

VIRTUAL COLLABORATION IN EUROPEAN TEACHER EDUCATION




What happened since October

During the past two months, the VCiETE team organised and carried out another physical exchange with Aix-Marseille University. This time, the exchange took place in Aix-en-Provence.

Furthermore, a workshop for teacher educators took place in November. During the webinar, participants interested in virtual exchanges in teacher education came together to discuss important matters on the subject.

Workshop: Virtual Exchanges in European Teacher Education

On November 21 2023, a workshop on “Virtual Exchanges in European Teacher Education”, led by the project manager Vasileios Symeonidis and Verena Bodenbender from the International Office of the University of Education Freiburg, took place. 23 teacher educators came together to learn more about virtual exchange programmes running at the University of Education Freiburg and to discuss and present important aspects of virtual exchanges in teacher education in general.



Outline: Teacher Education

- 1. Virtual Exchanges at the PH Freiburg** – Verena Bodenbender
 - 1.1 What is Virtual Exchange (VE), what purposes has it?
 - 1.2 VE @University of Education Freiburg
 - 1.2.1 Nett Devise
 - 1.2.1 LIVE Chile
- 2. The VCiETE project- hybrid exchange between PH Freiburg & Aix Marseille**
– Vasileios Symeonidis & Maria Impedovo
 - 2.1 Background
 - 2.2 Virtual exchange in the context of teacher education
 - 2.3 The European teacher model
 - 2.4 Methods
 - 2.5 The impact on student’s professional identities as European teachers
 - 2.6 Findings
- 3. Panel Discussion**

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During the conclusive panel discussion, guests who have already been involved in virtual exchange programmes shared their experiences and discussed the main benefits and challenges when it comes to implementing a virtual exchange in teacher education.

Two main questions and their main messages will be provided below:

Outlook: How can virtual exchange networks become more relevant?

Main Messages:

- Across institutional communication.
 - Which networks do already exist and how can we connect them?
 - VE does not have to be re-invented over and over.
- Number of VEs at School of Education Freiburg (FACE) has increased significantly since the pandemic → relevance of digitalisation?
- We need to eliminate bureaucratic and coordinational difficulties.
- How can we motivate people to start a VE?
 - A VE won't be perfect. It's a work in progress which needs to be started.
- Make the benefits visible.
- Be open about the experience.
- Make use of existing institutional platforms.
- Integration into curricula → students need to obtain ECTS points for the exchange.

Note: VE is rarely organised top-down. However, if one tries to organise it bottom-up, one will face a lot of structural issues. → It needs a combination of both and the involvement of many parties.

What are the biggest advantages of virtual exchange?

Main Messages:

- Cope with each other's differences but profit from each other's knowledge.
 - Promotion of unity and diversity in a multicultural classroom setting.
 - Convey European values and ideas according to the model of the European Teacher (Schratz, 2014).
 - Digitalisation in teacher education.
 - Eliminate multiple restrictions for physical exchanges.
 - Sustainability.
 - Win the students that don't have the possibility to go abroad.
 - Concept of "travel from home".
 - Cheap.
 - Helps students to grow more confident.
 - Take a look into comparative education.
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Virtual Exchange complemented by physical exchange: Cooperation between students from Freiburg and Aix-en-Provence

In cooperation with the French colleague Maria Impedovo, who is teaching at INSPE at Aix-Marseille University, Vasileios Symeonidis and his team organised a virtual exchange, which took place in the first half of the semester. During this exchange, the students had the chance to discuss their experiences made with the educational systems of their countries.

Virtual exchange provides an opportunity to increase student teachers' access to international learning experiences. The potential of virtual exchanges to develop student teachers' competences in other subjects remains relatively unknown and untested so far. Thus, the project helps to reflect on teaching beyond national borders.

After the virtual component, the students from the University of Education Freiburg and Aix-Marseille University were given the opportunity to meet and work together in person.

The physical exchange to Aix-en-Provence took place between December 3 and 6. This trip was mainly organized by Vasileios Symeonidis and Jens Alber from the University of Education Freiburg as well as Maria Impedovo from Aix-Marseille University and her team.



The main purpose of this exchange was to promote intercultural learning and student teachers' professional awareness as European teachers. Building on the base that had been established during the virtual exchange, this trip was meant to bring student teachers and researchers on teaching together to discuss relevant topics regarding their professional development. During two sessions, students from both universities worked on comparative aspects between different school systems in and outside of Europe.

Further goals of the trip were:

- To exchange experiences of different school systems from a student's but also teacher's perspective.
- To enhance students' intercultural communicative competence and language skills.
- To establish a network that allows student teachers to exchange experiences about their profession and professional realities.
- To compare the own school system with others in order to come up with proper ideas of what works well and what should be improved.

The programme in Aix-en-Provence included educational as well as social and cultural activities. The former were primarily conducted through group works and workshops followed by presentations by the French-German student groups. Educational systems in various countries such as Germany, Taiwan or France were discussed.



On top of that, the German students had the chance to visit a local school and gather valuable insights into the routines, struggles and processes that are faced by teachers in a foreign country. This experience and the comparison to the German school system allowed for deeper insights of what practical tuition looks like. The foci of observation were diversity and laicism. The school visit in general built a bridge between the theoretical approach of the presentations of different school systems and the practical insights into actual teaching.

The social and cultural activities included a walking tour through Aix-en-Provence, a stop at the iconic Crêpes stand in an underground passage of Aix-en-Provence and a day trip to the metropolis Marseille.



Concluding our report about our trip to Aix-en-Provence, we would like to share with you some impressions of members of our study group:

The opportunity to experience an education system foreign from your home country is very rare. We were given the opportunity to observe lessons in different class levels for a few hours.

We were also able to attend German lessons. This allowed us to experience the differences between the teaching methods which wouldn't have been possible without this exchange.

We learned that children in France have Wednesdays off but have lessons until late in the afternoon on the other days. This experience was very valuable as it gave us an insight into a different school system and a lot to discuss about.

We learned a lot about different aspects of the school system in different countries, especially in France. This was an important insight when it comes to comparative education.



Overall, the trip was an enriching experience with a group of people with whom I would have liked to spend more time. Combining theory and practice in such a way is not only instructive in itself, but also formative. Although we are neighbours, the French school system is very different from ours. Getting to know it helps us to become better teachers and collect international experience, just as many of our future students are also international students. All that remains is to say thank you to everyone involved for this unique, valuable and wonderful experience.



All good things come to an end...

Following BMBF's decision to discontinue the IVAC initiative for the year 2024, the VCiETE project will conclude its activities by the end of this year. Important insights and experiences were made thanks to the interaction between students of different countries and cultures. This international project showed that it is necessary to compare teacher education across different countries in our globalized world to shape teacher education as a common ground for the implementation of a European teaching agenda.

Thanks to Mr. Symeonidis, Jens Alber and Mrs. Impedovo for leading and running the project. Thanks to the student assistants Tom Türk and Lukas Kaiser and to our partner Aix-Marseille University. Especially the physical exchange components are certainly events that the students will keep in good memory.



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<https://www.ph-freiburg.de/ew/institut/abteilung-bildungsforschung-und-schulpaedagogik/projekte/virtual-collaboration-in-european-teacher-education.html>