

International virtual exchange, deep language learning, personal empowerment, and social transformation



Anton T. Brinckwirth, PhD
Martha Guadalupe Hernández Alvarado, PhD

March 2025



Introduction

- Virtual Exchange (VE) - Project Aims
- VE Participants
- The Mexican context
- VE Schedule & Structure
- VE Language Partner Interviews
- VE Role Play
- Enhancing VE
- Methodology
- Findings 1, 2 & 3
- Recommendations
- References

Virtual Exchange (VE) - Project Aims

- to provide students with opportunities for meaningful immersion and practice
- to heighten L2 proficiency outcomes
- to explore VE projects developed around a social justice theme
- to explore critical language pedagogy as a means to promote social transformation and global citizenship.

VE Project Participants

Project participants

- **VE Facilitators:** Designed, planned, and implemented the project while serving as teachers, researchers, instructional designers, exchange coordinators, and presenters.
- **Students:**
 - **Group 1:** Second-year **EFL university students** from Pachuca, Mexico.
 - **Group 2:** Fourth-year **Spanish immersion high school students** from Virginia, USA.
- **Pairing Criteria:** Students were matched based on **language proficiency, age, gender preference, and shared academic/career interests.**

The Mexican Context:

- B.A. in English Language Teaching
- Public university
- Language requirement to graduate from the program - C1 (CEFR)
- Not many opportunities to practice outside the classroom with native speakers
 - Academic English



VE Schedule & Structure

1. **Pre-session activities** prepared students in advance.
2. **Four one-hour sessions** planned; **three completed** over four weeks.
3. **Student-centered interactions** with instructor guidance and support on hand.
4. Activities included **discussions, interviews, and role-play skits**.
5. **Each session:** 25 minutes in Spanish, 25 minutes in English.
6. **Printed session handout** included the following components
 - a. **Session script** to keep students on task.
 - b. **Activity instructions** for structured participation.
 - c. **Exit ticket** to check understanding and completion.
 - d. **Reflection question** for deeper engagement.

VE Language Partner Interviews

Language Partner Discussion - After exploring **transmigration** and learning the associated thematic vocabulary, students discussed the following questions in their **L2** with their native speaking partners:

1. **Cultural Perceptions:** How is transmigration viewed in your culture?
2. **Migration Motivations:** Why do people migrate in your country?
3. **National Impact:** How does migration affect your country?
4. **Cultural Integration:** How do cultural differences shape immigrant integration?
5. **Challenges:** What obstacles do immigrants face in Mexico and the USA?
6. **Policies & Attitudes:** How do immigration policies affect migrants' lives?
7. **Contributions:** What positive contributions do immigrants make to society?
8. **Community Engagement:** How can we promote understanding and acceptance of immigrants?

VE Role Play - Asylum Interview

Students engaged in a **simulated asylum interview**, assuming the roles of:

1. **Hispanic migrant** applying for asylum in the U.S.
2. **U.S. immigration official** conducting the *credible fear interview*.

Activity Structure:

- Students received **detailed profiles** of both roles.
- The **immigration official** asked scripted questions and noted responses.
- The **migrant** responded based on their interpretation of the descriptive profile.
- The interview was **conducted twice**, allowing role reversal.

Learning Outcomes:

- Encouraged **empathy** and **critical awareness** of migration challenges.
- Developed **linguistic proficiency** in real-world, high-stakes communication.
- Fostered a **deeper understanding** of the complexities of transmigration.

Enhancing VE

New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (NPDL)

Develops critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication—key 21st-century competencies (Fullan et al., 2023).

Fosters global competency, technology-driven education, and innovative partnerships while integrating social-emotional learning.

Engages students in high-impact, real-world immersion activities to enhance L2 proficiency and critical thinking.

Critical Language Pedagogy (CLP)

Creates spaces for students to explore language, identity, and power (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006).

Dismantles traditional hierarchies, positioning educators and learners as co-constructors of knowledge (Freire, 1993).

Promotes equitable language use, global citizenship, and social transformation.

Empowers students to navigate linguistic and societal challenges with confidence and critical awareness.

Methodology:

Action Research Approach

- Investigates VE's impact on **communicative language skills, social transformation, and personal empowerment.**

Data Collection Methods

- **Student session notes** documenting key interactions.
- **Written reflections** for deeper insight.
- **Exit tickets** to assess understanding and engagement.
- **Surveys** capturing participants' perceptions at key points.
- **Facilitator & instructor observations** during sessions.

Findings (1): Impact on language learning

“It gave me insight on how English education is and meet new people.”

“Helped me a little bit with my pronunciation.”

“It helped me to improve my communication and comprehension ability as well as know about U.S culture.”

“The process was really helpful since I learned plenty of vocabulary related to migration.”

“It helped me to improve my speaking, because being in contact with a speaker made me aware of his/her pronunciation.”

Findings (2): Impact on perceptions of immigration

"I am now aware of the hard journey of migrants and I totally understand the reasons why these people leave their country."

"Now, I am aware of the perspective she has about immigration. Even when she is from USA, she stands for the idea that immigrants' rights need to be respected."

"We discussed questions related to the topic that made me think about the risks migrants face as well as the role play allowed me to be more empathetic with migrants."

"Actually, my perspective didn't change that much since I knew about that topic due to my sociocultural background. However, I can say that through the exchange project I figured out the way my partner looked at that topic."

"It didn't change much. We both had the same opinion and we didn't know the government policies of each country. It lacked a little more research on both sides."

Findings (3): Principle benefits of VE

“To learn about other's culture and develop speaking skills.”

“Learning more about other cultures.”

“It is a good and interactive way for us to learn to communicate our ideas better and be able to know understand other people's ideas.”

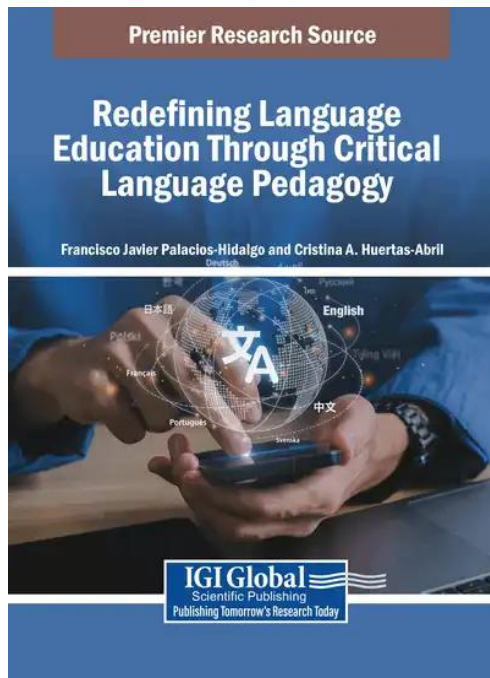
“It is a key point for the language level development in students, more specifically it helps speaking skills and vocabulary. Additionally to the knowledge acquired about different cultures and accents of English.”

“How native speakers interact, how they use the language and how are real conversations I would say that speaking and listening but only if all the participants are willing to give their best.”

Recommendations

- **Advance Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE):** Expand VE practices to promote **equitable and inclusive** student experiences.
- **Extend Engagement:** Increase the **number of exchanges and task duration** to enhance learning outcomes.
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** Foster **greater commitment** from all participating institutions.
- **Enhance Preparation:** Provide **more in-depth pre-exchange learning** on key topics.
- **Incorporate Dynamic Tasks:** Use **interactive and engaging activities** to sustain student interest.
- **Build Stronger Connections:** Encourage **ongoing collaboration** between language partners to boost confidence and empathy.

In case you are more interested in the project...



Brinckwirth, A. T. & Hernández-Alvarado, M. G. (2025). Virtual Exchange, Critical Language Pedagogy, and Deep Learning. In F. Palacios-Hidalgo & C. Huertas-Abril (Eds.), *Redefining Language Education Through Critical Language Pedagogy* (pp. 413-436). IGI Global Scientific Publishing.
<https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-5421-6.ch015>

References

- Balosa, D. (2023). Existential Literacy Promoting the Culture of Dignity for All Languages in Modern Language Classrooms. In D. Hird (Ed.), *Critical Pedagogies for Modern Languages Education: Criticality, Decolonization, and Social Justice* (pp. 23-44). Bloomsbury. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/uk/critical-pedagogies-for-modern-languages-education-9781350298781/>
- Beaudrie, S., Amezcua, A., & Loza, S. (2020). Critical language awareness in the heritage language classroom: Design, implementation, and evaluation of a curricular intervention. *Heritage Language Journal*, 17(2), 123–150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19313152.2020.1753931>
- Bogdan, S. (2023). Transforming Language Education: How Instructors Incorporate Translanguaging and Critical Pedagogy in Community Schools. In G. Park, S. Bogdan, M. Rosa, & J.M. Navarro (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogy in the Language and Writing Classroom: Strategies, Examples, Activities from Teacher Scholars* (pp. 9-22). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003357001>
- Castillo-Scott, A. (2018). Teaching social issues through cinema and teletandem. *Revista Do GEL*, 15(3), 257-278. <https://doi.org/10.21165/gel.v15i3.2409>
- Crookes, G.V. (2021). Critical language pedagogy: an introduction to principles and values. *ELT Journal*, 75(3), 247–255. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccab020>
- Freire, P. (1993). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). Continuum. (Original work published 1970).
- Fullan, M., Quinn, J., & McEachen, J. (2017). *Deep Learning: Engage the World, Change the World*. Corwin, a SAGE Company. <https://www.corwin.com/books/deep-learning-255374>
- Giroux, H. A. (2011). *On Critical Pedagogy*. Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://www.bloomsbury.com/us/on-critical-pedagogy-9781350144996/>
- Hauck, M. (2023). From Virtual Exchange to Critical Virtual Exchange and Critical Internationalization at Home. In Diversity Abroad, *Virtual Exchange as a Tool to Advance Equity and Inclusion* (pp. 9-12). The Global Impact Exchange. https://www.diversityabroad.org/common/Uploaded%20files/Global%20Impact%20Exchange%20Archives/Final_GIE-%20Sp23.pdf
- Hernández-Alvarado, M.G. & Brinckwirth, A. (2021). Transcultural language learning with cinema, social justice, and teletandem. In M. Thomas & K. Yamazaki (Eds.), *Project-based language learning and CALL-From virtual exchange to social justice* (pp. 201-230). Equinox eBooks Publishing. <https://www.equinoxpub.com/home/view-chapter/?id=42403>
- O'Dowd, R. (2023). *Internationalising Higher Education and the Role of Virtual Exchange*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315393704>

Contact Information:

Anton T. Brinckwirth

✉ atbrinckwirth@wm.edu

Martha Guadalupe Hernández Alvarado

✉ martha_hernandez5011@uaeh.edu.mx

Thank you!!