cultural elements, such as a presentation, to initiate discussion and explore cultural aspects. Subsequently, the core of collaboration is undertaken, which consists of a task related to the shared content of the courses that teachers wish to explore. This task typically requires students to describe aspects of their language or culture and inquire about those of their partners. In the third stage, students are expected to present a final product, which can be a report, a slide presentation, or a video, among others (Salomão, 2020).

The principles and activities developed in BRaVE align with project-based learning methodologies, where learning occurs through the collaborative work of participants in implementing the project they have envisioned. This approach reflects an active methodology in which students are protagonists of their learning, engaging in cooperative activities that promote joint knowledge construction.

²² For more information: <https://brasil.un.org/pt-br/sdgs>. Accessed on: 26 Dec. 2022.

In the BRaVE Program, participants work in teams, collaborating to achieve common goals. They share knowledge, discuss ideas, solve problems together, and are challenged to create a final product demonstrating their learning. Additionally, students have autonomy and responsibility over their learning, and they are encouraged to take control of the learning process and seek resources and solutions independently, following one of the fundamental principles of active methodologies.

However, while project-based learning typically involves more extensive and in-depth projects developed over a longer period of time, BRaVE focuses on specific activities and cultural interactions over a shorter period. Nevertheless, the initiative maintains the principles of active and collaborative learning.

Another active methodology that can be identified in the initiative is peer instruction. Both BRaVE and this approach emphasize collaboration among students, working together to achieve common goals and sharing knowledge and experiences. This provides participants with the opportunity to exchange experiences and perspectives among themselves, allowing participants to learn from each other.

Furthermore, BRaVE and peer instruction promote the active participation of students in their learning process. In this sense, students are not just passive recipients of information but active agents in knowledge construction, actively engaging in the process. This approach places students at the center of the educational process, stimulating the development of skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration.

Final considerations

In this article, we aim to explore, in an exploratory manner, the points of convergence between the most well-known active methodologies (AM) and the most prominent virtual exchanges (VE), particularly those aimed at higher education. We understand that the AM used in VE is intended to promote student initiative, the development of student independence as learners, teamwork (leadership skills and other roles), communication skills, the ability to think and analyze critically, and the comprehension and appropriation of concepts. Furthermore, most of the VEs described here allude, in one way or another, to the flipped classroom model, as pre-class/synchronous meeting preparation is necessary for participants to fully benefit from the potential generated in synchronous or asynchronous interactions. Moreover, they encourage discussions and exchanges during synchronous classes/meetings, and the feedback from the

teacher/mediator to the learner or among the learners themselves after the class/synchronous meeting is highly valued.

Finally, we conclude by acknowledging that our discussion was based on theoretical support to examine the relationship between active methodologies (AM) and virtual exchanges (VE). We believe that empirical studies could deepen the understanding of this relationship, especially regarding the roles and involvement of participants. This can be achieved through the analysis of interaction and negotiation conducted for the execution of collaborative activities mediated by technologies, and their relationship with the development and learning of the participants.

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