CO-LABORATORY TRAINING– EVALUATION REPORT

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evolve

Evidence-Validated Online Learning through Virtual Exchange

Acknowledgement:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an output of the **EVOLVE** project (*Evidence Validated Online Learning through Virtual Exchange*), an Erasmus+ KA3 Forward-Looking Cooperation Project which aims to mainstream Virtual Exchange (VE) as innovative educational practice in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across Europe. The intention of the EVOLVE team is to assist HE educators and educational supporters in promoting, designing and launching their own VE projects, in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. The project also targets HE mobility and International Officers, whose awareness of VE can align with institutional strategies and policies of 'internationalisation at home' and internationalising the curriculum.

To assure a shared understanding of what VE is, Virtual Exchange has been defined in the EVOLVE project as a "practice, supported by research, that consists of sustained, technology-enabled, people-to-people education programmes or activities in which constructive communication and interaction takes place between individuals or groups who are geographically separated and/or from different cultural backgrounds, with the support of educators or facilitators. Virtual Exchange combines the deep impact of intercultural dialogue and exchange with the broad reach of digital technology".

https://evolve-erasmus.eu/about-evolve/what-is-virtual-exchange/

The major aim of VE is to allow an increasing number of people to have a meaningful intercultural experience as part of their formal and/or non-formal education. This type of activity may be situated in educational programmes across the curriculum in order to increase mutual understanding, and global citizenship, as well as in informal education projects. Virtual Exchange also fosters the development of what has been recognized as employability skills such as digital competence (the ability to communicate and collaborate effectively online), foreign language competence, communication skills, media literacy and the ability to work in a diverse cultural context.

https://evolve-erasmus.eu/about-evolve/what-is-virtual-exchange/

Despite its enormous educational benefits, VE is still a relatively new HE practice (Jager et al., 2019) and its followers require considerable training and support from more experienced practitioners to ensure its informed implementation and integration with other elements of the curriculum. The current report presents the evaluation of the first piloting iteration of the Co-laboratory training which was developed and delivered by the EVOLVE team to promote the use of VE in class-to-class exchanges in various academic disciplines and contexts. The training was delivered to a group of

academic-level educators, teacher trainees and internationalisation officers in autumn 2018.

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES

The evaluation aimed to better understand to what extent the current shape of the training meets participants' needs and goals and whether it fosters the competences needed for successful VE design and delivery. Following, the findings are to guide the potential modifications of the content and instruction for the next iteration of Co-Laboratory.

The evaluation focused on the following issues:

- the participants' satisfaction with course components;
- the impact of the training on participants' confidence in dealing with technical, pedagogical and organizational aspects of VEs;
- establishing those training components which were perceived as most/least successful;
- collecting feedback on the relevance of technologies used in the training;
- recognising training areas in need of modifications.

The data obtained in the process will be used to fine tune the training content and instruction so that it serves the needs of HE educators even better and will assist them in launching their own exchanges.

EVALUATION METHODS

The data presented and analysed in this report were collected through an evaluation form created in English and distributed online right after the training, in the period between November and December 2018. The evaluation form entailed a collection of qualitative and quantitative data from 19 training participants. It consisted of 31 questions targeting various aspects of the training including the perceived relevance of particular modules as well as the perceived quality of content, task design, moderation and tools.

OVERVIEW OF THE TRAINING

The training, whose participants were recruited from educators and International Officers at partnering institutions and Coimbra and Santander networks, sought to prepare participants in the fundamental aspects of Virtual Exchange by giving them first-hand experience of communicating and collaborating online over VE-related content and through carefully designed tasks. The main target group involved HE educators representing various academic disciplines and willing to implement VE in

their own class-to-class settings. It also targeted International Officers and other HE professionals who would be able to assist the faculty or implement VE in physical mobility contexts. In particular, the training was designed and delivered with the following objectives in mind:

- Demonstrating what Virtual Exchange (VE) is and how it can be implemented in specific institutional contexts;
- Introducing different types of VE and the tasks used;
- Allowing the participants experience studying VE through VE;
- Making participants acquire technological competence required for VE;
- Assisting participants in constructing a scenario/task sequence for their own project;
- Encouraging the discussion among participants abbout the challenges involved in VE and consider solutions to them;
- Introducing participants to the concept of Facilitated Dialogue.
- Fostering participants' pedagogical competence

The content of the Co-Laboratory training was informed by the previous experience of team members, some of whom had been actively involved in Erasmus + Virtual Exchange programmes, Facilitated Dialogue and other initiatives promoting various types of VE (e.g. COIL, UniCollaboration, Soliya). It was also informed by the preliminary results of the baseline study carried out at earlier stages of the project, which provided a comprehensive picture of the current status of VE at European HE institutions (Jager et al, 2019). The final shape of the training was the outcome of collaborative efforts of EVOLVE members and aimed to tap on various areas of VE expertise they represented, all of which were duly reflected in the foci of particular modules.

Following, the core issues explored in the first 5 weeks of the training included:

- Introduction to VE
- Pedagogy of VE
- Introduction to Facilitated dialogue
- Becoming tool savvy
- Managing tensions and challenge

Apart from the 5 core modules, the participants could take 3 optional ones corresponding to the major VE research areas, namely

- Language and Disciplinary Competence
- Critical Digital Literacy
- Intercultural Competence
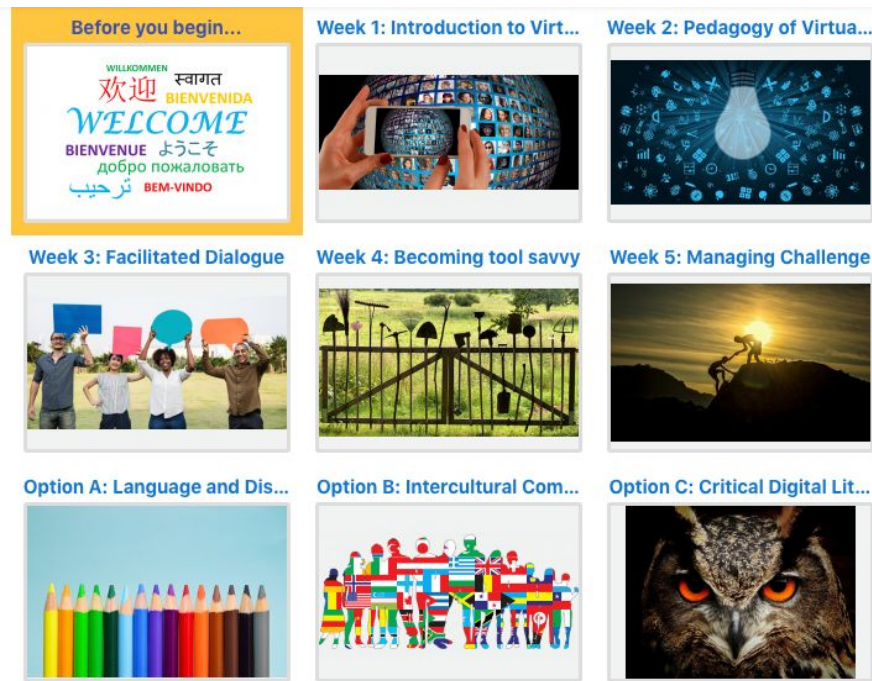
Fig.1 A screenshot of the Co-Laboratory homepage – titles of training modules.

The Co-Laboratory training took 7 weeks to complete, including optional modules. It was delivered online through a Moodle-based platform hosted by OpenEdu. Some tasks and training activities were supported with additional tools, such as videoconferencing software (Zoom.Us), video recording apps (Flipgrid) and other tools enhancing collaboration and communication (e.g. Padlet, Mahara).

The core part of the training was followed by a mentoring phase during which participants and their VE partners received individual guidance and support while preparing for their first VE projects. As a result of the mentoring stage, 10 exchanges were crafted and successfully launched, providing ground for research into the development of instructors' and students' competences.

Apart from providing participants with carefully selected content and tasks, the instructional approach applied in the training highlighted the social aspect of working in a *community of practice* in which participating members "share a concern or a passion for something to do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly" (Wenger, 1998). This was done by establishing regular synchronous communication (through video sessions) and direct mentoring.

It is important to note that the training in question focused mostly on class-to class type of VE, with Facilitated Dialogue introduced, but not fully explored. Participation in the training was awarded with digital badges.

The first iteration of the Co-Laboratory training gathered a group of 52 registered participants representing 26 European Institutions of Higher Education. 27 of the enrolled participants were actively involved in the course, some of them at different stages, 11 of who applied for badges of completion.

The post-training evaluation form was responded to by 19 participants, 6 males and 13 females, which provided the data on which the current evaluation is based. The group represented various scopes of professional experience, the largest group (42%) reporting the scope of 11-20 years of practice. The distribution of responses has been illustrated in Fig. 2 below:
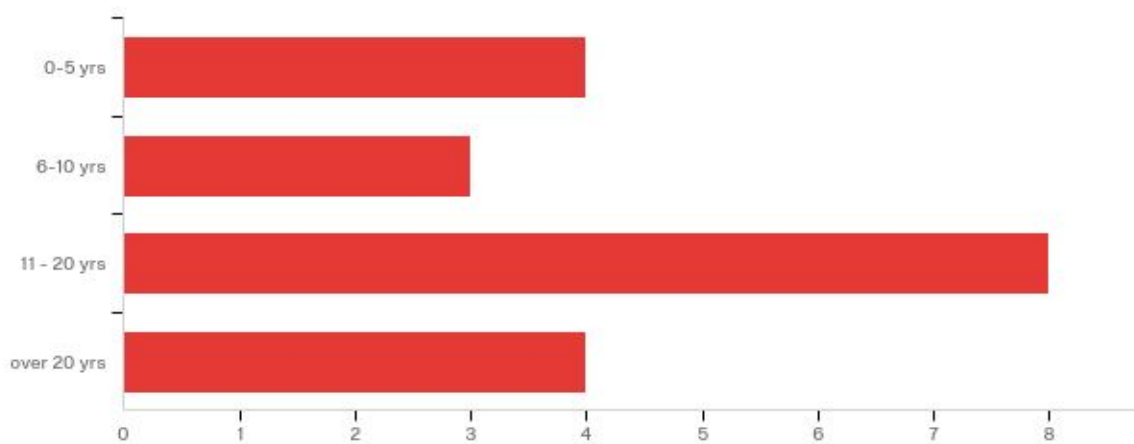
Fig. 2 Distribution of responses to Q 1: What is your professional experience in higher education?

The largest group of respondents were HE teachers and instructors (55%), with a relatively modest representation of teacher trainees (13%), curriculum developers (10%) and International officers (10%). The distribution of responses has been illustrated below:
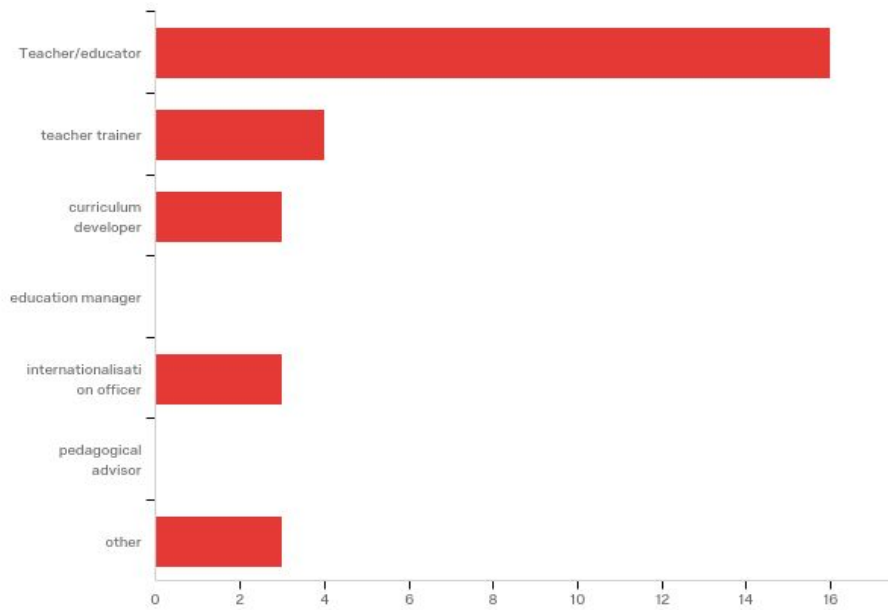
Fig. 3 Distribution of responses to Q 3: What is your role at your institution?

The data revealed that the respondents' participation in the training had been motivated by various personal and professional reasons. Over 22% wanted to gain the competence in using technology for learning, while 18% had a particular partnership in mind and wanted to set up an exchange. Another relatively large group of participants wanted to learn more about Virtual Exchange (13%) and how it could be used to deliver specific learning outcomes (18%). 13% of respondents indicated they had had previous experience with VE and hoped to refine their VE competence.
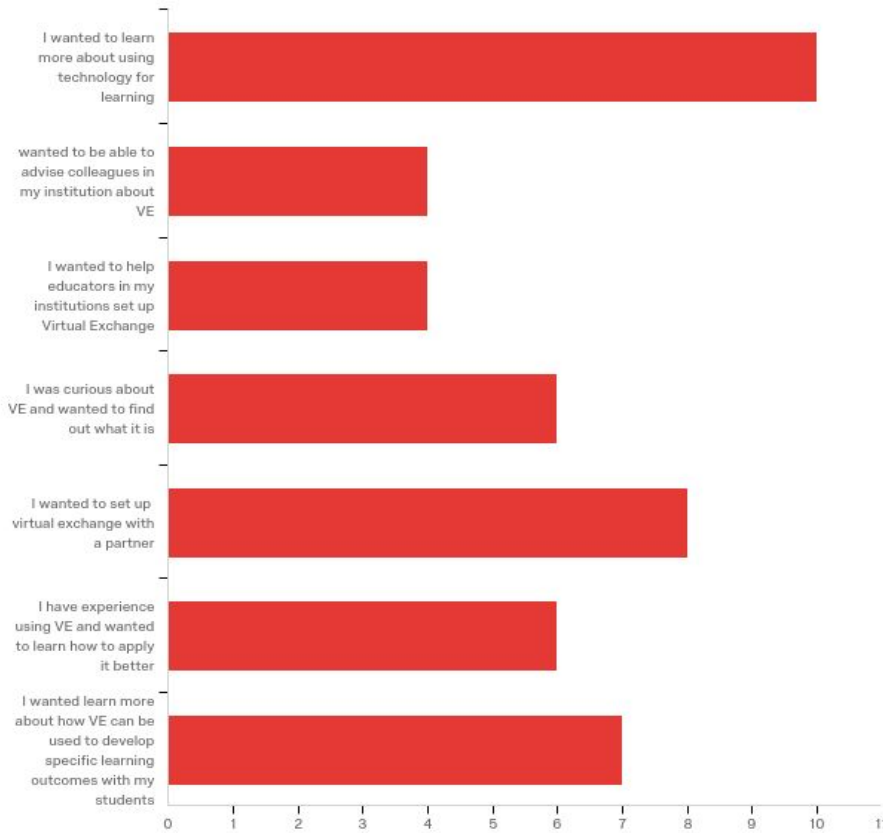
Fig. 4. Distribution of responses to Q5: What was the reason which best describes why you registered for the course? (select all that apply)

Notably, a vast majority of respondents were active training participants who either completed it (26,3%) or took part in the most of its activities (53%). Only 4 respondents (21%) admitted to having started the training and dropping out at some point.
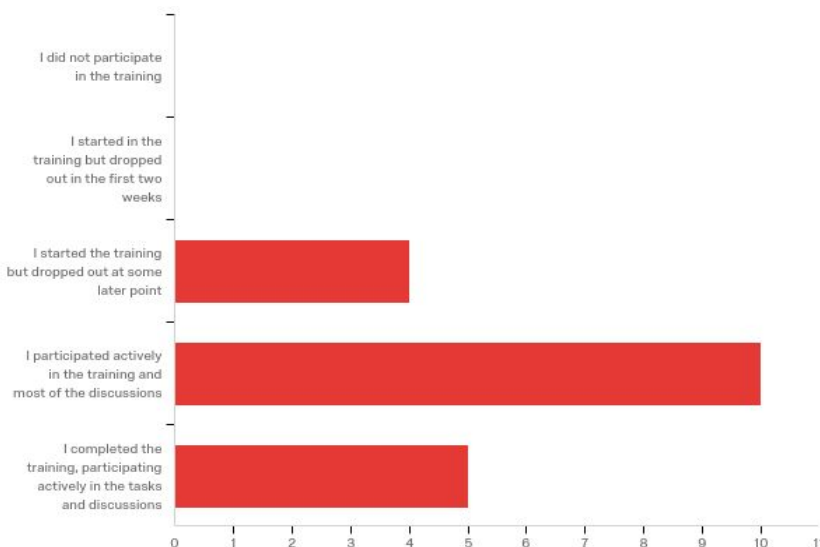
Fig. 5   Distribution of responses to Q 6: Which best describes your participation in the training?

TRAINING EVALUATION

The following evaluation presents the participants' feedback in the areas of

- Overall training satisfaction
- Course moderation
- Cuorse interaction and communication
- Video sessions
- Course content

OVERALL TRAINING SATISFACTION

Overall, the respondents evaluated their training experience very highly. The majority of respondents admitted that participating in the training contributed highly (63%) or very highly (16%) to their overall understanding of VE. 21% considered the learning value as moderate. None of the respondents selected lower values.
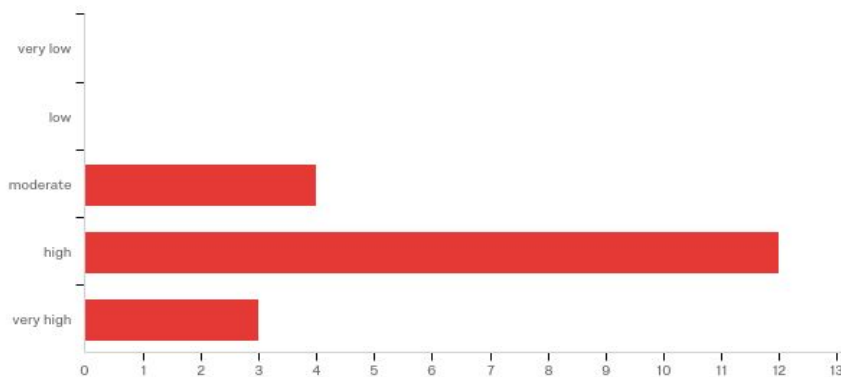
Fig. 6 Distribution of responses to Question 12: After having completed the course my overall understanding of Virtual Exchange is … .

As the participants commented:

- I really think that it was a very good training
- Overall a great educational experience

More specifically, participants highlighted that the training helped them understand what VE is (almost 89%) and that it met their expectations (84%). Moreover, the majority of them stated they felt prepared for launching their own exchange (88.7%). Also a staggering group of respondents admitted that the training helped them

improve their ability to communicate and collaborate online (83%) and their digital competence (72%).

#	Question	strongly disagree	disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	agree	strongly agree	Total
1	The course met my expectations	0.00%	5.26%	10.53%	**68.42%**	**15.79%**	19
2	The course helped me to understand what Virtual exchange is	5.56%	0.00%	5.56%	**27.78%**	**61.11%**	18
3	The training helped me to develop pedagogical knowledge necessary for VE	0.00%	0.00%	22.22%	61.11%	16.67%	18
4	The training offered helped me to improve my digital competence necessary for VE	0.00%	5.56%	22.22%	**55.56%**	**16.67%**	18
5	The training helped me to learn tools necessary for VE	0.00%	0.00%	27.78%	33.33%	38.89%	18
6	The training helped me to improve my ability to communicate and collaborate online	0.00%	0.00%	16.67%	**33.33%**	**50.00%**	18
7	I feel I'm prepared to launch my own exchange	0.00%	0.00%	33.33%	38.89%	27.78%	18

Table 1 Distribution of responses to Question 10: To what extent will you agree with the following statements?

A closer look at particular course components (Table 2) reveals that all of them were rated very positively, with the highest scores given to **trainers' moderation** (mean value 4.05 out of 5), **overall content and activities** (3.95) and weekly **synchronous video sessions** (3.89). A relatively low value was attached to **traditional forum discussions** (3.47), which suggests that more attention should be given to using state-of-the-art multimodal technology solutions for communication and self-reflection. This was confirmed in responses obtained in Question 13.

A more detailed distribution of responses has been shown in Table 2 below.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	**Overall content and activities**	2.00	5.00	3.95	0.83	0.68	19
2	**forum discussions**	2.00	5.00	3.47	0.88	0.78	19
3	**drop-in sessions**	2.00	5.00	3.89	0.85	0.73	19
4	**trainers' moderation**	2.00	5.00	4.05	0.94	0.89	19
5	**other participants' contributions**	2.00	5.00	3.68	0.73	0.53	19

Table 2 Distribution of responses to Question 13: How would you rate the contribution to your learning from the following parts of the content of the course?

Last but not least, in their open-ended comments participants appreciated the inclusiveness of the training and its broad scope:

- I learned about the pedagogical process that goes into creating a Virtual Exchange, and how it should be more important than the subject matter, technology or other considerations.
- (the training) was very intensive and complete.
- I liked the inclusiveness of the whole course.
- The content of the sessions, the intercultural exchange.

COURSE MODERATION

It was particularly reassuring to see the participants' recognition of the leading role of the trainers, as this will be hopefully reflected in their own exchanges. The involvement of the teaching team and their expertise in the subject were particularly appreciated and the comments were a positive endorsement of instructors' contribution:

- I liked the inclusiveness of the whole course, accessibility and openness of the experts involved and their genuine commitment to helping others learn about and practice VE.
- I liked the rich environment with the moodle platform and the different tools used - the synchronous session facilitated dialogue was something new for me and I really liked the way the trainers have moderated the session.
- (I liked) direct contact with the mentors, their readiness to answer questions and help to solve problems.
- (I liked the) helpful team.
- I like the very good engagement from the course leaders.
- Good job! Engaged mentors!

COURSE INTERACTION AND COMMUNICATION

The participants were also asked to identify those aspects of the training which they found particularly useful or enlightening. Obviously, they varied for different

respondents but one of the most commonly praised elements was interaction, either synchronous or asynchronous, which in some cases even led to establishing new partnerships.

- Finding a partner. Learning about different possibilities of setting up a VE.
- It was interactive but allowed for a lot of self-pace.
- The forum discussions and the synchronous sessions worked very well. I was able to relate to other participants.
- I really liked the connections I made with other professionals across the globe interested in many of the same things that I am. I also really liked trying out some tech, like padlet, that I might use myself.
- (I liked) being able to communicate with people who have the experience of Virtual Exchange, and realizing how diversely it can be set up.
- Time for interacting

The comments show that the interactive character of the training was highly appreciated and that the community of practice approach worked really well. Indeed, a sense of community was nurtured through different Co-Laboratory activities and the choice of supporting technology. As one of the respondents wrote:

- I think it is very important that a community of practice be maintained in some shape or form. It would be deeply sad if we could not continue to be in touch to whatever degree and even have a forum to continue exchanging. Thank you for a transformational, well-supported and very important programme and for being wonderful trainers and mentors. I look forward (…) to continuing to work on my VE project with my partner. THANK YOU!!

VIDEO MEETINGS

The aspect which was specifically addressed in the evaluation form was the perception of synchronous video meetings conducted via Zoom.us videoconferencing application. Although originally not included in the training syllabus, synchronous meetings became central to each of the modules, creating a platform for genuine interaction between participants, allowing for the clarification of module content and the exchange of ideas and experiences. Although participants reported problems attending all the sessions and only some managed to do so, they were almost unanimous in appreciating their value.
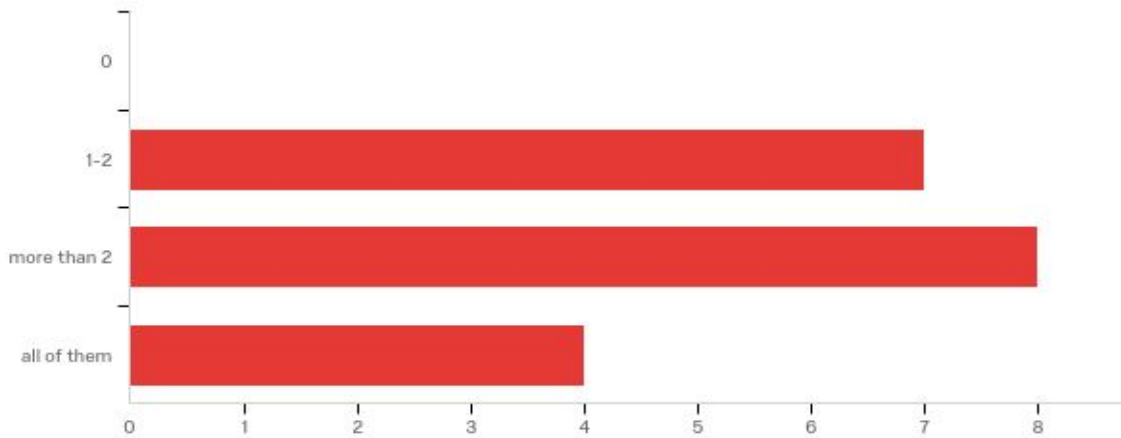
Fig. 7 Distribution of responses to Question 18: How many drop-in sessions have you attended?

Some of the participants highlighted a motivating value of such sessions. As they said, they also had helped them understand other people's views and experiences.

- I learnt about other people's views and experiences on virtual exchanges
- The sessions were very motivating; the exchange was really interesting
- Good to hear about other people's' experiences and ideas

Importantly, a group of participants pointed to the role of such meetings in nurturing social relationships and creating a group feel, recognizing the importance of this element in VE exchange:

- I think f2f contact is indispensable even when virtual exchange
- Absolutely indispensable in the community forming stage of any training.
- Nice to meet the people (in real!) and not only through the written forums contributions or padlets.
- The drop-in sessions were particularly effective to build relationships with other participants. They provided a venue to try out the theory being discussed that week, e.g. how to use break-out rooms, and facilitated dialogue.
- These sessions were simply the highlight for me. They demonstrated the power of virtual synchronous interaction and allowed for the development of genuine connections and relationships. The content or topics of these sessions was more effectively brought across as well, I think.
- Drop-in sessions make the whole VE experience a bit more tangible - creates the "classroom" feeling. You see real people and the distances that separate them seem non-existent. You experience different cultures in the way people speak: you hear various pronunciation styles, see different ways of thinking, notice various aspects of the problem discussed.
- Good exchange, important to get together and get to know the organisers of project, atmosphere was good and make me feeling welcomed.
- Absolutely indispensable in the community forming stage of any training.
- Participation of teachers from all over the world.

As one of the participants pinpointed:

- Synchronous meetings are a must.

All these comments confirmed that the participants saw the value of nurturing the social aspect in the training and that they understood the need to engage VE participants in social interactions. As the training used the modelling approach in which the tasks and technologies are expected to be replicated in other contexts, it is hoped that, indeed, the participants will promote the focus on meaningful social interactions in their own exchanges.

To inform the next iteration of the training, the participants were also asked to state their reasons for not having attended all the sessions. A number of them pointed out to business and general work overload, schedule incompatibility or other commitments as major obstacles:

- I attended the 2 that fit my schedule. Wish I could have attended them all!
- I did not know the dates/times of the synchronous sessions in advance, and sometimes just missed them, or could not make them due to other work commitments.
- I was out of the office, traveling for business.
- I dropped the last sessions because of the schedule. There was only one chance to participate in the sessions.
- Lack of time and unforeseeable work issues
- Lack of time
- If I missed any of them (I don't think that I did!), it was only because of unavoidable scheduling conflicts.
- Las weeks I had a lot of work and attended three conferences (2 of them abroad).
- Last semester was a complicated one for me, with several trips in order to attend conferences, so even the format of the sessions was fine, it was impossible to follow them.

Another challenge that the participants had to face in this context was the level of their communication skills in English, which was the main language of instruction.

- Go beyond the challenge it's for me to interact in English (not a lot of practice in this skill)

The above data illustrate that the synchronous element and real time interaction with instructors/mentors and other participants is indeed an indispensable element of online courses, which is very much in line with what is known about the social aspect of learning. It can be hoped that the participants will make sure it is properly addressed in their own VE projects.

Course content

As one of the objectives of the evaluation was to modify the training with future iterations in mind, the participants were asked to rate the learning value of particular modules on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1-of very little value, to 5 - of high value

As Table 3 shows, all the modules were evaluated highly, with the highest rates attached to the modules on Facilitated Dialogue (4.16) and Pedagogy of VE (4.0).

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	**The introduction to Virtual Exchange**	2.00	5.00	3.84	1.04	1.08	19
2	**The Pedagogy of VE**	3.00	5.00	4.00	0.73	0.53	19
3	**Facilitated Dialogue**	3.00	5.00	4.16	0.59	0.34	19
4	**Tools and technologies for VE**	2.00	5.00	3.84	0.81	0.66	19
5	**Managing Challenge**	2.00	5.00	3.58	0.82	0.66	19
6	**Language and Disciplinary skills**	1.00	5.00	3.42	1.09	1.19	19
7	**Intercultural Competence and VE**	2.00	5.00	3.61	0.89	0.79	18
8	**Digital Critical Literacy and VE**	1.00	5.00	3.41	1.09	1.18	17

Table 3 Distribution of responses to Question 14: How would you rate the contribution to your learning from the following training modules?

Even though different modules addressed different aspects of VE, it was interesting to see which of them participants perceived as most relevant to their needs and own contexts. The participants were also asked to express their opinion on the content of the modules in the form of open-ended comments, some of which were very practical and suggestive of future improvements.

- "Tools and technologies" was a good module, but perhaps would benefit from some hands on experience with specific technologies.
- Select max. 3 web-pages to study in each module to let the participants focus on the most important points. Too many links and possible sources to investigate make the participants lose their drive and motivation.

TECHNOLOGIES USED IN THE TRAINING

Another issue investigated in the evaluation was the adequacy of the technologies used in the training. Since Co-laboratory was delivered online and, for that reason, mediated heavily by technological tools, it was of utmost importance to collect feedback on to what extent the choice of tools reflected participants' needs and added to their technological competence. In Question 17 the respondents were asked to rate the value of the tools used in the course on a 5-point scale with 1 indicating *very low* and 5 – *very high*.

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	**Course platform (Moodle)**	3.00	5.00	4.26	0.55	0.30	19
2	**Zoom for synchronous sessions**	3.00	5.00	4.58	0.59	0.35	19
3	**padlet**	1.00	5.00	3.68	1.03	1.06	19
4	**Mahara for self-reflection**	1.00	5.00	3.37	1.13	1.29	19
5	**Flipgrid for video introductions**	2.00	5.00	3.88	0.76	0.57	17

Table 4: Distribution of responses to Question 17: - How do you rank the value of the following tools used in the training for your own understanding of technology in VE.

In their comments the participants appreciated the variety of tools used and their applicability to their own exchanges.

- I liked the use of the communication tools employed in this course. Meeting people online was interesting and I enjoyed the online synchronous sessions.
- I think, now I can use VE or parts of it; I was provided with pretty much useful tools for digital learning.
- I liked the rich environment with the moodle platform and the different tools used.
- I (…) really liked trying out some tech, like padlet, that I might use myself.

CHALLENGES

When it comes to challenges, one of the most frequently reported challenges resided outside of the training itself and resulted from participants' busy schedules and lack of time.

- Doing the tasks on time and attending meetings... But it was just because I am very busy at this time of the year.
- Time constraints while I was preparing to move.
- Fitting it in with other work commitments. The beginning of the week is usually very busy for me, so I always felt I was trying to catch up. Perhaps it could work to release the content of each week the previous weekend. A catch-up week in between can also be useful.
- My own lack of time and concentration
- Lack of time for myself
- Lack of time to fully research and benefit from the opportunities provided
- The time I had to involve in it. First the time pressure because of the work to do beside the training and also because English is not a language that I master enough to develop easily precise ideas about the different topics we had in the course. I needed time to focus on content and then to express what my concerns are - so it took at the beginning and in the following weeks really a lot of time to write contributions in the forums or in the padlets.

Some of the comments reflected participants' individual needs and areas of interest which, due to the comprehensive nature of the training, could not have been given adequate attention. These included intercultural and technology-related issues.

- A kind of superficial approach to intercultural issues; I do not think interculturality can be created just by mix up people of different cultures and let us see what happen.
- I would have liked to have had more focus on specific technologies and how to use them, for example I love padlet and decided to try it in my own moodle as the semester began but it just did not work. I think that presenting and using ed tech in the way that the training did was excellent but I would have liked to have had a bit more focus on some specific ones we could immediately implement and begin mastering for the VE experience.

Some participants mentioned the technical problems they were experiencing.

- When I couldn't get thru, or when I could see & hear you but you couldn't hear me.
- Troubles with Zoom.
- At the beginning I did not understand well how to participate in the discussions. Afterwards, it was a little late to begin doing it.

It cannot be ignored that the use of English as the language of instruction was seen as a challenge or barrier by these participants who were fluent in other languages. The reason for such comments not being frequent in the final evaluation is, most probably, that such people dropped out of the course relatively early, or did not feel comfortable to respond to the form. Indeed, participants' limited language competence was voiced informally in private communication with course instructors.

COURSE IMPROVEMENTS- PARTICIPANTS' SUGGESTIONS

In the attempt to provide the best learning experience for future participants of Co-laboratory training, the respondents were asked to point out the areas for potential improvements. As they were experienced academic educators, their feedback was invaluable.

In general, the largest number of comments (although not many) suggested organizational improvements such as 1) providing more options for video meetings, 2) offering one centralised location for easy access to all important files or 3) creating more opportunities for group work rather than forum exchanges. Some of the suggestions clearly exceeded the scope of the current project, the example being a proposal to work with secondary-level teachers.

One of the issues that participants repeatedly mentioned was the need to modify the duration of the training. Busy schedules, unexpected travels or other arrangements affected participants' availability for synch sessions in particular and sometimes led to backlog. When it comes to solutions, the suggestions were polarised, ranging from

suggestions to reduce the content to those proposing extending the time needed to complete them:

- Extend the time
- I would suggest to dedicate two weeks for each module: one to review the materials you provide and the 2nd one to debate with colleagues. That would have been helpful for me, who I was new to VE.
- My only suggestion would be what I wrote in Q27 about length and volume... you might even consider a "week off" in the middle so that busy educators could catch up if need be.
- Start one week earlier and finish earlier, offer more tangible case studies and real examples (less theory), engage participants to work in small groups to complete certain tasks.
- I think that the estimate of 2-3 hours per week/module was very optimistic given the volume and depth of materials. Could the training be a bit longer so that each week has a bit less content?

It was also valuable to learn that participants expect a clear practical focus of tasks and activities and even greater interactivity. As they said:

- You can do the course more practical.
- More opportunity to meet in smaller groups. Less forum activities.
- Present more case studies, real examples limiting the theory to the minimum.
- More collaborative activities would be better. Simply writing paragraphs in response to content on a forum did not feel very interactive, in my mind.
- Select max. 3 web-pages to study in each module to let the participants focus on the most important points. Too many links and possible sources to investigate make the participants lose their drive and motivation.
- Give more concrete advices from your rich experience for absolute.

Yet another set of suggestions referred to video sessions, which participants deemed important and highly valued:

- Perhaps they could be more task focused.
- More time options
- Integrate a bit more structure. For instance, share an agenda for each meet, which could help us prepare for them and interact more efficiently.

Dates and more clear about times.
- if possible one more time slot.
- Everything was fine, although it is hard to offer time slots that would suit everybody.

Above all, there was also a number of comments in which the participants expressed their gratitude for the training and appreciation for its high quality:

- Thanks for the opportunity to take part in the course. Please, consider my application for a new edition to be able to finish the training.
- Keep up the good work!
- I like the very good engagement from the course leaders.
- Thanks for teaching me and sharing your knowledge.
- Thank you all for the comprehensive feedback and support during the training!!

- Thank you for a transformational, well-supported and very important programme and for being wonderful trainers and mentors. I look forward to work on my VE project with my partner. THANK YOU!!
- Thanks for the great course!

These were confirmed in informal conversations and email exchanges in which participants openly referred to the training as an opportunity for professional development and personal growth.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The feedback obtained from pilot participants allowed the EVOLVE team to identify the strengths and limitations of the current version of Co-Laboratory, which will be taken into consideration in its future adaptations. First of all, the picture that emerges from the analysis is that the training has succeeded in its stated objectives of making the participants aware of VE and knowledgeable of the particular VE competences and equipping them, at least to some extent with the major competences required for informed implementation of VE. It has also succeeded in making them experience the feeling of being involved in online intercultural collaboration and communication, which are the very essence of VE. Participants' comments, supported by the preliminary research data into their pedagogical competence, clearly indicate that for many of them the training was an eye-opening experience helping them progress and grow professionally and personally.

As regards other strengths of the training, these included the modelling function of tasks and tools, which helped the participants develop their own competences. Another strength was nurturing a community feel and highlighting the social aspect of the experience, which was repeatedly mentioned in participants' comments.

The feedback received from the pilot participants serves as invaluable guidelines for the training developers and mentors and will inform certain modifications in the new, large-scale iteration of Co-Laboratory. The main areas for modification will therefore include:

- Reducing the length of the training so that it fits more easily with educators' busy schedules and heavy workload. It is advisable to reduce the training in length without limiting its breadth and inclusiveness. This will be done by exporting some of the content, especially the introductory part in the form of self-paced learning objects that will be easily accessible to future participants depending on their individual needs.

- Replacing some of the textual or presentation-mode content with multimodal (video) files, especially those recorded by VE practitioners.
- Using video meetings to engage participants in task-based group work rather than the presentation of content.
- Taking into account the needs of non-English speaking participants with additional materials provided to facilitate comprehension.

The second iteration of the training will take place in autumn 2019.

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