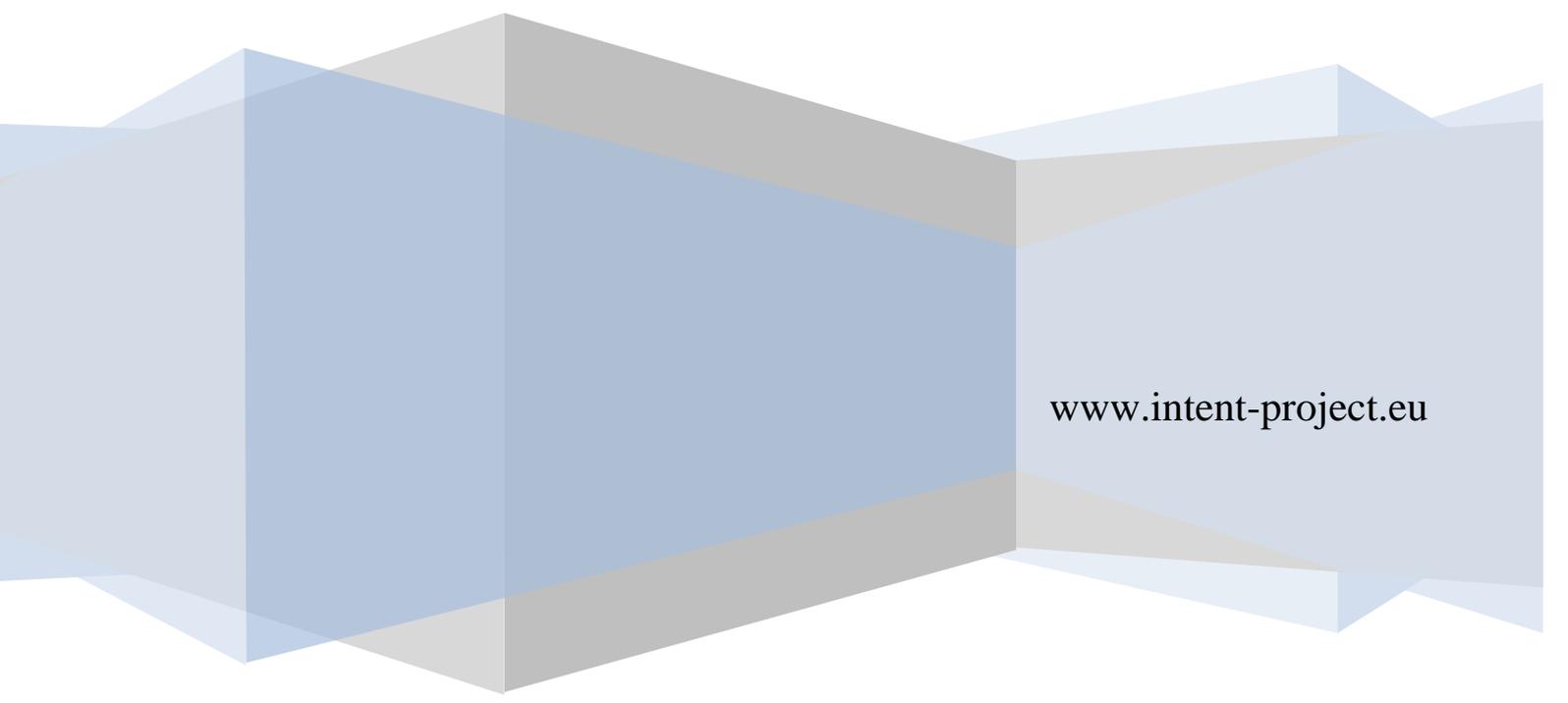


University Language Classes Collaborating Online

**A Report on the Integration of Telecollaborative Networks
in European Universities**

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with the INTENT project team**

October 2012



www.intent-project.eu

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Acknowledgements:

The study reported in this publication was developed principally by Francesca Helm, Sarah Guth and Robert O’Dowd in their role as the main researchers in this part of the INTENT project. However, we would like to acknowledge that all the INTENT project team played a very active role in the development and dissemination of the survey and the report. More information about the INTENT project team and their activities can be found here: <http://intent-project.eu>

The INTENT project team is extremely grateful to all the university students, teachers and management who took part in the survey and the case studies reported here. In the acknowledgement sheet at the end of this document we have attempted to mention the names of the institutions which were involved in the study. However, we are aware that some institutions may have been omitted for reasons beyond our control.

The survey data upon which this report has been based is available on request from the authors. Please write to: intentproject@gmail.com

This report and its related project have been funded with support from the European Commission. This report reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.



1. Introduction: Background to the INTENT project and this report

Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE), also called foreign language telecollaboration¹, involves Internet-mediated intercultural engagement between classes of foreign language (FL) learners in geographically distant locations. In the context of university education, this may involve, for example, students learning German in Ireland communicating on a weekly basis using email and Skype with students of English in Germany. Alternatively, Business Studies classes in Spain, Poland and France may use English as a Lingua Franca to work together on collaborative projects using an online collaborative platform such as a Wiki or a NING.

Since the 1990's, FL educators at universities have been organising such online projects to bring their classes into contact with groups of target language speakers with the aim of creating opportunities for authentic communication, meaningful collaboration and first-hand experience of working and learning with collaborators from other language and cultural backgrounds. Research has shown that online exchange projects of this nature can contribute to the development of learner autonomy, linguistic accuracy (Belz & Kinginger, 2002), intercultural awareness (Ware, 2004), intercultural skills (Belz & Mueller-Hartmann, 2003; Thorne, 2010), and electronic literacies (Hauck, 2010).

At the primary and secondary school levels, online intercultural exchange projects have been supported by major networks and online platforms such as ePals (www.epals.com) and the European Union's Etwinning platform (www.etwinning.net). However, research has highlighted the limited impact of telecollaboration in university contexts to date (Belz & Mueller-Hartmann, 2003). Various reasons have been identified for this. First, telecollaboration remains relatively unknown outside of specialised research communities and it is often only researchers and highly motivated practitioners who engage in the activity. Second, practitioners who do organise exchanges often encounter practical barriers, such as difficulty in finding partners, misalignment of academic calendars, differing assessment procedures and divergent attitudes toward online technologies. An initial small-scale study carried out by one of the authors of this report (O'Dowd, 2011) found that telecollaboration is often viewed as an 'add-on' activity which relies on 'pioneering' teachers and motivated students and as such, OIE activity rarely comes to be considered an integral part of university study programmes. Further reasons for the lack of integration of telecollaboration which were identified in this study included the absence of pedagogical training available for educators, educators' apprehension of extra work-load due to lack of support and resources, the dearth of long-term stability in partnerships with other universities and, significantly, the lack of academic credit awarded to students for telecollaborative activity.

Taking into account the current state of affairs in this area, the INTENT project was awarded funding by the European Commission's Lifelong Learning programme to carry out a 30-month project. The team established two key aims for their project:

- 1) To raise greater awareness among students, educators and (senior) managers at university level of OIE as a pedagogical model serving the goal of virtual mobility in foreign language education.
- 2) To achieve more effective integration of OIE in university institutions.

¹ The terms 'telecollaboration' and 'Online Intercultural Exchange' (OIE) have been used interchangeably through this report, but for consistency and clarity, the term OIE was the only one used throughout the survey form.

These aims address the main obstacles to achieving virtual mobility – first, the lack of awareness among educators about this activity and how it can be organised, and second, the need to provide practitioners with the tools, training and support necessary to make the activity as effective as possible. These aims can be broken down into the following objectives:

1. Establish a clear overview of the levels of use of OIE, explore attitudes to the activity among key stakeholders across European HEIs, and identify practical barriers to the adoption of OIE activities.
2. Develop a set of tools, telecollaborative models and partner networks to overcome barriers and facilitate OIE practice.
3. Develop a set of workable solutions to address the current lack of academic recognition for participation in OIE activity.
4. Publish an online training manual and hold training workshops to inform and support the FL teaching and learning community as well as related stakeholders and decision makers.
5. Engage decision makers at institutional, regional and national levels in a collaborative dialogue as to how telecollaboration can be effectively employed as a tool for the achievement of the Bologna process.

By achieving these objectives, the project team hopes to increase the number of students, educators and decision makers who are aware of the benefits of telecollaboration and who will consider integrating it into their educational activities.

This report focuses on the findings of objective 1- a European survey and collection of case studies aimed at establishing a clear overview of the use of OIE across European universities, at identifying practical barriers to the take-up of OIE as well as possible solutions to these barriers. The report begins by providing a brief overview of the numerous contributions which telecollaborative exchange networks can make in European university education. These include the development of students' linguistic and intercultural and electronic competences. However, we also refer to the contribution which telecollaboration can make to supporting or complementing physical mobility programmes such as Erasmus, as well as forming an important part of a university's internationalisation programme.

Following that, the methodology behind the European survey is outlined in section 3. This is followed by a presentation and commentary on the most significant findings in the teacher survey (section 4) and the student survey (section 5). Section 6 of the report presents seven case studies which are considered to be representative of the telecollaborative activity which is currently being undertaken around European universities. These case studies describe how the online exchanges are being carried out, but also focus on the barriers and challenges which practitioners are encountering and how they are overcoming these obstacles. In the discussion in section 7, the key findings from the survey and the case studies are outlined and their consequences for educators and university management are identified.

2. Why integrate telecollaboration into European Higher Education?

A growing number of educators in European Higher Education Institutions (HEI's) are using online communication technologies to bring together language learners in geographically distant locations to develop their foreign language skills, intercultural competence and transferable skills through collaborative tasks and project work. (As mentioned in the first section of this report, this activity is referred to in many different ways, including Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) and Telecollaboration. From now on, the two terms will be used interchangeably.) The integration of telecollaboration into European universities' foreign language and international curricula is potentially very beneficial and we will now enumerate some of its core benefits.

First, telecollaboration has been shown to be an effective tool in the development of students' foreign language and intercultural communication skills. Being able to communicate effectively in two or more languages is seen as one of the basic competences necessary for full participation in the knowledge society. This is relevant not only for specialised 'foreign language students' per se but also for students of Engineering, Business and other academic areas who need to be able to gain employment in a globalised labour market. The ability to communicate in foreign languages is one of the European Commission's 'Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning' (2007) and research has shown that telecollaborative exchange is a powerful tool for the development of students' language skills because it is motivating and semi-authentic in nature, provides ample opportunities for spoken and written communication with speakers of other languages, and provides a relatively inexpensive form of elaborated contact with other cultures.

Second, telecollaboration is also seen as having the potential of developing various generic, interrelated, and transferrable skills that are invaluable for graduates entering the global workplace. These include intercultural communicative competence (or the similar concept of global competence) and e-literacies or e-skills. The first of these skills, the ability to establish relationships and work effectively with people of other cultural backgrounds, has become a necessity for many professions where work involves travelling abroad and collaborating with colleagues and clients from other linguistic and cultural backgrounds. For example, Grandin and Hedderich (2009) suggest that in the case of 21st century engineering "...the future belongs to those who learn to work or team together with other groups without regard to location, heritage, and national and cultural difference" (p. 363). Similarly, the growing importance of online technologies for the ways in which we work and learn means that contemporary European students are obliged to learn how to combine foreign language skills and intercultural competence with electronic literacies in order to carry out a wide variety of activities in virtual environments. These include knowing how to carry out effective online research, create multimodal presentations in a foreign language using Web 2.0 applications, and the ability to communicate clearly and effectively in a foreign language with distant collaborators through asynchronous tools such as email and through synchronous tools such as online telephony (e.g., Skype) and video-conferencing (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000; Trilling & Fadel, 2009; Lankshear & Knobel, 2006).

With the increasing complexity of communication as outlined above, university educators are being challenged to create learning environments that integrate the tools and communicative

practices which learners will later face in their working lives. The European Commission's document "New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now" (2010), for example, calls on educators to develop new methodological techniques which facilitate the integration of digital, linguistic and intercultural skills and competences. This goal, it is suggested, is best achieved by integrating "more cross-curricular and innovative approaches, such as learning-by-doing or project-based learning" (p. 26). Telecollaboration supports an approach to learning which combines the development of intercultural competence and e-literacies. Successful telecollaborative projects being carried out around Europe are bringing together students from distant international universities, are helping them to use Web 2.0 tools to create digital artefacts for and with distant peers, and creating opportunities for collaborative project work. In this way, telecollaborative activity provides students with first-hand experience that is directly related to successful professional practices in the global workplace.

But telecollaboration offers more than benefits to participating students. This activity can also support senior management at universities as they strive to develop a successful internationalisation strategy in their institution. By engaging students in online intercultural projects with classes at other institutions, universities are bringing their students and teachers into contact with other perspectives and practices and are providing them with the opportunity to learn from these in the relative comfort of their own classroom. In contrast to other internationalisation strategies, telecollaboration can also be seen as a relatively 'low-cost' form of international activity as many of the online tools used in online exchanges are already freely available.

In relation to student mobility, telecollaboration is an excellent form of preparation for later physical mobility, allowing students to engage in virtual contact with partners in their future destination. Not only does this better prepare them for the challenges of studying and living in the target culture, but it also leads to greater integration between exchange students and local students, two groups that tend to remain quite separate. It can also serve as a viable alternative for those students who cannot take part in physical mobility programmes be it for personal, financial or any number of other reasons. The recent European Commission Green Paper on promoting the learning mobility of young people acknowledges telecollaboration's role as a tool for preparing for physical mobility and as a viable alternative for those students and young people who are unable to engage in traditional mobility programmes (Commission of the European Communities, 2009, p. 18).

Institutions may also consider that the integration of telecollaborative projects with physical student mobility programmes such as the European Union's *Erasmus* programme can facilitate the development of more stable partnerships among European classrooms. The report of the High Level Expert Forum on mobility suggests the following: "Virtual mobility is widely available, quick and cheap. ...Developing the synergies between virtual and physical mobility is a central part of a new way of life" (2008, p. 11). With this in mind, various projects and initiatives are currently exploring how telecollaboration can be integrated with physical mobility (see the Mobi-blog project -<http://mobi-blog.eu/>- for an example of such an initiative).

In short, telecollaboration has been shown to have great potential for students and for their higher education institutions across Europe. However, there has yet to be any large-scale attempt to establish the impact of telecollaboration on European universities nor to explore how the

barriers to integration of this activity are being overcome. It is with this in mind that the INTENT project team set out to design a survey of educators and students in October 2011.

3. Designing a survey of telecollaboration in European Universities

Having established the potential value of telecollaboration to the development of European Higher Education, the first step of this project was to survey current practices and attitudes across European universities in relation to this form of virtual mobility. The team was particularly interested in identifying, (1) what types of telecollaborative practices were being undertaken by European university educators, and (2) in exploring the barriers which practitioners encountered when organising online intercultural exchanges and their strategies to overcome these barriers. We were also interested in gathering the views and opinions of students with different experiences of telecollaboration in order to establish the impact online exchange can have on European students and whether this may have positive effects on attitudes toward physical mobility and foreign language learning. While the team was also interested in the attitudes of senior university management and decision makers to OIE, it was decided that it would be difficult to achieve sufficient responses from this group. With this in mind, the team chose to approach this group during the collection of case studies (see section 6 of this report) and during the workshop stage of the project.

In order to carry out a representative survey of telecollaborative practice around European universities, the INTENT project undertook various steps. In October 2011, the team drew up a list of telecollaborative practitioners around Europe based on their own extensive networks of contacts. This list was collected in a database in the project wiki where each group member listed the name and email of their contacts. Following that, further potential informants were identified through academic publications, conference presentations and relevant mailing lists. Third, a call for participation was published on the project website and in various academic mailing lists and relevant social networks asking for those European university colleagues who had organised telecollaboration in the past or who were interested in this type of activity to carry out the surveys. Finally, colleagues were asked to share the call widely with other professionals. Individuals who answered these announcements and expressed their willingness to participate in the survey were added to the database of informants in the project wiki. This database will also serve as a useful source of dissemination of future activities and publications by the project team.

This approach to data generation is often referred to as *convenience sampling* and involves the researcher contacting individuals who represent the target population and continuing until sufficient data has been collected for the purpose of the investigation. There is also an element of *purposive sampling* in this approach, in which the survey respondents are selected by the researcher on the basis of their typicality (Cohen & Manion, 1985; Nunan & Bailey, 2009).

The two teacher surveys were aimed at: 1) university educators in European institutions who had carried out telecollaboration, 2) university educators in European institutions who had not yet carried out telecollaboration but were aware of and interested in the activity. The surveys were developed through a process of pre-piloting and piloting similar to that described by Nunan and Bailey (2009: 145). Initial drafts of the different surveys were drawn up by the project members in León and Padua.

The questions involved a combination of three types: 1) closed questions, 2) Likert scale questions, and 3) open questions. The closed questions were generally based on findings drawn from the literature review. This initial draft was then discussed and reviewed by the other project members

in the project wiki and group email. Based on their suggestions and comments, a second draft of the three surveys was drawn up and programmed using the SurveyMonkey online survey software². This second questionnaire was then pre-piloted by the members of the project team and suggestions were again shared and discussed using the project's internal communication channels. These suggestions included linguistic and conceptual clarifications that increased the usability of the survey instrument while also reducing the amount of time necessary to complete it. When these changes had been carried out, a third version of the survey was then piloted by a group of fifteen colleagues outside of the project team. Their feedback also served to identify and correct questions which could lead to misinterpretation as well as problems with the 'question logic' of the survey software.

Following these iterative developments, the survey was deemed to be ready for dissemination. Project members in France, Germany and Italy then translated the survey into these three languages. These team members also provided a translation of a model 'introduction e-mail' which team members could use when contacting possible respondents. This email briefly outlined the background of the project, explained and contextualized the survey, and offered to respondents who wished to receive an acknowledgement of their participation in the survey that they could do so by informing the team by email. (This list of acknowledgements is available at the end of this report.)

The survey was sent initially to approximately 800 university educators who had either already organised telecollaborative exchanges or had expressed an interest in the activity. The survey was also published on various academic mailing lists and websites, therefore it is not possible to establish how many educators finally received the request to participate in the survey, but the number exceeds 800 in total.

In this report, the main findings from the quantitative and qualitative data are presented and are accompanied by commentaries in order to contextualise the findings as much as possible. The responses to closed questions are reported with descriptive statistical data consisting of percentages. In reference to the open questions, systematic content analysis was carried out by three researchers. The first researcher marked the distinct content elements or key points of the responses and inductively developed categories in order to 'code' the responses. The two other researchers then coded all responses and the combined coding of the three researchers was checked for inter-rater agreement.

The teacher survey targeted university educators both with and without experience of Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE), but some of the questions differed depending on whether they had experience with OIE or not. For this reason, the figures presented in this report refer regularly to 'Yes' – meaning teachers who had already organised online exchanges, and 'No' – referring to those teachers who had yet to organise such an exchange. The survey was launched at the beginning of December 2011 in English, French, German and Italian and was closed at the end of January 2012.

The questionnaire for teachers with experience of OIE was divided into several different sections. The first part concerned bio-data and the teaching contexts of the educators; the second and most extensive part of the questionnaire dealt with their experience of OIEs, e.g. why they started and how they found partners, the type, number, duration and languages of their OIEs, pedagogical aspects such as aims and objectives, tasks, assessment and difficulties encountered, tools used,

² surveymonkey.com

evaluation of the experience, and institutional considerations. With the same aim, teachers who had no experience of OIE were asked similar questions in a hypothetical manner. The final part asked questions about the importance they give to the planned activities and outputs of the INTENT project, in addition to any comments they felt were worth adding based on their experience with OIE.

4. Findings of the teacher survey

This section presents the principal findings of the survey of teachers carried out for this report. The findings are divided into 6 key sections:

- Section 4.1: profile of the European university teachers who took part in the study.
- Section 4.2: practitioners' knowledge and experience of OIE.
- Section 4.3: pedagogic aims and outcomes.
- Section 4.4: OIE implementation.
- Section 4.5: educators' opinions and overall evaluation.
- Section 4.6: evaluation of personal experience with OIE.

4.1 Profile of teachers taking part in the study

A total of 286 university educators from 142 institutions (see Appendix 1) responded to the survey (see Table 1 for breakdown of surveys completed by language version³), but only 210 respondents were taken into consideration for this report, since 60 questionnaires were incomplete and 16 came from outside the EU. Of these, 102 were teachers who had experience of OIE and 108 were teachers with no direct experience of OIE.

Table 1: Language used to complete teacher surveys.

German language version	25
English language version	118
French language version	52
Italian language version	15
Total	210

Responses were received from 23 different European countries (Fig. 1), which indicates a broad geographic distribution of respondents. The most represented countries were France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland, UK and Cyprus. It is worth noting that in the case of Italy, Cyprus and Poland, the majority of respondents were those who had no experience implementing OIE. This would seem to suggest that there is indeed an interest on the part of educators in these countries but that there are barriers to the implementation of OIE in these national contexts. One quarter of these educators were male, and three quarters female, perhaps reflecting the gender skew of the language teaching profession.⁴

³Teachers and students did not necessarily complete the survey in their L1.

⁴ Report on applications for teacher education in UK with statistics on gender and language education <http://www.gtr.ac.uk/documents/statsreport11.pdf>

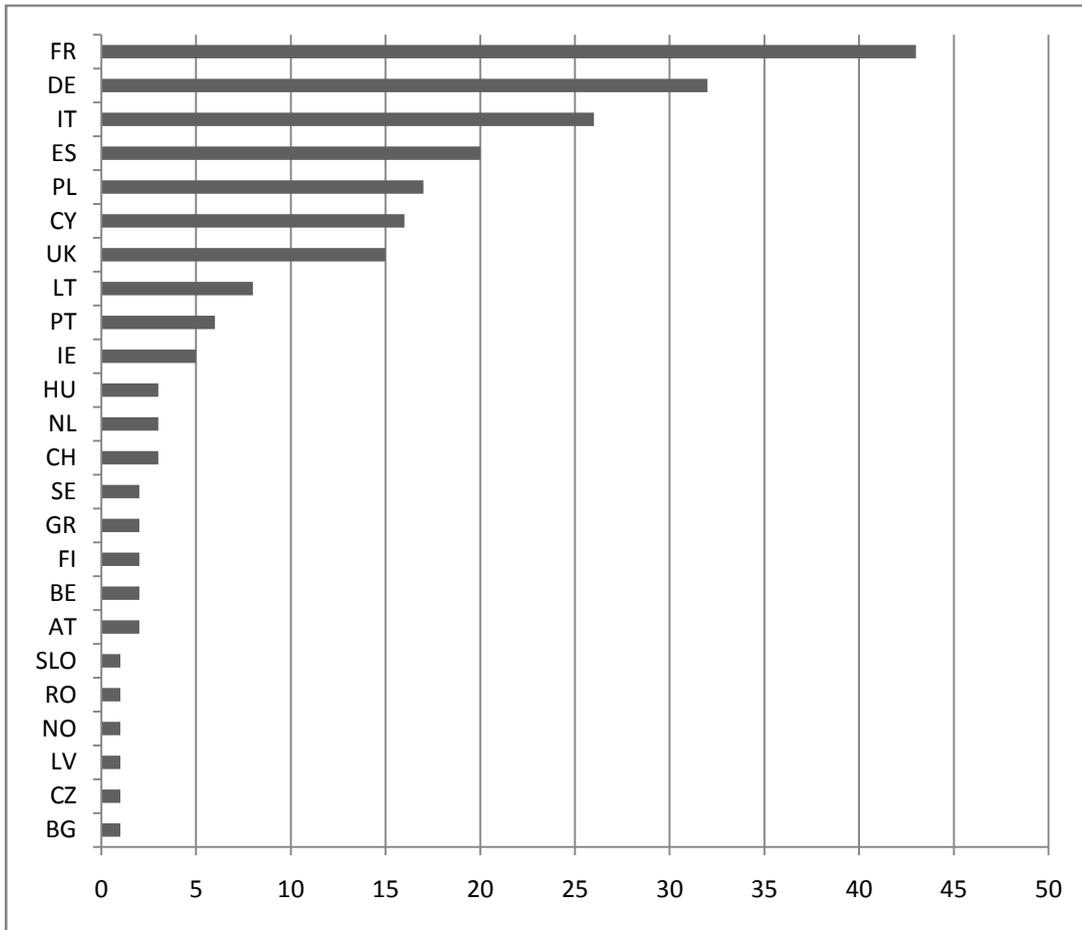


Figure 1: Country where respondents report they currently work.

Most respondents were language teachers and English was the main language taught, which is not surprising given the prominent position it has acquired in university curricula. However, as Figure 2 shows, nearly half of the respondents were teachers of 4 other European languages that are commonly taught in Universities across Europe (French, German, Spanish and Italian) and responses to the open 'other' option indicated responses by teachers of other languages and subjects areas such as Catalan, Chinese, Dutch, Finnish, Hungarian, Polish, Portuguese, Rumanian and Turkish as well as instructors of translation, intercultural studies, intercomprehension, ICT and teacher education.

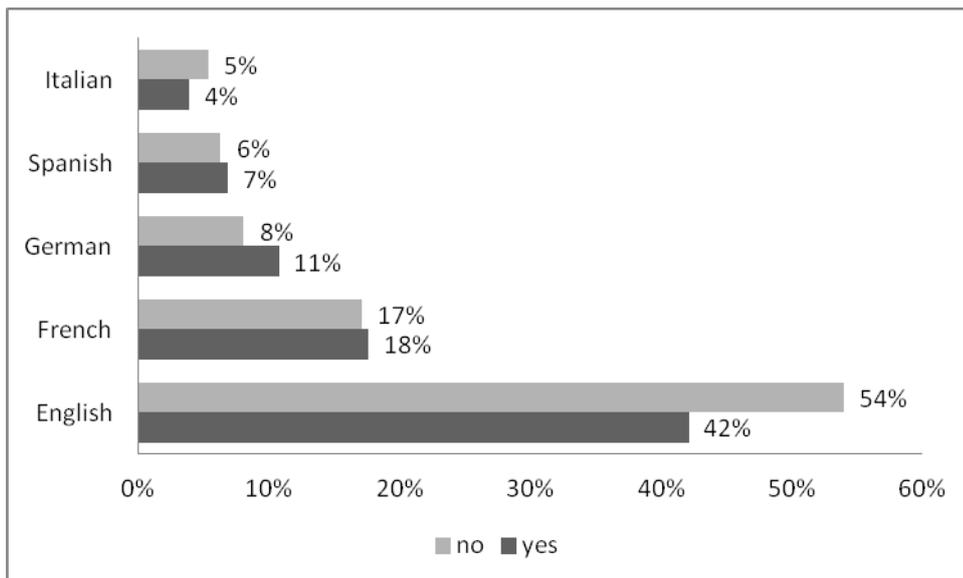


Figure 2: Languages taught (>5 responses)⁵.

Since language educators often teach students from different disciplines, respondents were asked to indicate the domain of study of their students but were allowed to indicate more than one as well as complete the 'other' option. While over half the sample taught students who were majoring in foreign languages, many had students majoring in social sciences, humanities, science and technology, foreign language teacher education, and lastly, clinical and para-clinical subjects (see Figure 3). This seems to confirm the fact that foreign language educators play an important role in the education of students in numerous faculties (across various disciplines) and often more than one at the same time.

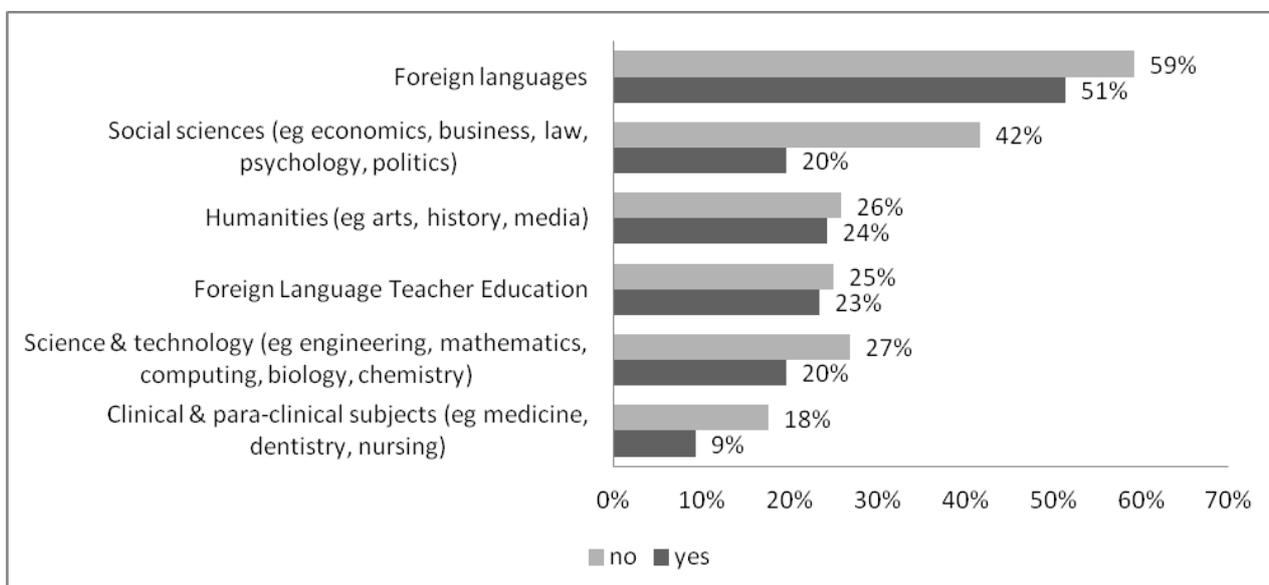


Figure 3: Domains of study of respondents' students.

⁵For many closed questions respondents were allowed to tick more than one option. Therefore, when the percentages in the figures, such as Figure 2, do not add up to 100% this is because individual respondents have ticked more than one choice. 'No' indicates the responses of educators with no experience of OIE, 'yes' indicates responses of educators with experience of OIE.

4.2 Knowledge and experience of OIE

Respondents in both groups reported learning about OIE through attending conferences and workshops (35% with no experience, 25% experienced) and sharing experiences with colleagues (35% with no experience, 27% experienced) (Fig. 4). This indicates that when one educator in a university starts an OIE, this increases the probability that others will follow suit since in addition to promoting the OIE concept, colleagues with experience are also well placed to provide moral, technical and organizational support. Presentations and workshops may both inspire educators to set up their own exchanges as well as offer opportunities for establishing partnerships. The extremely low percentage of teachers with no experience who indicated having heard about OIE through academic publications (3%), when contextualized against the 70% whose responses were catalysed by colleagues or conferences, would seem to highlight the importance of face-to-face contact and real-life sharing of experiences as opposed to reading academic publications.

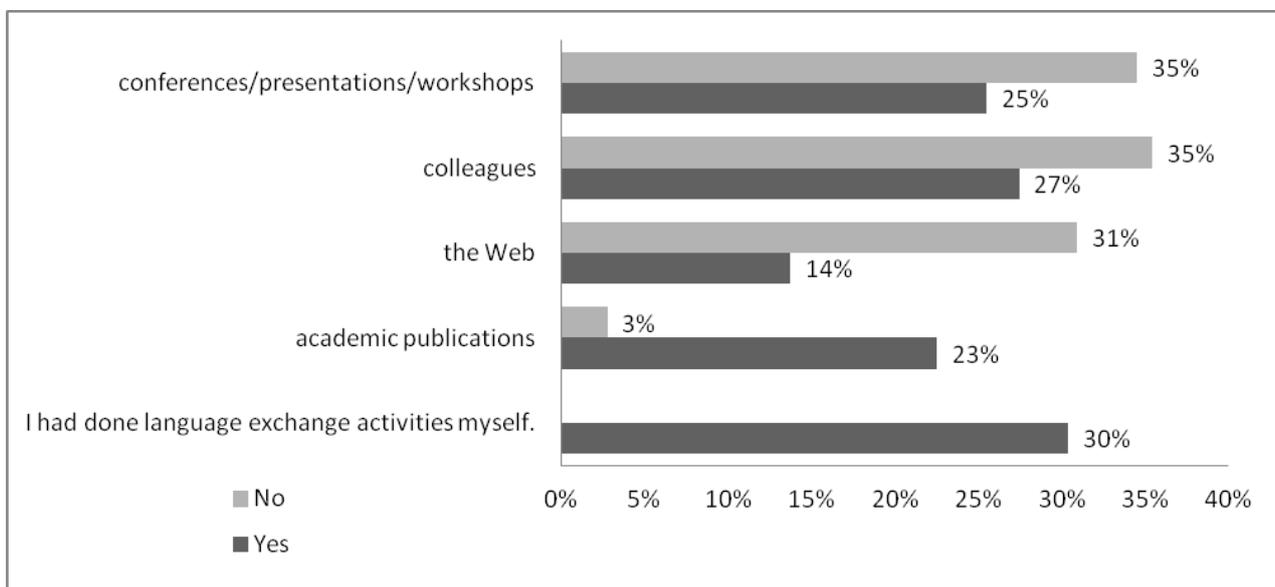


Figure 4: Responses to “Where did you get the idea to do OIE from?”

Regarding teachers who had experience with OIE, many reported having had personal experience of online language exchange either as part of their higher education and/or training, which suggests that if this form of activity is offered in teacher education programs as an integral part of the course, it is likely that the trainees will integrate the activity into their own teaching repertoire (Dooly 2009). A small number had also carried out research on telecollaboration projects for their PhD. A few respondents reported that they were invited by educators they did not previously know to become involved in exchanges while others participated in international projects which were part of EU-funded programmes such as Comenius and Grundtvig (for instance the LITERALIA project). A few respondents said that they set up their OIEs as a response to learning needs or student requests for authenticity, and several also said that it was because they saw OIE as a part of everyday life, as these remarks highlight⁶:

- It just made sense! Language learning is all about communication. (T-Yes-EN-45).
- It seemed to be a less artificial and more stimulating way to practise spoken language. (T-Yes-IT-05)

⁶Responses to open questions have been translated into English when necessary and the original responses, including any language errors, are included in the footnotes.

- ICT is part of our environment.(T-Yes-FR-03)⁷
- I developed the idea with a colleague because we wanted to address a learning need. (T-Yes-EN-03)
- We designed the exchange to provide an experiential learning experience for undergraduates exploring intercultural computer mediated communication. (T-Yes-EN-48)

4.3 Pedagogic aims and outcomes

When practitioners were asked about the principal pedagogic aims of their OIEs, it was interesting to see that the development of students' intercultural awareness and communication skills was indicated by more respondents as a pedagogic aim in doing OIE than development of students' foreign language competence (see Figure 5). This may in part be due to the fact that it is the opportunity for intercultural contact and authentic communication which distinguishes OIE from 'traditional' foreign language classroom practice and can be seen as a reflection of what has been described as "the intercultural turn" in FL education (Thorne 2010).

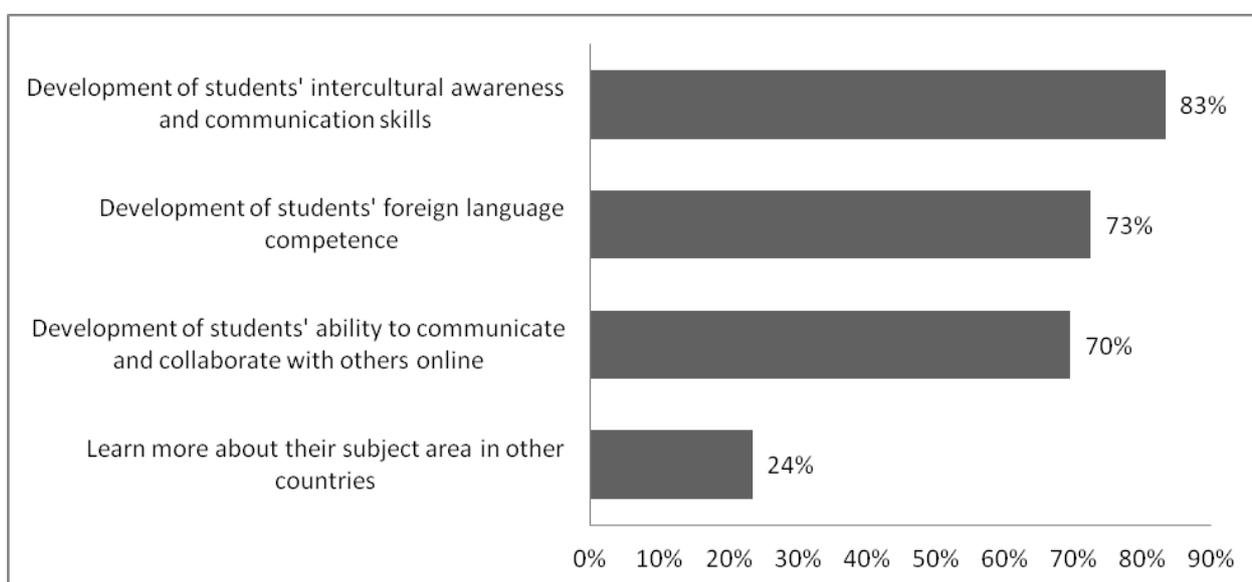


Figure 5: The pedagogical aims of teachers with experience of OIE.

It is also worth noting that nearly two thirds of respondents mentioned the importance of developing students' ability to communicate and collaborate with others *online*. This online communicative competence combines three of the eight key competences identified in the European framework: foreign language, digital competence, cultural awareness and expression. Learning more about their subject area in other countries was listed by only a quarter of respondents. In the 19 open responses to this question we find the development of multiliteracies, academic literacies, learner autonomy and learning to learn (another of the EU's eight key competences) and professional competences, as the open responses below indicate:

- Development of teaching and pedagogic competence and techniques for future French language teachers. (T-Yes-FR-16)⁸

⁷“Mi sembrava un modo meno fittizio e più stimolante per esercitare la lingua orale”. (T-Yes-IT-05)

“Les tics font partie de notre environnement.” (T-Yes-FR-03)

- Also: learning first-hand about the collaboration between technical communicators and translators which goes on in the real world of localization. (T-Yes-EN-56).
- Development of learners' autonomy. (T-Yes-EN-01)
- Development of multiple academic competences. (T-Yes-EN-51)
- Encourage acceptance of cultural diversity rather than social inequality. Provide a space for real communication outside the classroom. (T-Yes-EN-39)
- Increase digital literacy and experience online communication technologies. (T-Yes-EN-57)

Towards the end of the survey, this group of teachers was asked to evaluate what they felt their students actually learned through OIE. The main outcomes seem to fall in line with the aims and include: 1) development of intercultural competence (75%), 2) students learned to communicate effectively online through OIEs (63%), and 3) students improved their FL skills⁹(54%)(see Figure 6).

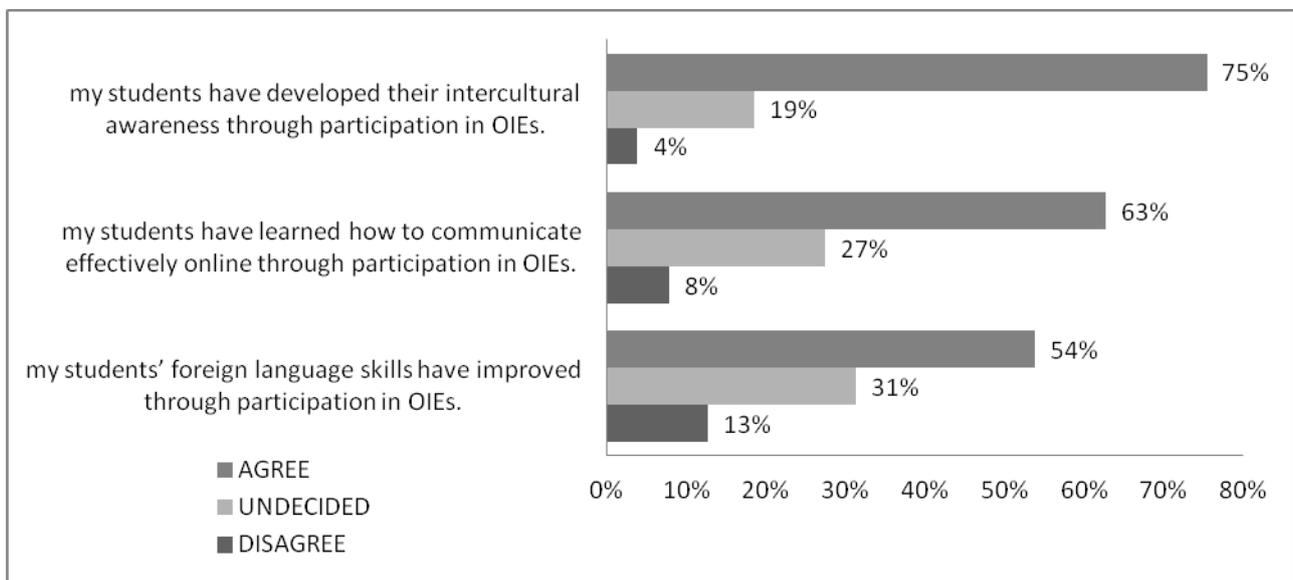


Figure 6: Educators' evaluation of student learning through OIE.

Respondents with no experience of OIE were given three closed questions similar to those above, but with hypothetical learning outcomes: 91% of respondents agreed that their students' foreign language skills could benefit from online exchanges, while almost 90% felt their students' intercultural awareness (89%) and their students' online communication skills (88%) stood to be improved through OIE (Fig. 7). Respondents seemed to overwhelmingly recognize that their students' learning would benefit from OIE, but they didn't seem to differentiate between outcomes as much as teachers with experience did. Responses to an open question which tapped this same issue provide some additional insight. The most recurrent responses were: to develop intercultural competence/intercultural communicative competence, knowledge and awareness of other cultures and language skills. Here too, the development of intercultural competence seemed to take precedence over developing language skills. Several respondents also mentioned opportunities for authentic communicative experiences and making contact with people in

⁸développement des compétences didactiques, pédagogiques et techniques pour de futurs enseignants de langue française(T-Yes-FR-16)

⁹Not all educators' students were participating in OIEs as part of a foreign language course, which may be why only 54% agreed with the statement that their students improved their FL skills.

different cultural contexts, developing online communication skills and increasing student motivation and autonomy.

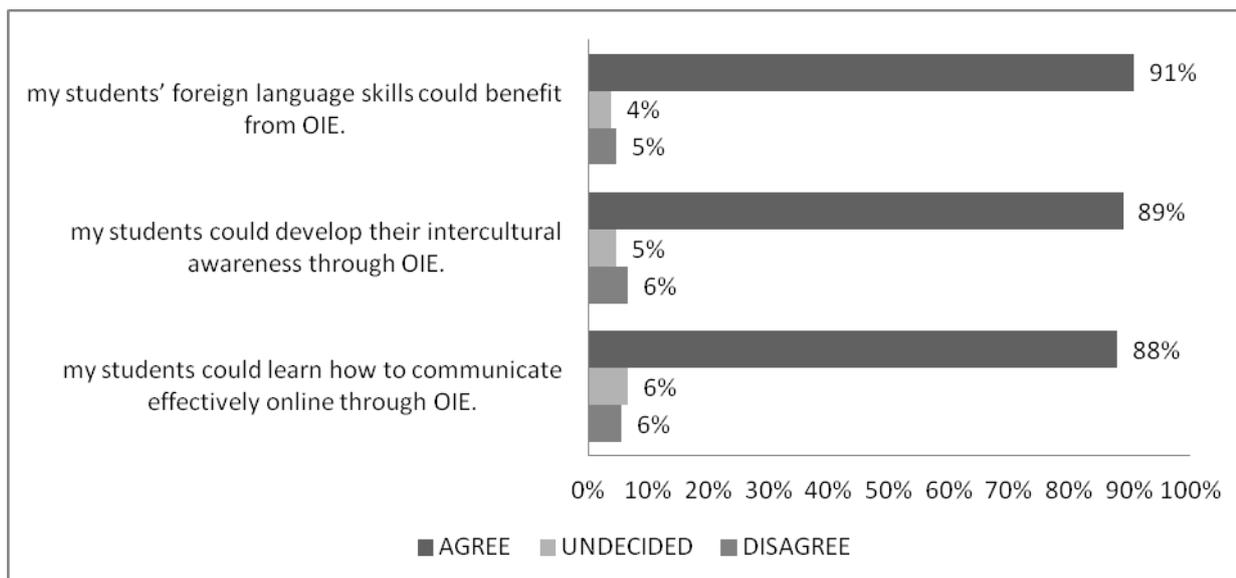


Figure 7: Opinions regarding the potential learning outcomes of OIE by teachers with no experience of telecollaborative exchange.

4.4 Setting up and Running an Online Exchange

4.4.1. Language(s) of exchanges

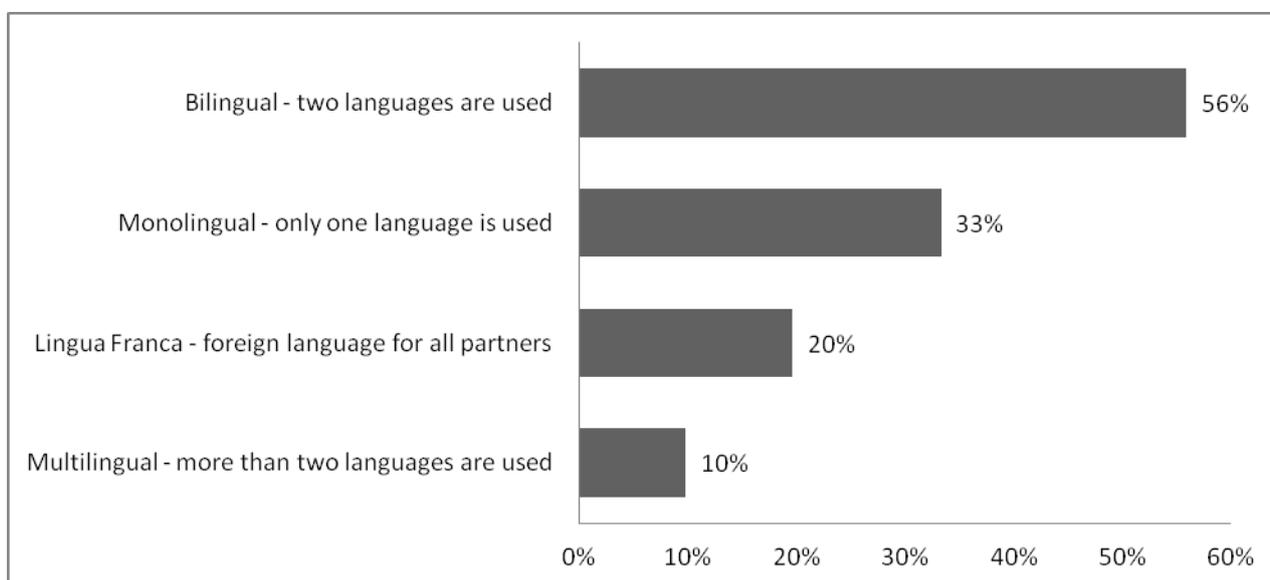


Figure 8: Type of exchange(s) in terms of language configuration.

The entire portion of the survey dedicated to exploring what types of exchanges teachers had set up was only given to teachers who had experience with OIE. Since we assumed that respondents might have experience of more than one OIE, when asking about the languages used in the exchanges, we allowed for the possibility to respond with multiple answers, and also allowed space for open answers and explanations. Bilingual exchanges were the most common type, with over 50% of respondents indicating experience of this type of exchange while a third indicated monolingual exchanges such as those between teacher trainees of, say, Spanish, with learners of

Spanish as a foreign language (Fig. 8). A fifth of respondents had implemented exchanges using a lingua franca such as English among predominantly non-native speakers of English. Responses such as the one that follows helped us better interpret how respondents perceived our questions and what was really going on:

Actually, English as a lingua franca (ELF) is used as the main language, but there may be other languages involved on an ad hoc basis. By ELF I do not mean that it isn't a foreign language for all partners but rather that some students are making a move from English as a Foreign language to ELF and some are making the move from English as a first language to ELF. The choices on offer here are too limiting to capture our conceptualisation of what is happening in our longstanding project. (T-Yes-EN-27)

This comment indirectly expresses the concept of code-switching, i.e. choosing a given language based on communication needs in a particular situation, which showed up in other open answers and is a characteristic of lingua franca communication. 10% of respondents, on the other hand, indicated that their exchanges were explicitly multilingual.

With regards to languages used in the exchanges, respondents were allowed to indicate more than one choice since they may have been involved in exchanges with different language configurations. Again, not surprisingly, English was the most commonly reported language used in exchanges, with, however, a high number of respondents also indicating French, German and Spanish (Fig. 9). Answers to the 'other' option indicate the use of other languages as well: Finnish, Greek, Turkish, Hungarian, Dutch, Polish, Portuguese, Catalan and Rumanian. Although the number of instances of these less-used languages were not many, the fact that they are being used in telecollaboration indicates their continued importance in a multilingual Europe.

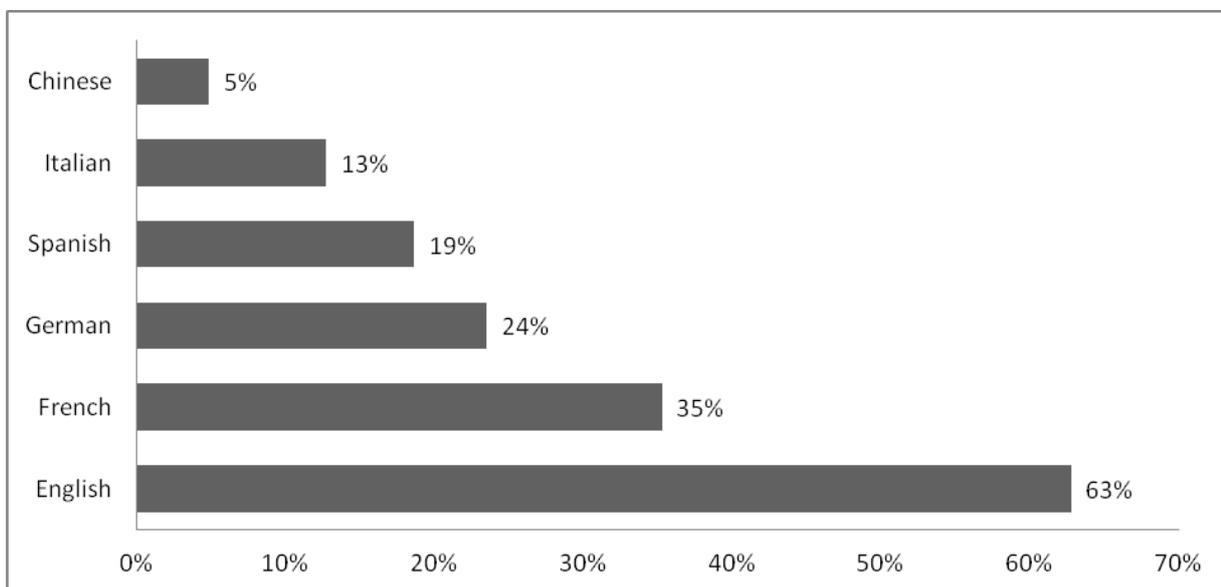


Figure 9: Language(s) used.

4.4.2 Partner countries

Respondents were also asked to indicate the countries of their partners. As can be seen in Figure 10, a significant part of the globe is engaged in OIE with the European respondents to this survey. With the exception of Canada, the main 'white' areas in the map tend to be less developed areas or regions where there is significant conflict. This should prompt reflection on what needs to be done to engage these parts of the world in OIE.



Figure 10: Map of OIE partner countries based on respondents' answers are highlighted in black.

Whilst Figure 10 reflects the distribution of European universities' telecollaboration partners across the world, it does not reflect the intensity of such partnerships. Figure 11 shows the partner countries that 2 or more respondents indicated whereas Table 2 shows the partner countries indicated by only 1 respondent.

Although, as stated above, English was the predominant language of exchanges, a surprising result was that 33 respondents had partners in the US as opposed to 22 in the UK (Fig. 13). This might be due to a greater availability of classes in the US, a desire on the part of European partners to move beyond European borders in OIE for cultural reasons, or it may also be because the US actively seek partnerships with European universities. The responses to the 'other' option offer insight into the fact that many exchanges involved more than two countries, in accordance with the fact that nearly 50% of the respondents were engaged in lingua franca, multilingual or monolingual exchanges. The considerable number of exchanges using English as a lingua franca (ELF) would seem to confirm David Graddol's predictions about the future of English: "The new language which is rapidly ousting the language of Shakespeare as the world's lingua franca is English itself – English in its new global form [...], this is not English as we have known it, and have taught it in the past as a foreign language. It is a new phenomenon, and if it represents any kind of triumph it is probably not a cause of celebration by native speakers." (2006: 11). Indeed exchanges with 'native speakers' are, in the case of English, to some extent giving way to exchanges using ELF. This may be partly because it is easier to find partners for exchanges, but could also be because this communicative situation is seen to be more similar to students' future communication contexts.

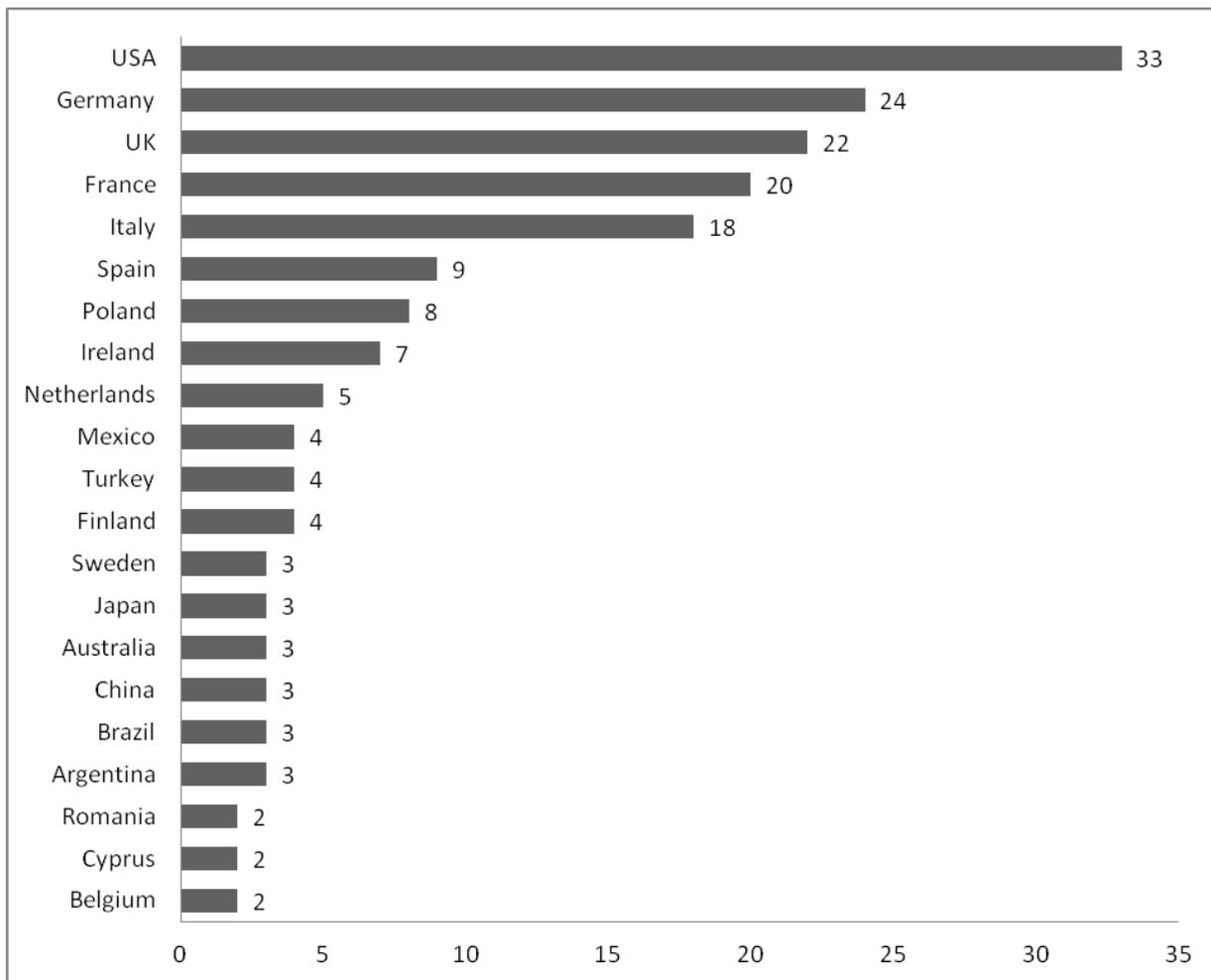


Figure 11: Distribution of OIE partner countries based on respondents' answers (> 1).

Table 2: Partner countries indicated by only one respondent.

Algeria	Malaysia
Belgium	Morocco
Chile	Norway
Colombia	Portugal
Czech Republic	Russia
Greece	Serbia
Hong Kong	Slovenia
Hungary	Taiwan
Israel	Thailand
Jordan	Uruguay
Kuwait	Vietnam
Luxembourg	

4.4.3 Number of exchanges carried out

OIEs are not a one-off experience for a large majority of survey respondents, since most have had more than one experience in the past 5 years, as can be seen in Figure 12, and almost a third report having had experience of more than 5 OIEs. This could indicate that once educators have tried OIE they are generally keen to repeat the experience. It would thus seem important to encourage and support educators in setting up initial projects, since once they have embarked on OIE, they appear to value its efficacy as a pedagogical model. It is important to remember, however, that as pointed out in the conclusion of the report, the survey may have gathered more responses from telecollaboration enthusiasts than from educators who had an unsuccessful experience and subsequently abandoned the practice.

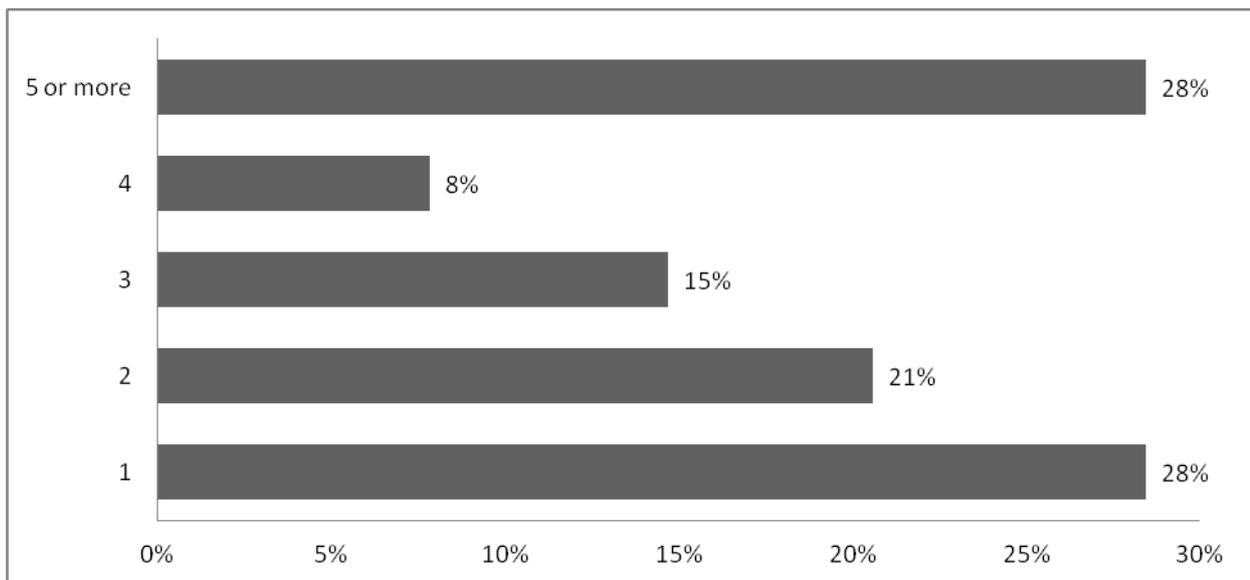


Figure 12: Responses to “How many exchanges have you set up in the past 5 years?”

4.4.4. Duration of exchanges

The majority of exchanges are reported to last between one and three months (see Figure 13), and a quarter from three to six months. Given that the length of an academic term in European universities can range anywhere from 2 to 4 months, if we sum responses for 1-3 months and 3-6 months, we might conclude that 70% of respondents implement OIEs as courses or as part of their courses.

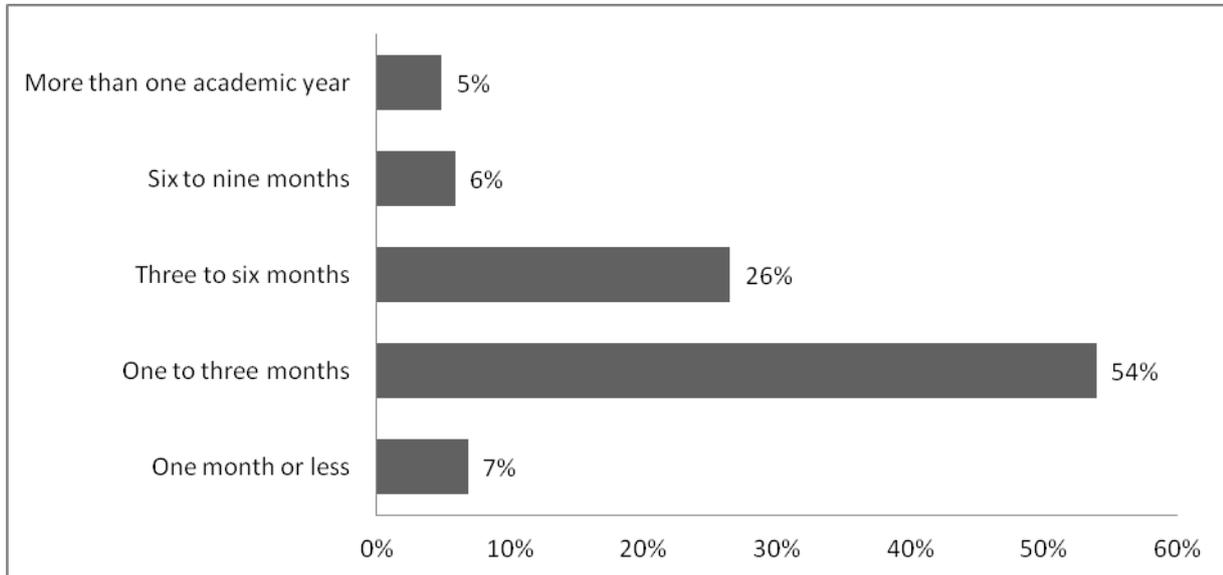


Figure 13: Responses to “How long does a typical exchange last?”

4.4.5 Number of partner classes

Regarding the number of partners (Fig. 14), the majority of exchanges had just one partner, though 15% had 2 in addition to the respondent’s institute, and 14% had three more partners. Surprisingly, given the complexity of organizing such exchanges, 6% of respondents reported having 4 partners, and 5% reported five or more partners.

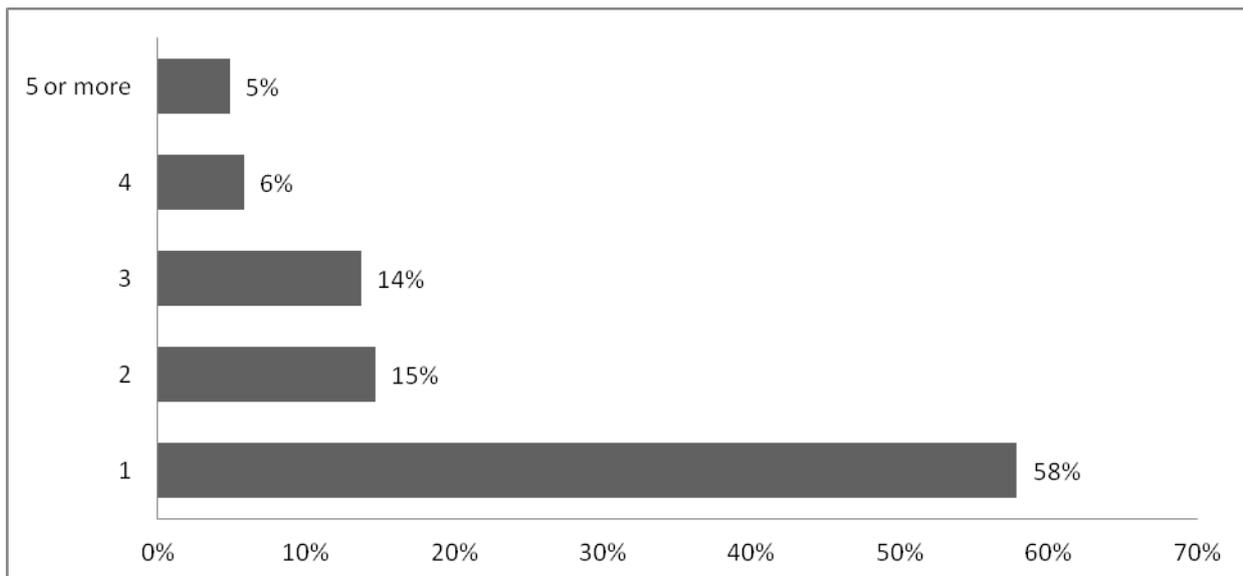


Figure 14: Responses to “Apart from your own university, how many other universities or other groups are usually involved in your exchanges?”

Given the extra complexity of different time zones, different academic calendars, different traditions, etc. that carrying out OIEs with non-European countries involves, we also looked at the number of exchanges respondents had within or beyond the EU. We coded 'EU' those who *only* had partners in the EU and 'non EU' those who had *at least one* partner beyond the EU. Overall more respondents had at least one partner beyond the EU (58%) than those who only had partners within the EU (42%). Figure 15 looks at number of partners and confirms this data with more respondents indicating non-EU partners consistently regardless of number of partners.

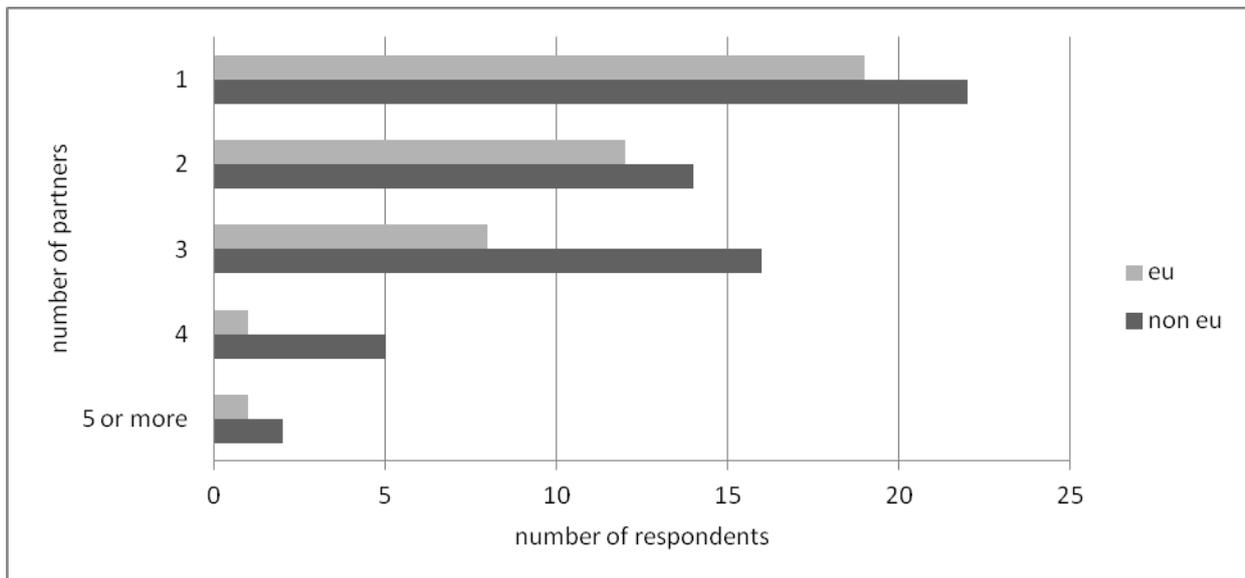


Figure 15: Location of partners (EU or beyond the EU) for number of partners in OIEs.

4.4.6 Finding partners

How did respondents find these partners? As can be seen in Figure 16, nearly three quarters of respondents indicated that they found their partners through their own network of colleagues and collaborators, and nearly one third through colleagues they had met at conferences.

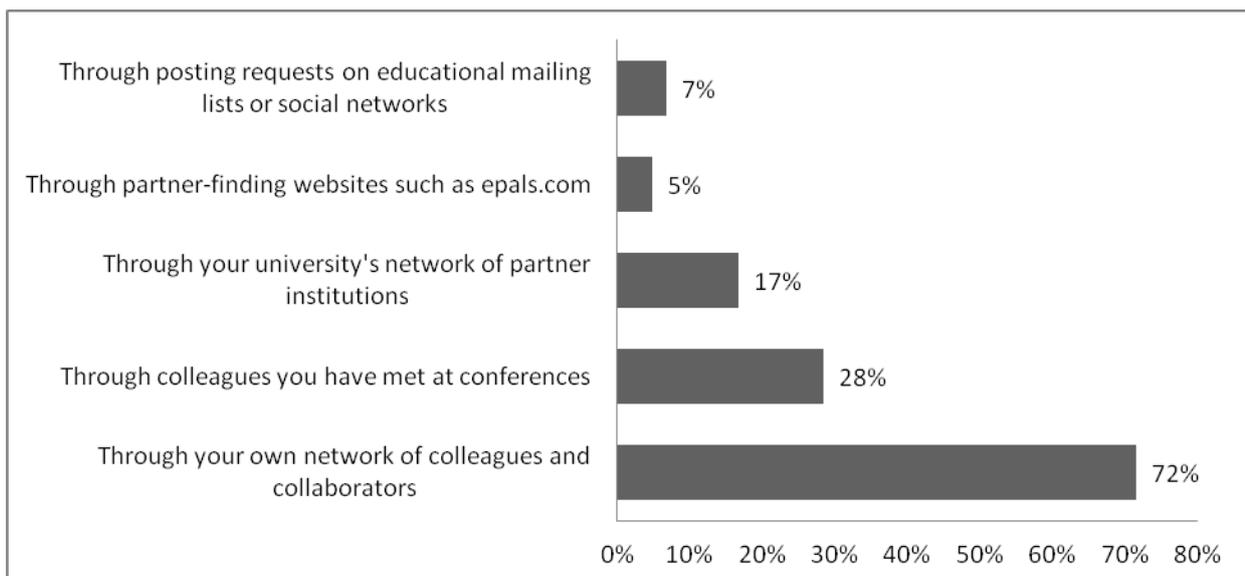


Figure 16: Responses to "Please explain how you usually find partner classes for your exchanges (you may tick more than one option)."

Only 17% reported having found partners through their universities' network of partner institutions, and a very small percentage reported finding partners through partner-finding websites or educational mailing lists. This perhaps is an indication that most OIEs are the initiative of individual educators, not an institutionally-supported activity in Europe. If the latter were the case, one would expect partners to be found through existing partnerships such as Erasmus agreements, bilateral exchanges and networks of universities such as the Santander Group or the Coimbra group. Answers to the 'other' option confirm this trend: only 2 respondents found partners through European projects and 1 by emailing partner institutions, all the others emailed personal contacts (5) or used web-based OIE community sites such as AidenLigne-Français¹⁰ (2), Cultura¹¹ (1), Mixer¹² (1) and Soliya¹³ (1).

4.4.7 Exchange tasks

Practitioners were also asked about the online tasks which they used during their telecollaborative exchanges. From a review of the telecollaboration literature we drew up a list of tasks that are commonly used in OIEs, and also left space for educators to add other activities (Fig. 17). The most common tasks were personal presentations, discussions of different topics or texts, and comparison of cultural products and customs. Also popular were presentations of students' towns, universities, collaboration in the creation of documents or webpages, error correction and interviews. Additional activities listed in the open responses included translation projects, creation of tasks or other educational materials (for teacher trainees), preparation of joint presentations, participation in moderated discussions, summarising tasks, role plays, preparation and opening of postal 'cultural packages', working on case studies, reading and comprehension activities. These responses corroborate the importance given to developing intercultural awareness and online communication skills as pedagogical aims as the focus of many responses is clearly on cultural aspects and communicating and collaborating *online*.

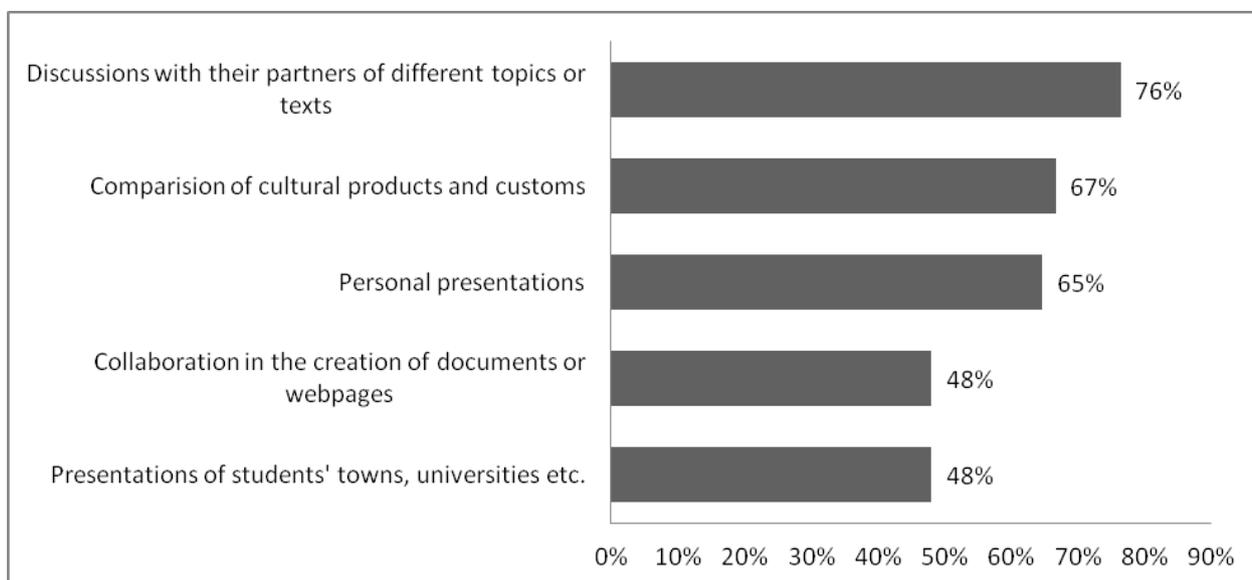


Figure 17: Responses to "What types of tasks or activities do your students usually carry out during their online exchanges?"

¹⁰ <http://www.aidenligne-francais-universite.auf.org/>

¹¹ <http://cultura.mit.edu/>

¹² <http://www.language-exchanges.org/>

¹³ <http://soliya.net/>

4.4.8 Communication tools

Regarding the tools teachers had used to implement OIE, respondents were presented with a series of tools that appear most frequently in the literature on telecollaboration and asked to indicate whether they had used them several times, once, never, or had never heard of them. Figure 18 reports teachers' responses when they indicated 'several times'.

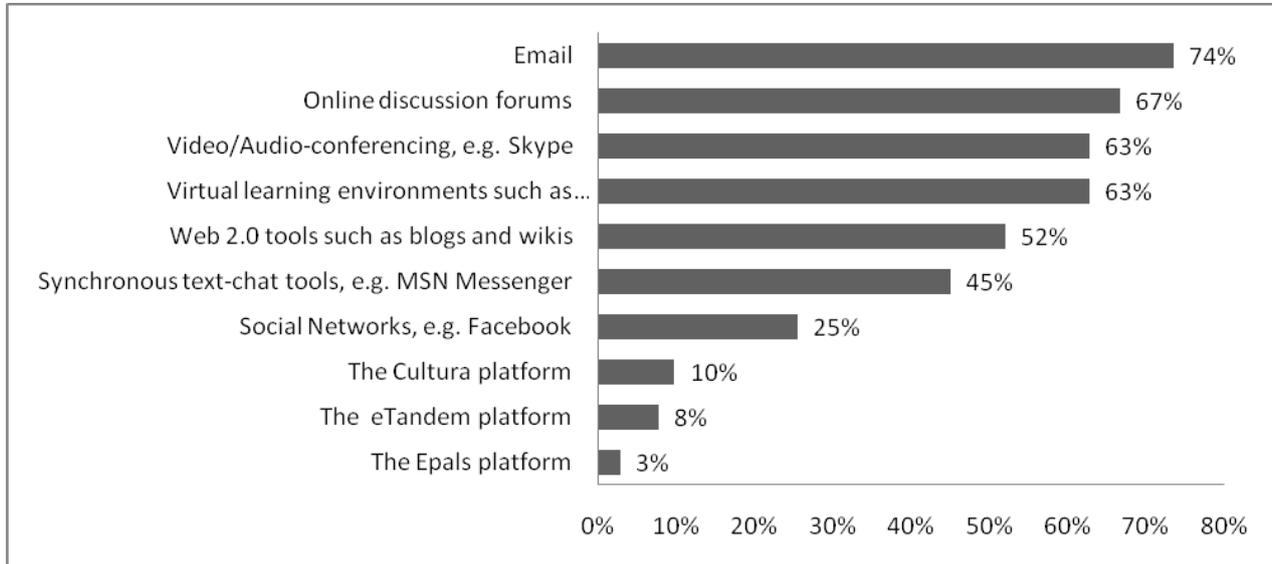


Figure 18: Tools that teachers experienced with OIE have used 'several times'.

As can be seen, the most frequently used communication tool for OIE was email, followed closely by online discussion forums, video/audio-conferencing and virtual learning environments, all of which have been used several times by over 60% of respondents. This reflects a massive rise in the use of video/audio conferencing tools and virtual learning environments which until relatively recently were less common due to the cost of the equipment and/or tools, several of which are now free such as Skype and Moodle, and because of limited bandwidth for transmitting audio and video data. There is also considerable use of synchronous text-chat tools and Web 2.0 tools such as blogs and wikis, both of which were mentioned by over 40% of respondents. This may be due both to the fact that many of them can be used free of charge and to efforts on the part of teachers to use tools in the classroom that students are already familiar with in their non-educational uses of the Internet, e.g. blogs. Although the use of social networking tools was mentioned by over 20%, the fact that these are used less than other Web 2.0 tools may reflect the fact that they are relatively new and/or it may indicate a resistance, on which there is much debate (see Thorne & Fischer, 2012, for a discussion), to using more personal tools in the context of formal learning. Platforms which have been specifically developed for OIEs, such as eTandem, Cultura and ePals were used only by few respondents. Indeed, the only three options that teachers chose as 'never heard of this' were these three platforms: 25% for Cultura, 17% eTandem, 25% Epals. This is an important result for the INTENT project since these are projects that were developed, like ours, to promote telecollaboration. Cultura, for example, was specifically developed in the context of French and English exchanges and was mentioned only by respondents teaching those two languages. This is somewhat surprising given that Cultura community has come to include multiple other languages and published significant learning outcome results in well-known academic journals. eTandem, unlike Cultura, which was developed specifically for institutional exchanges, is more geared towards independent learning, which might explain why it is not used by teachers in institutional contexts. The limited use of these tools

would seem to indicate that there is a need to publicize them more or to develop more user targeted tools and training opportunities so that interested teachers and institutions can more readily participate in OIE activities. This is a primary goal of the INTENT project.

4.4.9 Assessment

Regarding assessment of student participation in online exchanges, it is interesting to note that 36% of respondents reported that they did NOT assess their online exchanges. The 64% of respondents who said they do assess OIEs were then asked to indicate which aspects of learning they assess through a multiple choice question with the ‘other’ option (Figure 19).

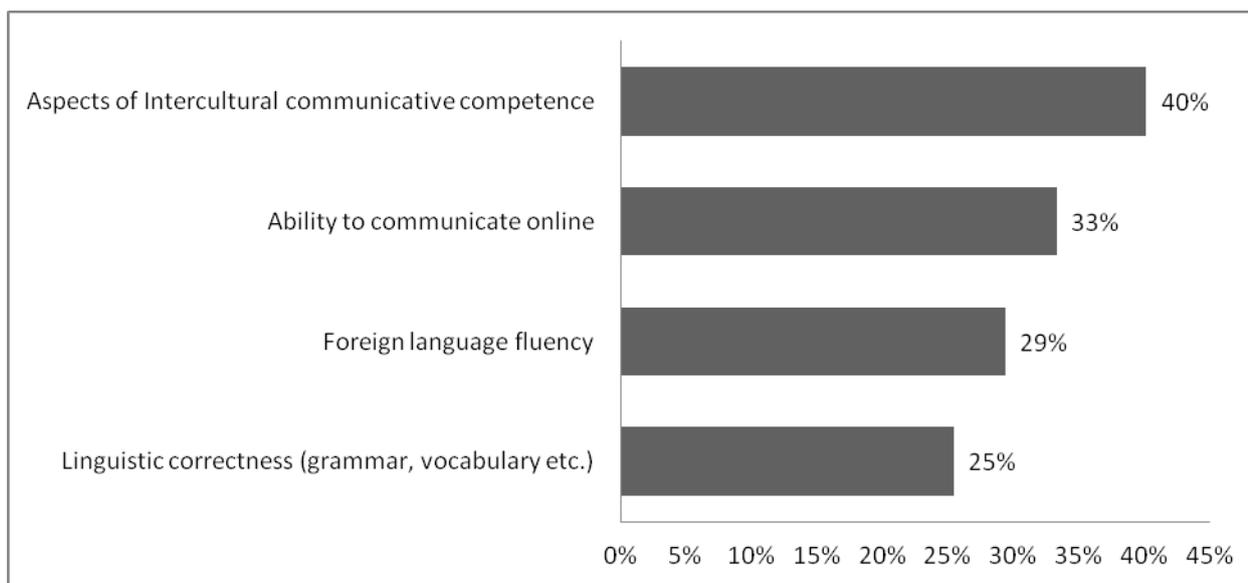


Figure 19: Responses to “Please indicate what aspects of student learning you usually assess in your exchanges.”

Similar to the responses regarding pedagogical aims and task types, 40% assessed intercultural communicative competence, followed by 33% assessing ability to communicate only. Other aspects mentioned in the 24 open responses to the ‘other’ option included content, comprehension, task completion, reflection, learner products, individual development of each learner, autonomy, participation, task completion, writing skills and translation errors.

The most commonly reported assessment methods selected from the multiple choice options available were evaluation of students’ essays or presentations reflecting on their exchanges (44%), the content of students’ online interaction (43%) and student portfolios (22%) (Figure 20). Other methods listed in the open answers included the outputs of the exchanges, e.g. translations, webpages, tasks, learner journals, self-assessment or structured reports. No respondents indicated any sort of ‘traditional’ written or oral assessment such as those that characterize many language courses at universities today, e.g. written grammar tests. Once again, this confirms the importance placed on learning *throughout* the exchange, learning as a process, intercultural learning together with language learning rather than summative assessment of canonical language forms. We suggest, however, that the development and/or implementation of more formal language and intercultural communication assessment instruments may raise the visibility and support the use of OIE within the EU, and further, that rigorous and broadly disseminated assessment strategies could facilitate the inclusion of OIE activities as credit bearing components of university curricula. Assessment of OIE activities as a part of formal institutional learning is a significant issue that will benefit from continued attention.

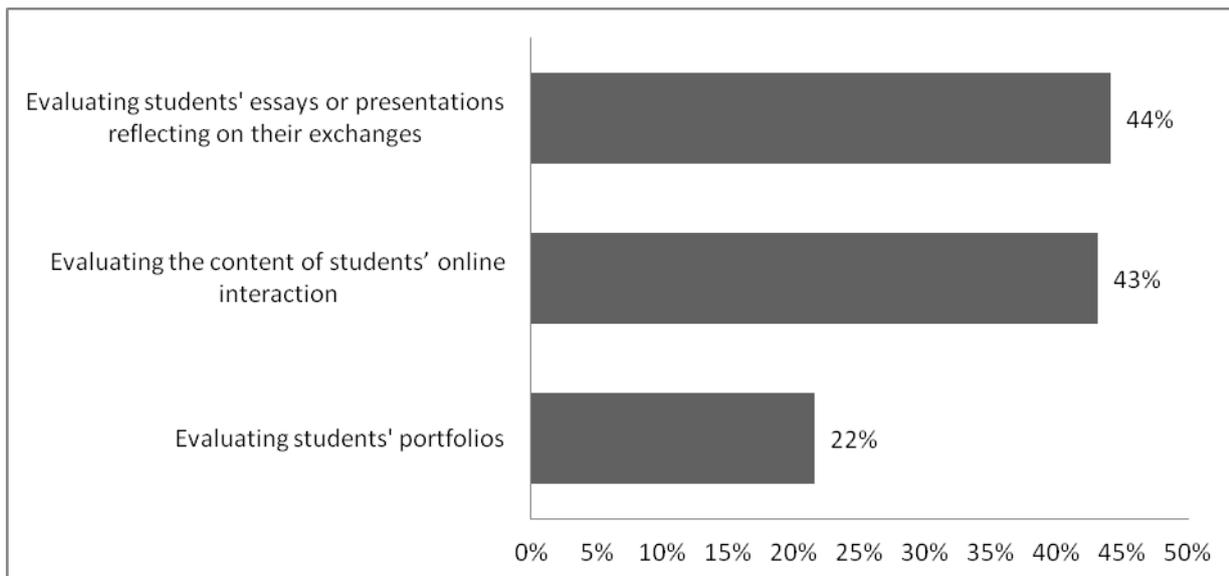


Figure 20: Responses to “Please indicate how you usually assess student learning in your exchanges.”

4.5 Educator opinions and overall evaluation

The following part of the survey was a series of questions aimed at investigating educators’ opinions regarding student attitudes, discussion topics, the various real and potential challenges involved in setting up an OIE, and the products that practitioners and institutions would like to see as an outcome from a project such as INTENT. Educators were asked to give their level of agreement (from 1 to 5) to a number of statements about OIE. In the figures below, responses indicating agreement (1 and 2) were grouped together, as were those indicating disagreement (4 and 5). Those who responded 3 on the Likert scale were categorized as undecided.

4.5.1 Influence of OIE on student perspectives and attitudes

In terms of changing student perspectives (Fig. 21), a majority of respondents with experience (63%) agreed that their students had somehow changed their attitudes or perspectives through OIE, only 5% believed that OIEs had led to the reinforcement of stereotypes, and 26% were uncertain about this. These results were more or less the same for teachers without experience imagining the potential of OIE to change student attitudes, as a large majority (81%) agreed that OIE had the potential to do so and 62% disagreed that OIE would reinforce stereotypes. Although the survey responses did not go into the details of how, for example, attitudes changed, the general consensus seems to be that OIE is a valid learning experience that leads students to change their beliefs, or at least bring them into question in some way, rather than simply experiencing the OIE as an opportunity for language learning alone. This is confirmed by the data gathered in the student survey that is discussed in the next section of this report.

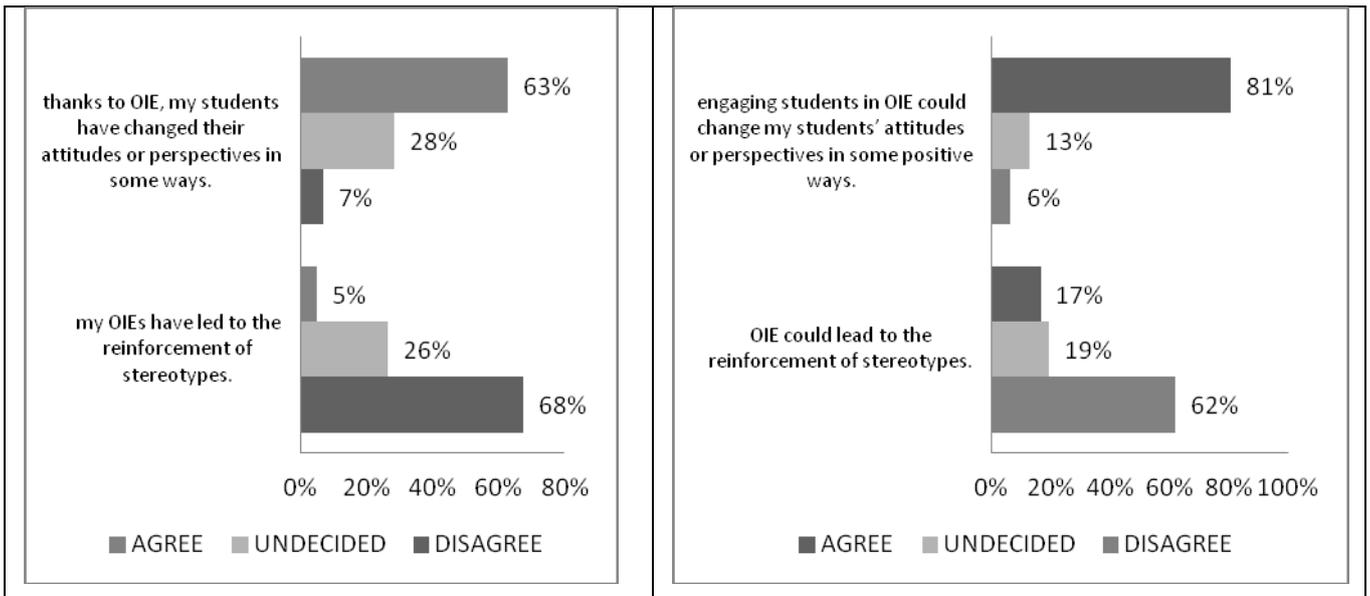


Figure 21: Educators' view of changing student attitudes (experienced OIE teachers on the left, teachers with no experience of OIE on the right).

4.5.2 Discussion Topics

The degree to which student attitudes change might also very well depend on how much the contents of a given exchange encourages them to question their beliefs. In order to investigate this, we asked both groups two questions regarding disagreement and sensitive topics for discussion (see Figure 22).

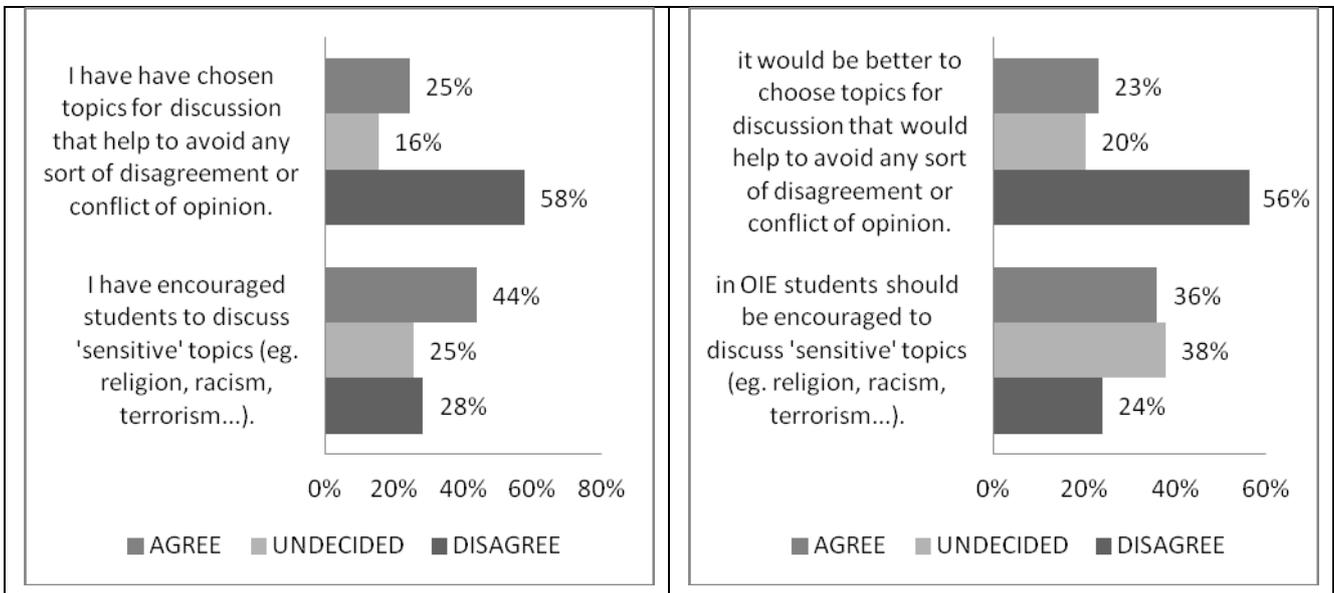


Figure 22: Educators' views on disagreement and 'sensitive' topics (experienced OIE teachers on the left, teachers with no experience of OIE on the right).

Only a quarter of respondents reported having chosen topics for discussion that help to avoid disagreement or conflict of opinion, 16% were uncertain as to how to respond, whereas over half (58%) had *included* topics that might lead to conflict of opinion. In a similar vein, but to a lesser degree, 44% of respondents report having encouraged students to discuss sensitive topics such as religion, racism and terrorism. The slight difference in the responses to these two statements may

be due to an understanding that disagreement or conflict can arise in discussion of even the simplest of topics, such as living at home after age 18, whereas discussing sensitive topics moves into much more 'risky' territory. The teachers with no experience provided very similar results. Nearly one quarter thought it best to choose topics that would avoid disagreement or conflict of opinion, 20% were undecided, but over half (56%) did not agree with this. In the case of sensitive topics, there was less consensus and more even distribution of responses. In comparison to the responses of teachers with experience, who also varied considerably in their responses, there was a greater degree of indecision, with 38% of respondents neither agreeing nor disagreeing that students should discuss sensitive topics. Nonetheless, the results indicate that over half of the respondents were either unsure or did not agree with embracing or encouraging conflict in discussion, which may reflect a reluctance to move away from the safe topics typically found in many mainstream foreign language textbooks, and is perhaps on a deeper level representative of a general consensus in European societies where, particularly in education, overt conflict is perceived negatively and often avoided. This is certainly an area to be researched further, particularly in the context of OIE where people from different cultures are brought together to interact and engage in discussion within a formal educational context.

There has, however, recently been a change in European policy and an interest in promoting 'intercultural dialogue' (Council of Europe, 2008). This approach differs from previous approaches to social policy such as assimilation and multiculturalism, and, we would argue, this shift has implications for foreign language education (FLE). Until recently the focus in FLE has been on learners developing socio-pragmatic competence in the target language to the point of avoiding topics that may lead to disagreement (Savignon & Sysoyey 2002, p. 513). However, the notion of intercultural dialogue as espoused in the Intercultural Dialogue White Paper is seen as:

a process that comprises an open and respectful exchange of views between individuals and groups with different ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds and heritage, on the basis of mutual understanding and respect. It requires the freedom and ability to express oneself, as well as the willingness and capacity to listen to the views of others. [...] It is a powerful instrument of mediation and reconciliation: through critical and constructive engagement across cultural fault-lines, it addresses real concerns about social fragmentation and insecurity while fostering integration and social cohesion.¹⁴

If educators are to "play an essential role in fostering intercultural dialogue and in preparing future generations for dialogue" and to "serve as important role models" (ibid.) it is important that they address certain potentially difficult issues, and in order to do this they require, as stated in the White Paper and as reflected also in these survey results, teacher training curricula to help them design and facilitate these pedagogical processes.

¹⁴http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/whitepaper_interculturaldialogue_2_EN.asp#P255_97232 (para 3.1)

4.5.3 OIE in relation to physical mobility

Since OIE can be seen as a form of virtual mobility, the survey aimed to investigate respondents' opinions regarding the relationship between OIE and physical mobility. As can be seen in Figure 23, 91% of teachers with experience and 93% with no experience believe that OIE could support physical mobility. The responses were slightly different with regard to OIE being a valid alternative to physical mobility: 63% of teachers with experience agree and only 16% disagree whereas only 46% of teachers with no experience of OIE agree and nearly a third (29%) disagree. This would seem to indicate that teachers who have experienced OIE are guided by the understanding that the 'virtual' experience can actually be quite 'real', a belief that is supported by social psychological research on interaction and learning in virtual environments (e.g., Bailenson et al., 2008). When responding to the statement "a true intercultural experience requires face to face contact" only 33% of respondents with experience agreed and 48% disagreed with only 18% undecided whereas 26% of respondents with no experience were undecided, 27% agreed and 36% disagreed. Again, a comparison of these results indicates that teachers with experience seem to believe more strongly that virtual encounters can be just as valid as real-life encounters and offer authentic intercultural experiences. Clearly much of the impact of these experiences will depend on the nature and design of the OIE.

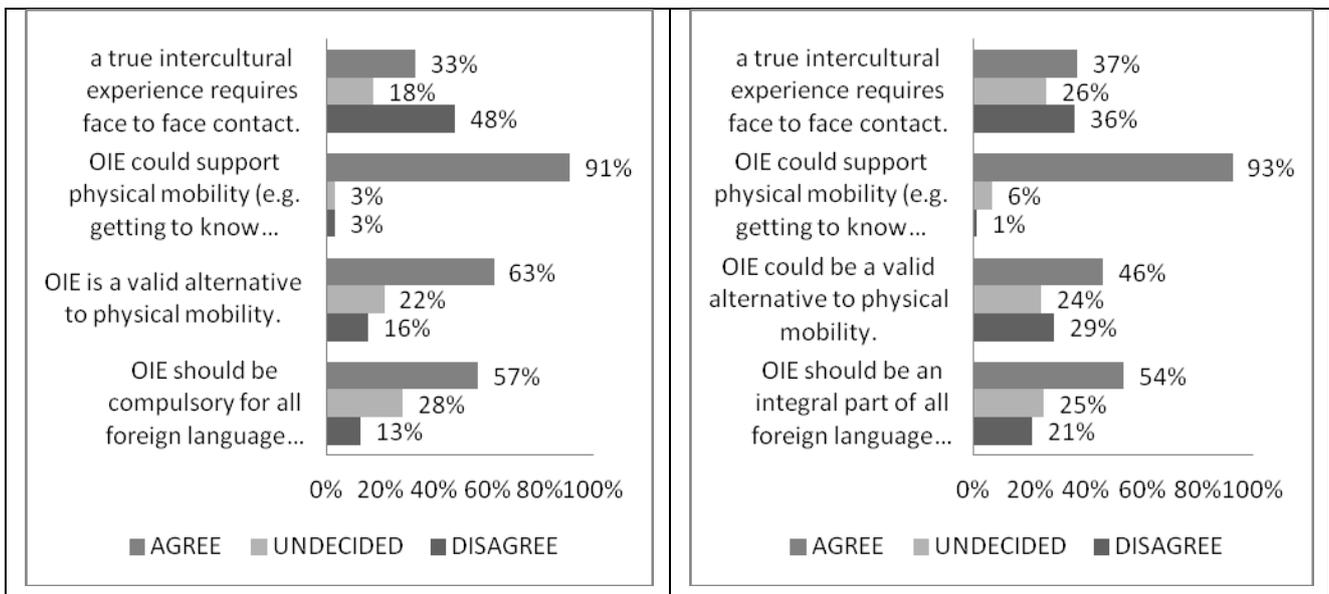


Figure 23: Responses regarding OIE and physical mobility (experienced OIE teachers on the left, teachers with no experience of OIE on the right).

Physical mobility is currently a reality for only 4.5% of university students in Europe, and the EU objective is to bring this to 20% by 2020. Even if this ambitious target is reached, there will still be 80% of higher education students with no experience of mobility and intercultural exchange as part of their studies. The European Commission does not aim to *replace* physical mobility with virtual mobility, but as mentioned in the Introduction to this report, has suggested that online exchange can be a valid tool for preparing for physical mobility and it might be a viable alternative for those students and young people who CANNOT engage in traditional mobility programmes. Prior to departure for study abroad, for example, students can get to know the place and potential peers before embarking on the journey, students who go abroad can keep those who have not travelled updated on the experience, for instance through a blog¹⁵ (see O'Dowd 2007), and

¹⁵ <http://visitingnewyork.blogspot.it/>

afterwards students can function as intercultural tutors for younger students (see King 2010). But perhaps more importantly, OIE can offer the opportunity of an intercultural and “international experience at home” (EHEA 2012) for those students who cannot and/or will not have the opportunity for physical mobility. Though OIE is clearly different from physical mobility¹⁶ and should not replace physical mobility when this is possible, the majority of respondents in both groups agreed that OIE is a valid alternative to physical mobility and also that it should be compulsory for all foreign language students, as the responses to open questions listed below illustrate:

- In my view it is like the Erasmus program: everyone SHOULD do it but only a few do. It would be wonderful if students realized the value of an online intercultural exchange and used it. In reality many remain as 'virtual' online partners and don't take the bait. Overcoming this is the key, I think. (Yes-EN-29)
- It needs to become an mainstream option in traditional face-to-face universities. (Yes-EN-03)

In the United States, where only 2% of higher education students have experiences of physical mobility, there has been a strong move in recent years to promote online intercultural exchanges. The Exchange 2.0 coalition has been set up by three organizations that implement online exchange and their vision is "to make it the norm for young people to have a profound international cross-cultural experience as part of their education"¹⁷. Policy-makers within and outside the US are being addressed and are showing an interest in this project:

The League of Arab States has issued an endorsement of the Exchange 2.0 Coalition, and the United States Institute of Peace, President Obama’s Partners for a New Beginning Initiative, and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, have all convened events with policymakers and education experts to discuss ways to advance Exchange 2.0.

Policy-makers in national and supra-national European contexts need to be addressed in a similar vein to harness their support for making OIE a regular feature of higher education programmes in Europe. As the case studies in the final section of this report clearly illustrate, OIEs can be successfully integrated in university programmes at different levels, but currently it is often pioneering educators who do this on an individual level, for this activity often lacks institutional support as the findings in following section also reveal.

¹⁶This is why we have chosen not to call it 'virtual mobility' but rather telecollaboration or OIE

¹⁷<http://www.soliya.net/?q=node/218/>

4.5.4 Institutional Factors

One of the characteristics that differentiates OIE from other informal types of exchange that students might engage in is the fact that it is a form of institutionalized learning. As such, we wanted to investigate what educators think about OIE and the role their institution does or could play in promoting the activity.

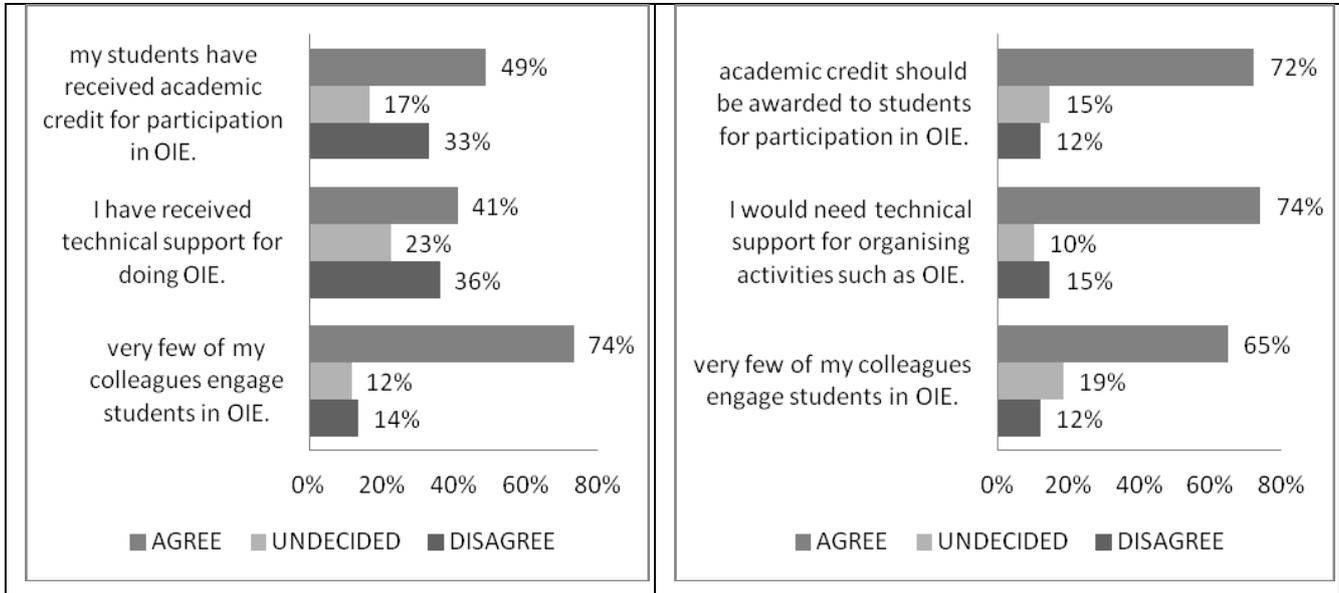


Figure 24: Educators' opinions of the role of institutional factors in OIE (experienced OIE teachers on the left, teachers with no experience of OIE on the right).

A comparison of the results in Figure 24 can be seen as a comparison between reality (experienced teachers on the left) and what teachers would like (teachers with no experience of OIE on the right). Nearly three quarters of respondents with no experience of OIE said they believed that academic credit *should* be awarded to students for participation in OIE whereas only 49% of teachers said their students *had* received academic credit. Similarly, nearly three quarters feel they *would need* technical support, but only 41% *have* received it and 36% explicitly said they *have not* received technical support. The results regarding colleagues who implement OIE were similar between the two groups as 74% of teachers with experience and 65% of those with no experience had *few* colleagues who engage students in OIE. Hence it appears that OIE is not widely practiced in the respondents' institutions, and there is a strongly felt need for institutional and technical support as well as recognition for OIE by awarding students academic credit and/or formal acknowledgement for participation.

4.6 Evaluation of personal experience with OIE

Respondents with experience of OIE were also asked a series of questions with regard to their personal experience(s) of implementing OIE (Fig. 25).

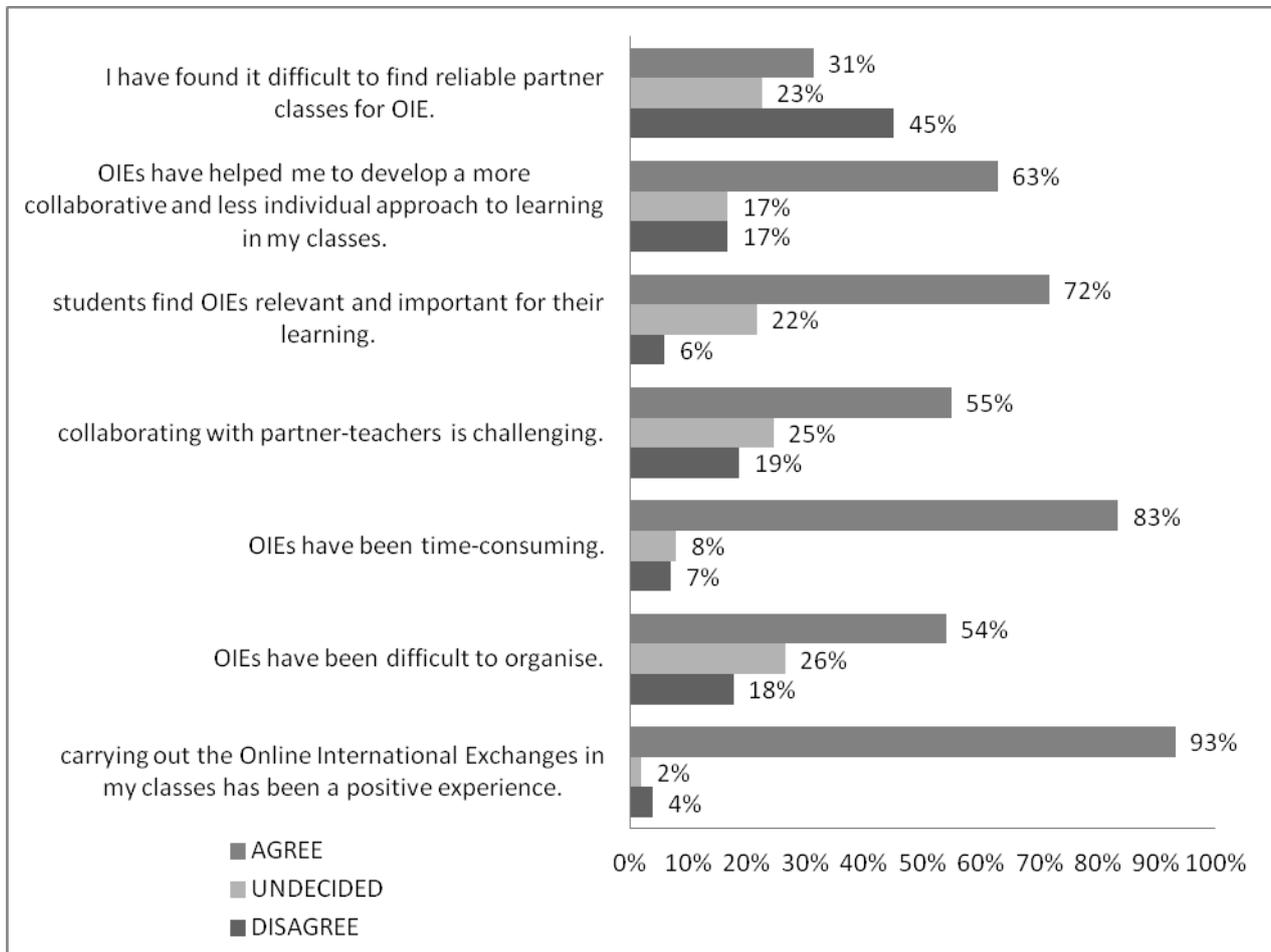


Figure 25: Experienced educator evaluations of online exchange

The overwhelming majority (93%) of respondents agree that carrying out OIE in their classes was a positive experience, acknowledging at the same time that OIEs are time consuming (83%) and, to a lesser extent, difficult to organize (54%). There is also widespread agreement (72%) that students find OIEs relevant and important for their learning. Many educators agreed (63%) that OIEs helped them to develop a more collaborative and less individual approach to learning in their classes. Finding reliable partner classes was reported to be difficult for 31% of respondents, but was not so for 45%. On the other hand, collaborating with partner teachers was found to be challenging by 55% of respondents. It is worth noting that teachers with no experience also responded to the statement “I would find collaborating with teachers in other countries challenging”, with 64% in agreement. Though this does not seem to have affected experienced educators’ overall evaluation of OIE (only 4% did *not* find it a positive experience), it is an area which needs to be addressed further by the INTENT project: e.g. what is it that educators find challenging and how can they be prepared for and supported in this type of collaboration?

What seems to emerge from responses to open questions is that the activity in itself is positive, motivating and rewarding but there remains a need for a community of practitioners who can

support one another, which can be both at the teachers' institutions and/or on an international level, as these comments also illustrate:

- I have faced quite some difficulties with the Intercultural Exchange Project but still it was very rewarding (for my students and for me). I worked on it together with one of my colleagues at [my university] and she has been a great support to me. I think it is very valuable to work on exchanges like in small teams of groups because there is a lot of brainstorming needed. (T-Yes-EN-43).
- In my experience, teachers - as everybody else - learn best when learning by doing with personal assistance on the spot. F2F meetings/workshops/contact are very important to get started and keep up motivation to experiment with something that is new and scary for a lot of teachers. (T-Yes-EN-08)
- It's very important to establish professional communities such as this to research and promote OIE internationally. Thanks! (T-Yes-EN-25)
- Very motivating for the teachers involved as it allows to build relationships on a personal basis. (T-T-Yes-EN-12)

4.6.1 Challenges to running online exchanges

Based on the literature review carried out prior to writing the survey, several problems in carrying out OIEs were identified, and respondents were asked to indicate which of these problems they encountered. The problem that most respondents with experience indicated was differences in institutional timetables (63%). Other problems were more evenly distributed, as can be seen in Figure 26, ranging from differences in language proficiency (35%) to lack of institutional support (23%). The other major problem, highlighted in the open questions, was related to technical issues, in terms of support, levels of literacy and choice of platform. The issue of different expectations on the part of the students and/or educators was also mentioned by several respondents.

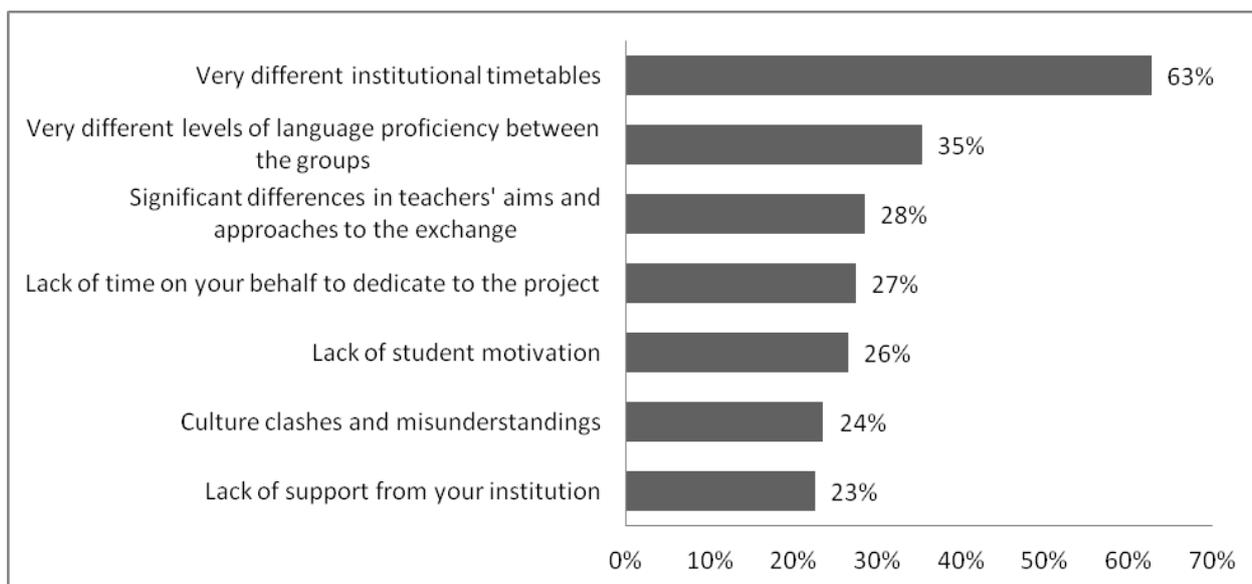


Figure 26: What types of problems (if any) have you had when organising or running your online exchanges?

As far as inexperienced respondents are concerned, 23% respondents agreed with the statement “my institutions does not offer sufficient Internet access to be able to participate in an OIE”, and these responses came from educators at universities in various European countries (Poland,

Germany, Spain, Lithuania, Italy, France, Ireland, Hungary and Cyprus). 15% were undecided, leaving 62% for whom Internet access was not an issue. This result indicates that access to Internet for university language educators and their students wanting to engage in OIE still cannot be taken for granted. Responses to the statement “OIE would be difficult to organize” were evenly spread, with 36% agreeing and 35% disagreeing. This is not surprising given the fact that respondents have no direct experience in setting up OIE. Although they may have colleagues who have carried out OIEs or although they may be familiar with OIE through journal articles or conference presentations, the success of these experiences of others would most likely influence their responses. Another factor that may have led to this relatively even distribution is that some institutions do indeed provide more support in terms of hours, technical support, facilities, etc., as opposed to others, as can be found in the case studies in chapter 6.

Both groups were also asked to respond to open questions regarding the challenges/potential challenges of implementing OIE. The teachers with experience were asked why, based on their experience, they thought online intercultural exchange was not a common practice in university education. The most frequent explanation by far was the time commitment required to organize and maintain exchanges, given by over 40 respondents, several of whom also commented on the personal investment and high motivation which OIE requires of teachers. While many of the respondents are teacher/researchers who in addition to the gratification of offering this opportunity to students also carry out studies and publish on OIE, several others are educators who have heavy teaching loads and no recognition or reward for their investment, making OIE less appealing. Other reasons connected to this which were offered by many was lack of institutional support, no recognition in syllabus or credits awarded and lack of technical support and/or resources. Several also mentioned that OIE could be perceived as a new, unknown and apparently complex approach which requires technical know-how on the part of educators and thus may put educators off this kind of activity. Difficulty in finding partners, particularly reliable partners, was also mentioned by many. Some of the responses to the open questions are listed below.

- Unless there is a clear outcome in terms of publication opportunities the time and effort needed are more profitably employed in the pursuit of other research areas (T-Yes-EN-44)
- Different semester times and class timetables make cooperation difficult and the new ‘modulisation’ process means that students have less time for such projects(T-Yes-DE-03)¹⁸
- Because it requires a lot of time investment, because of lack of computer expertise to set and carry out, and because it is difficult to set and evaluate (T-Yes-EN-31)
- Maybe because of the reluctance towards technology of some teachers, the personal commitment it requires in terms of time, the costs bound to the setting up of a computer lab.(T-Yes-FR-01)¹⁹
- For many reasons: because it is difficult to find partners, because such projects are extremely costly (time, technological effort, attendance, finding the appropriate technical

¹⁸Unterschiedliche Zeitpläne/Semesterzeiten erschweren Kooperation, durch Modularisierung haben Studierende wenig Zeit hierfür

¹⁹Peut être en raison: - de la réticence de certains enseignants vis-à-vis des TIC, - de l'investissement personnel que cela demande en terme de temps, - du coût que peut demander l'équipement informatique d'une salle (T-Yes-FR-01)

infrastructure or lack thereof), because there is no external funding or opportunities to use research funds for these activities (T-Yes-DE-09)²⁰

- This type of activity is still not well-known and, therefore, it is not considered important in the context of language learning (T-Yes-IT-04)²¹

Regarding teachers with no experience, it is interesting to note that while many felt that OIE might motivate students (see above), they also identified lack of student motivation and interest in response to the question: “If you were going to organize such an activity at your institution, what problems or barriers do you think you might encounter?” One of the explanations for this, however, was that students would not have the time to dedicate to additional activities. Indeed time was frequently mentioned as a constraint for teachers and students alike. Other major factors were lack of technical skills (on the part of both teachers and students), lack of technical support and lack of institutional support. Limited language proficiency and potential cultural conflict or misunderstandings were only mentioned by a handful of respondents.

²⁰- aus sämtlichen o.g. Gründen; - weil es sehr schwer ist, Partner zu finden. - weil solche Projekte extrem aufwendig sind (Zeitaufwand, technologischer Aufwand, Anwesenheit, technische Infrastruktur vor Ort bzw. Mangel daran) - weil es keine drittmittelrelevanten bzw. für das Einwerben von Drittmitteln geeigneten Aktivitäten sind (T-Yes-DE-09)

²¹Questa modalità non è ancora molto conosciuta; non le viene attribuita grande importanza nell'apprendimento della lingua (T-Yes-IT-04)

4.6.2 Desired role of the INTENT project

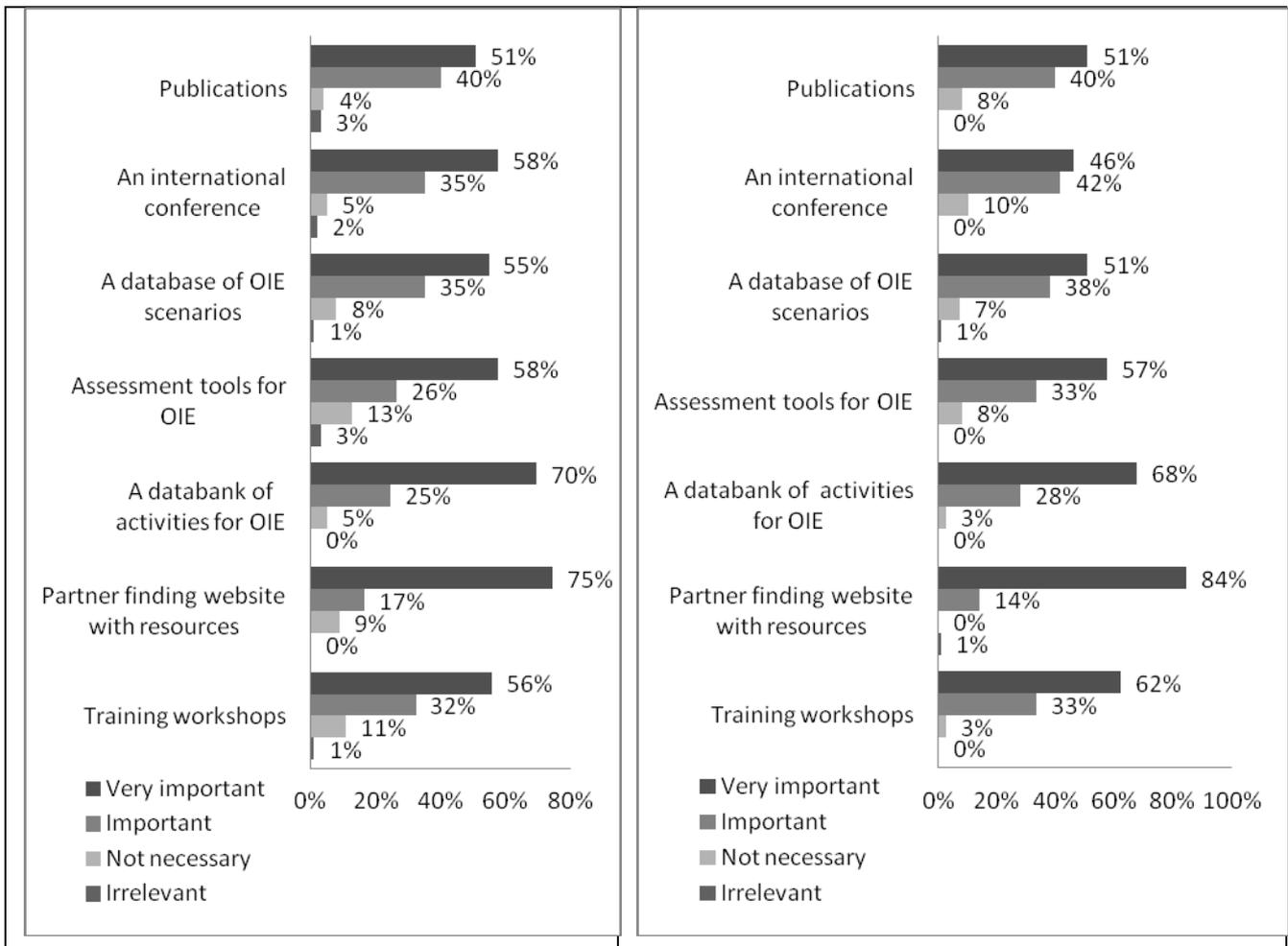


Figure 27: Educators' opinions of the importance to them of some of the activities and outputs that the INTENT Project plans to implement over the course of the project (experienced OIE teachers on the left, teachers with no experience of OIE on the right).

The final survey question (Fig. 27) asked respondents to evaluate the intended outputs of the INTENT project in terms of importance to them in their contexts. Of these, the one which met with most enthusiasm from respondents is the online website for educators to find partner classes for both groups (75% and 84%), followed closely by a databank of useful activities for OIE (70% and 68%), though all the products are deemed important or very important by 80-90% of respondents. This seems to be a very positive indication that the INTENT project is being developed at a time that is ripe for the wider dissemination of the practice of OIE in higher education in Europe. Indeed, in the United States there are two projects, Exchange 2.0²² and the COIL Center²³, whose

²² "In 2011, Soliya partnered with [iEarn](#) and [Global Nomads Group](#) to form the Exchange 2.0 Coalition. Programmatically, our focus has been on virtual exchange, which we define as technology-enabled, facilitated, and embedded in curricula with a cross-cultural educational purpose. Our Connect Program, along with other pioneering programs from iEarn and Global Nomads Group, serve as proof of concept for the potential of these models." <http://www.soliya.net/?q=node/218/>

²³ "The COIL Center's mission is to develop and implement online collaborative international courses at SUNY as a format for experiential cross-cultural learning, thereby sensitizing participating students to the larger world by deepening their understanding of themselves, their culture, how they are perceived and how they perceive others. These globally networked courses also intensify disciplinary learning in fields where engaging other cultural

primary aims, similar to INTENT, are to promote and increase the implementation of globally networked courses and virtual exchange for today's learners.

perspectives is key. COIL builds bridges between study abroad, instructional design and teaching faculty through team-taught courses, thereby promoting, integrating and enhancing international education experiences across the curriculum. The COIL Center also works with international programs offices, helping them to integrate technology into their workflow." <http://coilcenter.purchase.edu/>

5. Findings of the student survey

As explained in the introduction, a third survey was developed in parallel with the two teacher surveys to collect the opinions and experiences of university students in European institutions who had already participated in telecollaborative exchanges during their studies. This particular survey targeted university students or recent graduates who have had at least one experience of OIE. The aim was to gather the views and opinions of students with different experiences of OIE about the value of telecollaborative exchanges in general, not regarding one particular exchange. Whereas we felt teachers who had no experience of OIE would be able to imagine what the practice might entail, we decided that this would not necessarily be the case with students and therefore conducted only one student survey. As with the surveys for teachers, the student survey was launched at the beginning of December 2011 in English, French, German and Italian and was closed at the end of January 2012. A total of 202 responses from students were received, but 71 were missing responses on a large number of items and so it was decided not to include these in the final analysis of the data. The findings reported here are therefore based on data from 131 students who had had experience of OIE and had completed the survey in full in one of the four language versions (see Table 3 for breakdown of surveys completed by language version). As mentioned earlier, the survey is by no means intended to be representative of European students as a whole, first because it targets the small percentage of students who *have* participated in OIE and secondly because respondents were contacted through members of the INTENT team and their colleagues, meaning that the sample represents a limited number of exchanges. Nonetheless, we believe this survey can provide useful insights into the experience and attitude towards OIE of students in European countries who have participated in at least one OIE. This information thus adds a further dimension to that which emerges from the teacher surveys.

Table 3: Language used to complete student surveys.

German language version	27
English language version	46
French language version	50
Italian language version	8
Total	131

The findings are divided into 4 key sections:

- Section 5.1: student sample and intercultural profile.
- Section 5.2: students' evaluation of OIE.
- Section 5.3: student learning.
- Section 5.4: student attitudes and beliefs.

5.1 Student sample and intercultural profile

Given the target group of this survey, i.e. primarily ex-students of INTENT members and their contacts who had participated in exchanges, the aim was to identify the programmes students had been attending when they participated in the OIE and to create a sort of 'intercultural profile' through a series of questions, as will be seen below. Of the 131 respondents, 57% were studying or had studied for a teacher education degree. The remainder were students from the Humanities (just over 21%) and Social Sciences (16%), with a small percentage from other degree courses.

The survey respondents would seem to over-represent the European student population in terms of intercultural experience, since 58% have spent a period of at least 3 months living abroad for study or work, several of whom have had more than one experience. 19% of all respondents have been on an Erasmus exchange, which is nearly 4 times the European average according to the most recent statistics from the European Commission (only 4.5% of EU students participate in the Erasmus mobility during their studies).²⁴

61% of respondents reported that they intend to apply for Erasmus or another form of mobility programme while at university. Whilst clearly not all of these will actually go on a mobility scheme, even if half were to do so, the percentage would be well above the European average of 4.5%. A careful analysis of the students' open responses to the question "Please explain briefly why you DO NOT plan to take part in a mobility programme", indicates that the reasons are more practical than academic. For example²⁵:

- Family and economic problems (EN_ST_02)
- Because of the money mainly (EN_ST_26)
- I'm 36 and I have a family here in Latvia. But I would like to take part in a programme which is shorter than Erasmus. (FR_ST_18)²⁶

These responses highlight the fact that OIE could provide an alternative opportunity for intercultural encounters for students who cannot, due to life circumstances, participate in mobility programmes such as Erasmus. What is lacking is the possibility to go abroad, not the desire to interact with people from different cultures. We would argue that it is worth tapping into this desire by offering alternatives to physical mobility.

In order to gain a very rough idea of the students' intercultural experience in their home and university contexts, we also asked how many 'foreign' people²⁷ they were in regular face-to-face contact with. Most reported between 1 and 5 contacts, but nearly a quarter of the respondents reported 10 or above. Most of these were friends and/or foreign students and 90% of respondents reported sometimes using a foreign language to speak to them.

When it comes to foreign contacts in social networks, 15% of respondents had none, either because they did not use social networks or simply because they had no foreign contacts. 43% had

²⁴<http://ec.europa.eu/education/erasmus/doc/stat/0910/report.pdf>

²⁵All student quotes from the French, German and Italian versions have been translated into English by the authors for the purposes of the report. The original responses are provided as footnotes.

²⁶*J' ai 36 ans et j' ai ma famille ici, en Lettonie. Mai je participerais a un programme plus court qu' erasmus.*

²⁷Much discussion took place before choosing the term 'foreign people' as opposed to, for example, 'foreigners' or 'people who don't speak your language'. Although consideration of this is beyond the scope of this report, the responses to the questions involving 'foreign people' indicate that people interpret this phrase in different ways.

between one and 5 such contacts, 18% between 6 and 10, and just over 20% have over 10. Comparing the two graphs presented in Figures 28 and 29, we note that the main difference lies in the 17% who do not use social networks or have no contact with foreign people on social networks. The other results overlap considerably, indicating that students' contact with foreign people is not very different between face-to-face and virtual environments.

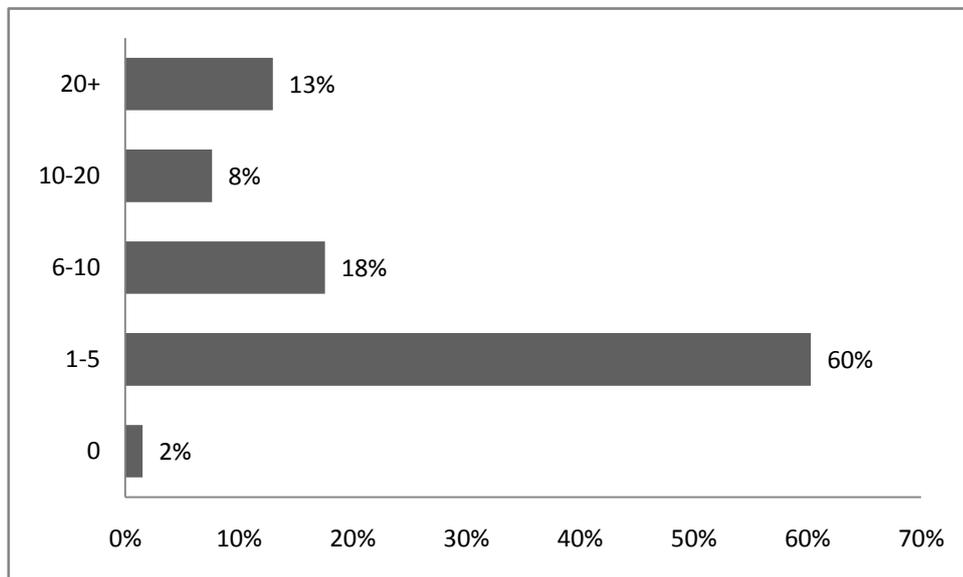


Figure 28: Responses by percentage to the question “How many foreign people are you in regular contact with in your home and university contexts?”

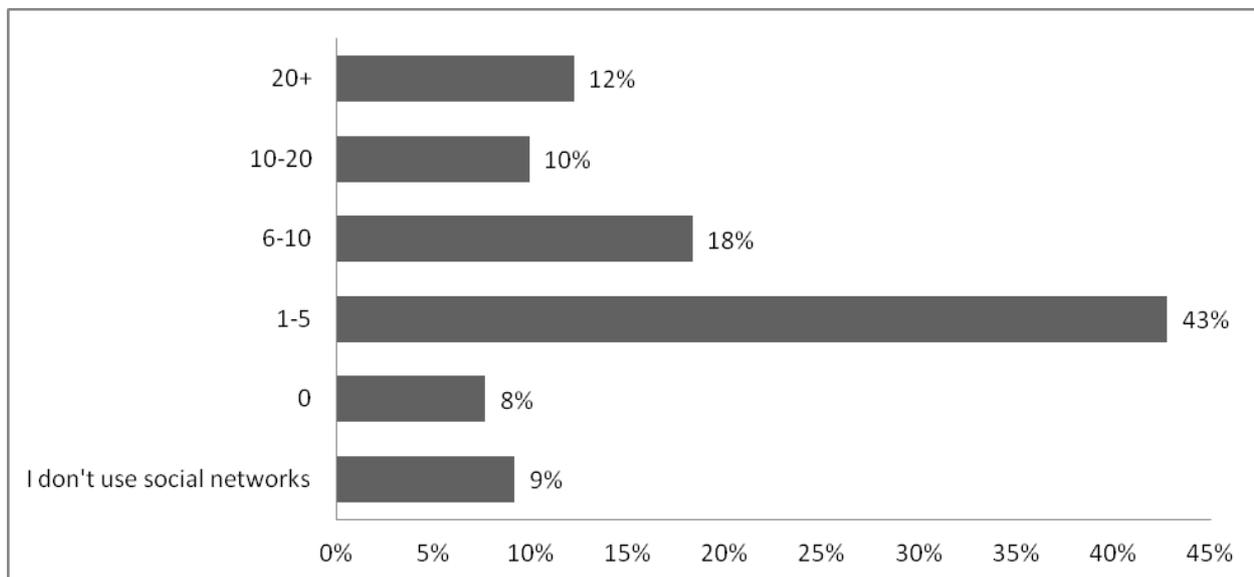


Figure 29: Responses by percentage to the question “If you regularly use online social networks (e.g. facebook, messenger etc.), how many foreign people do you have regular contact with?”

Just over one third of the respondents (35.1%) report keeping in contact with partners they met through their online exchange. In response to the open question “Please tell us briefly about your relationship with the partner(s) you've remained in touch with.” most respondents say they keep in touch via email and/or Facebook and a few also continue to interact through Skype. Whilst some respondents say they are not true friends, they just share information and keep in touch to practise their foreign language skills and exchange news, the majority report some kind of friendship having developed and sharing news on their daily life, university and/or common

interests. A couple of the respondents even reported having visited each other. Some of the responses are listed below:

- we are just good friends who share their free time, their bittersweets of daily life (EN_ST_40)
- We talk sometimes on facebook and they have even come to visit! And I know that if I ever go back to the States, I will let them know so we can see each other again. (EN_ST_15)
- We discovered some common points of interest during the Skype exchanges and we wish to improve our skills, for him French, for me English²⁸ (FR_ST_12)
- We have continued to exchange intercultural aspects specific to our fields of study²⁹ (FR_ST_7)
- friendship and cultural exchange. moreover, political updates from their countries (EN_ST_11)
- With some of them is just facebook contact. With some others it's much more than that. we have visited each other and I even was invited to a wedding in North Carolina. (EN_ST_38)

5.2 Students' evaluation of OIE

In the student survey, respondents were asked many of the same questions that teachers were asked regarding typology of exchanges, languages used, number of exchanges, etc. Since these responses do not add any new information to what was gleaned from the teacher surveys, here we would like to focus on the various responses students gave regarding their experience of OIEs. As can be seen in Figure 30, the overwhelming majority of respondents found OIE to be a positive experience, and three quarters believe it should be compulsory for all foreign language students. This also emerges in the final comments several students made at the end of the questionnaire, for example:

- It is a great experience that everyone should have once in a lifetime. (N_ST_38)
- I will encourage everyone to participate in exchange programs. (EN_ST_40)
- It's a useful tool. I think that all the foreign language students should use it to realise that studying a language involves more things than studying grammar and phonetics. (EN_ST_45)
- Our University should organise more exchanges. (EN_ST_36)

²⁸*Certains point communs découverts lors des échanges Skype, et la volonté d'augmenter, pour lui son français, et pour moi mon anglais*

²⁹*Continuer à échanger les aspects interculturels dans notre demain d'études*

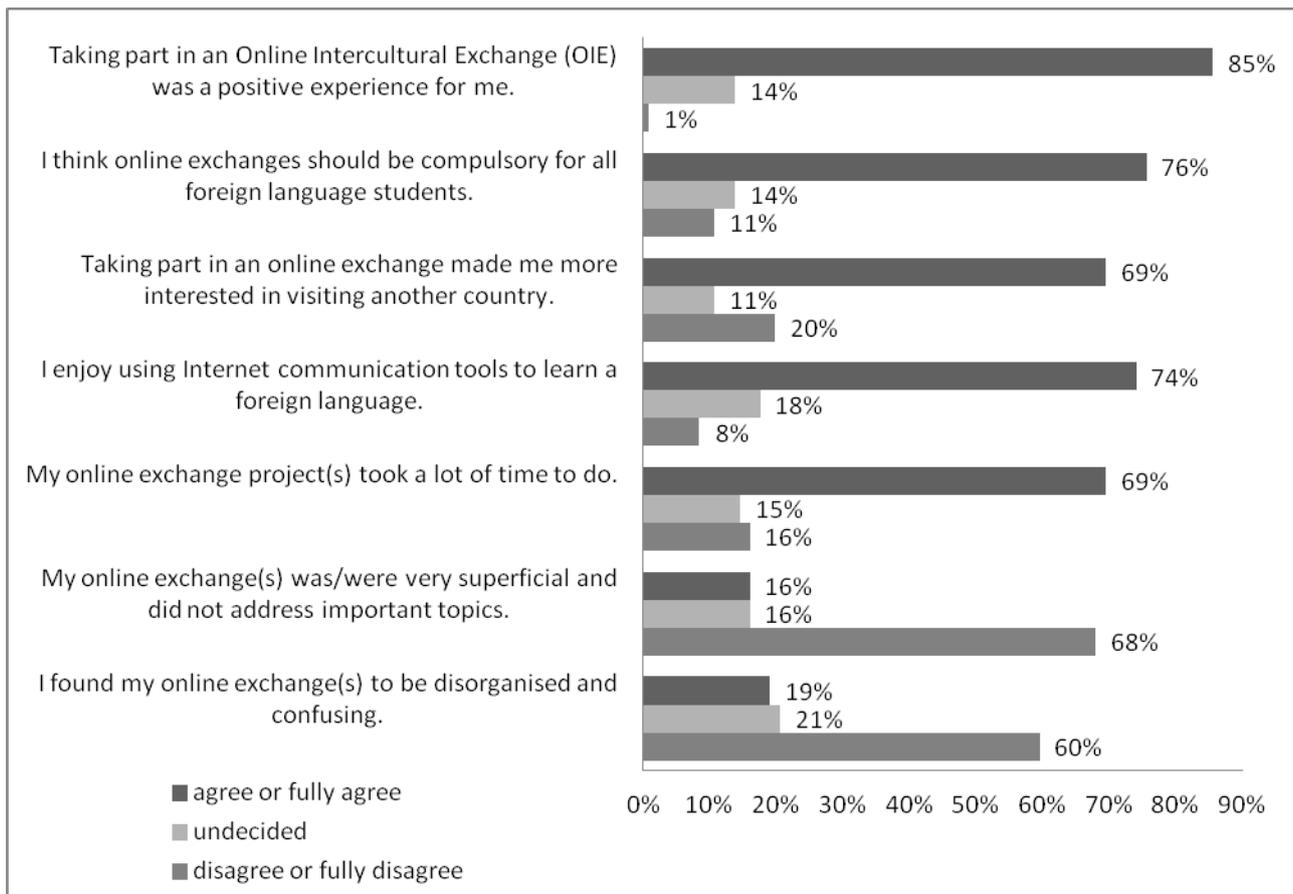


Figure 30: Student evaluation of OIEs.

Many students also report being more interested in visiting another country as a result of having participated in the exchange which, given the number of students in Europe going abroad on an Erasmus exchange cited above, seems to indicate that OIE might very well be a stimulus for greater interest in study abroad programmes. This finding further supports the case for the mainstreaming of OIE as part of universities' internationalization strategies

Despite the widespread belief that foreign languages should be learnt face to face, a considerable majority of respondents say they enjoy or appreciate using ICT for connecting up with other people as this student reports:

- I didn't really experience telecollaboration as an intercultural encounter but rather as an encounter 'tout court'³⁰ (FR_ST_14).
- Collaborating is always useful, whether it's at a distance or face to face³¹ (FR_ST_02)

Similar to the responses from the teacher surveys, most respondents to the student survey indicated that OIEs are time-consuming. The fact that students are rarely granted university credits for participation in OIEs may very well contribute to the sense of the exchanges 'taking up too much time' when students have numerous other tasks to complete for their credited courses, as these statements from responses to open questions about telecollaboration and problems encountered reveal

³⁰ *je n'ai pas vraiment vécu la télécollaboration sous l'angle d'une rencontre inter-culturelle, mais d'une rencontre tout court. (FR_ST_14)*

³¹ *Collaborer est toujours utile que ce soit à distance ou en présentiel (FR_ST_02)*

- I need to learn to divide my time – between studying and work³². (FR_ST_05)
- The time, because when you are at the university you haven't a lot of time. (EN_ST_46)

The statements regarding the quality and organization of their OIEs confirmed the general positive evaluation of OIE: 68% did *not* feel the project was superficial and 60% did *not* believe that the exchange was disorganized. Nonetheless, given the complexity of OIEs and the lack of support teachers receive, it is not surprising that 19% of respondents found their OIEs to be disorganised and confusing and 21% were undecided. Similarly, since setting up telecollaborative exchanges requires significant planning on the part of the partner teachers who often do not have enough time or support, it is not surprising that 16% of respondents judged their OIEs to be superficial and 16% were undecided.

The main problems reported by the students regarded technical issues; others were language issues, when they were not able to express themselves as they wished to or were not able to understand their peers, or misunderstandings arose. For a few students lack of immediate responses from their partners was problematic. Yet these problems are typical of intercultural communication in both face-to-face and online formats, hence encountering these in an OIE presents a developmentally rich opportunity for preparing students to deal with these issues.

- Sometimes we had technical problems which made our conversation very slow. people around the world speak English with many different accents; sometimes it was difficult understanding others (EN_ST_08).
- It takes a lot of time and sometimes it's difficult to talk without seeing your interlocutor³³ (FR_ST_45)
- It was difficult to explain my ideas in a way that could be understood by everyone and that not offended others. (EN_ST_42)

These comments suggest that students participating in OIEs are experiencing first-hand the challenges and rewards of communicating across linguistic, cultural, and perhaps also social class boundaries. As transcultural communication contexts become increasingly prevalent via processes of migration, immigration, professional and recreational travel, and Internet-mediated environments, the above student comments indicate that OIE can be seen as preparation for the increasingly plurilingual and polycultural environment that makes up the EU and broader global context.

³² *J'ai besoin d'apprendre à partager mon temps - des études et de travaille. (FR_ST_05)*

³³ *Sa prend beaucoup de temps et parfois c'est difficile de discuter sans voir la personne (FR_ST_45)*

5.3 What students learnt

In response to statements regarding their learning (Fig. 31), three quarters of respondents reported having learnt how to communicate better with people of other cultures, having learnt how to communicate more effectively online through OIE, and having improved their foreign language skills. As for developing skills which they think would make them more employable, 50% of respondents agreed.

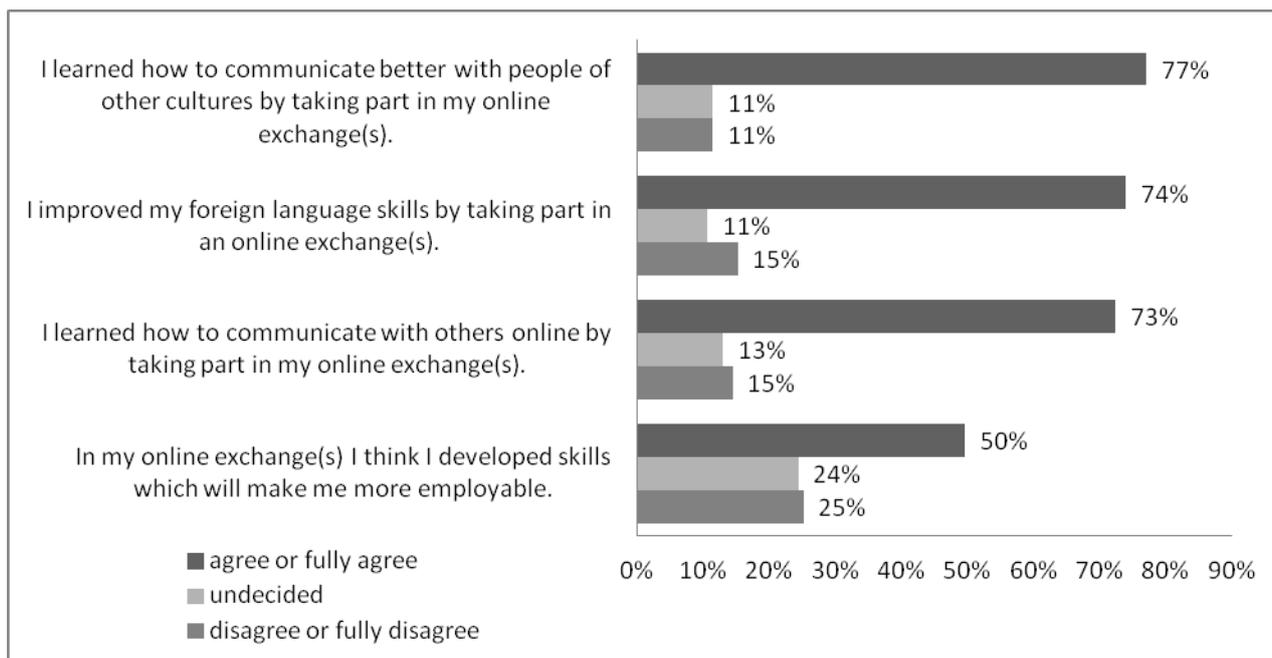


Figure 31: Student respondents' self-assessment of learning and skills developed.

Responses to the open question asking what skills they developed during the online exchanges that students thought would be helpful to them in their current or future jobs, however, seemed to provide evidence for the development of a wide range of skills, as the excerpts below illustrate, including linguistic, intercultural and communicative competences, as well as collaboration and the ability to work in a group, and skills relating specifically to the teaching or translating professions:

- I've been practising a lot of English. I know how an email conversation is like in English. I realized I should be less influenced by cultural stereotypes. (EN_ST_02)
- Cross-cultural dialogue skills -negotiation and facilitation skills (EN_ST_06)
- Patience and cooperation. (EN_ST_22)
- My English skills, both speaking and comprehension and some language teaching techniques. (EN_ST_41)
- I have developed the ability to work in a group³⁴. (FR_ST_04)

³⁴J'ai developpe la capacite de travailler en groupe. (FR_ST_04)

- I believe I've developed my ability to write in a foreign language and my knowledge regarding the use of ICT in foreign language teaching. I've been able to expand my vocabulary.³⁵ (FR_ST_08)
- Coordination and group work mainly (I was group leader)³⁶ (IT_ST_01)
- Managing relations with a client³⁷ (IT_ST_06)

5.4 Attitudes and beliefs

The survey results regarding attitudes and beliefs were diverse (Fig. 32), with responses to the statement "By doing my online exchange(s) I confirmed what I thought about members of other cultures" almost evenly divided across the scale. It is difficult to interpret this since no change may be seen as a positive thing by respondents, just as it may indicate a reinforcing of stereotypes. The next statement "By doing my online exchange(s) I changed my attitudes and beliefs about other cultures" is more precise and indicates a learning process that potentially includes increasing awareness and appreciation of diverse culture and language communities. 43% of respondents expressed agreement, 27% were undecided, and 30% disagree. Attitudes and beliefs are a notoriously difficult area in intercultural communication to study, interpret and assess and this complexity is reflected in the responses to this delimited attempt to explore them.

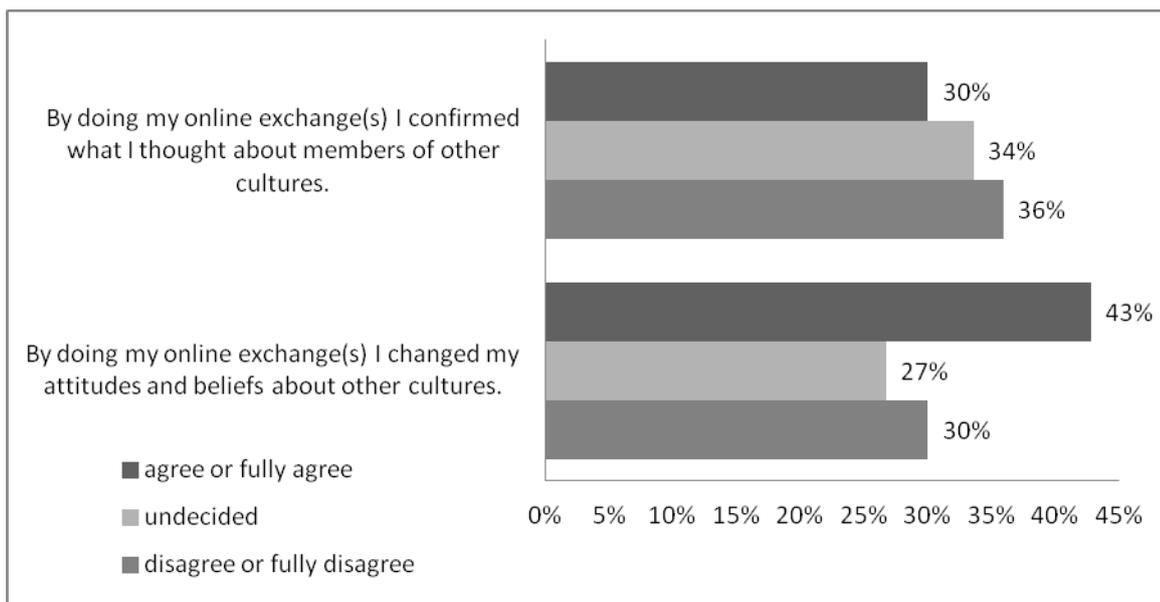


Figure 32: Student attitudes and beliefs (1).

Responses to open questions provide additional insights into the nature of changing attitudes and learning outcomes, indicating in some cases the development of intercultural communicative competence, awareness of stereotypes, and acceptance of difference. Below are a selection of responses to the question: What do you feel you learnt from this experience of working with people from another culture?

³⁵Je crois avoir développé mon expression écrite en LE et mes connaissances par rapport à l'emploi des TIC dans l'enseignement en LE. J'ai pu enrichir mon vocabulaire. (FR_ST_08)

³⁶Coordinazione e lavoro di gruppo, principalmente (ero il capogruppo) (IT_ST_01)

³⁷Gestire i rapporti con un cliente (IT_ST_06)

- That the cultural values of a country/region/family/person are not necessarily the "best or only" ones, and that we can indeed explore and appreciate other views and experiences. (EN_ST_14)
- The different attitudes they take when looking to the same issue or just the fact of breaking some the stereotypes we usually have when thinking about people from another country. (EN_ST_30)
- We are so different and no one could ever guess how this difference will show up (EN_ST_40)
- I've learnt about the culture, their standard of living, I've improved my English skills and I can compare now the Spanish educative system to the Northern Irish one. (EN_ST_41)
- I became more open towards other cultures and understand better other way of life (EN_ST_42)
- People's customs are different and you must keep an open mind. (EN_ST_43)
- A lot about their way of life and culture: how they live, what they eat, how they sort out their waste, what stereotypes they have about the French, etc.³⁸(FR_ST_32)

While the vast majority of respondents like discussing topics with people from different backgrounds, when asked about whether they felt it necessary to *avoid* sensitive topics the percentage of agreement and disagreement was almost the same, 37% and 38% respectively, and 24% were undecided (see Figure 33). This would seem to be representative of a general tradition in European education and socio-pragmatic norms that require people to avoid conflict as seen above with regard to the teacher surveys dealing with similar questions. The statement about disagreement, on the other hand, found more consensus, with 55% of respondents reporting that disagreement was useful in their OIE discussions. The fact that 30% were undecided and 15% did not find it useful might very well be indicative of the absence of topics that lead to disagreement.

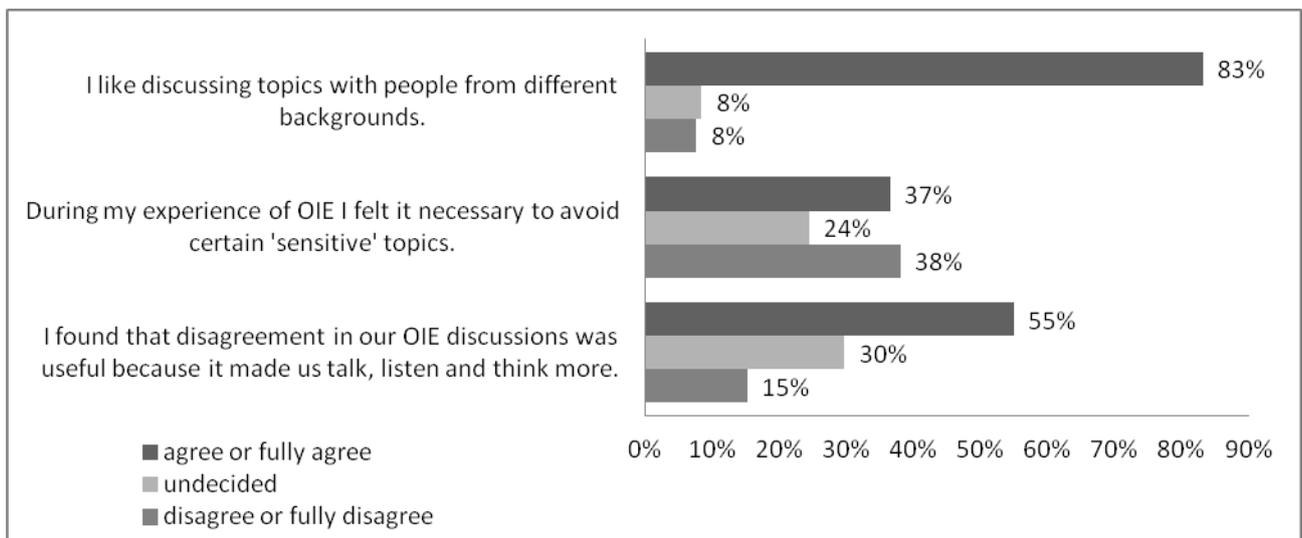


Figure 33: Student attitudes and beliefs (2).

³⁸ Beaucoup d'éléments concernant leur mode de vie et leur culture : leur manière de vivre, ce qu'ils mangent, comment ils trient, quels stéréotypes ils ont sur les Français, etc. (FR_ST_32)

6. Case studies of European university telecollaborative projects

Based on the ongoing analysis of the organisational problems and barriers to the take-up of telecollaboration at European universities, the project team collected various case studies of universities, partnerships and telecollaborative networks which provide a representative picture of the type of online intercultural exchanges which are being carried out around Europe and which have achieved a certain level of integration of telecollaboration into their institutions. We were particularly interested in identifying how both students and teachers receive credit or recognition for their exchanges, how exchanges are integrated into or alongside traditional language courses and how educators overcome the typical barriers which were mentioned in sections 1 and 4 of this report.

Table 4 below shows that the case reports represent students who are studying in a wide range of study areas (including Translation Studies, Business Studies, Teacher Training, French Philology and Engineering among others). Furthermore, these online exchanges have been provided to learners from an array of European countries including Ireland, the UK, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Denmark, Italy, Latvia and France. In most cases, the case studies report on specific exchanges which have been organised between two universities (for example The SW-US Exchange between Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg, Sweden and Clemson University, South Carolina, USA), however we have also included case studies of one university which is involved in multiple exchange projects (The University of Padua, Italy) and of a telecollaborative network of various universities who collaborate loosely together (The Trans-Atlantic Network) in an attempt to capture the different structures and set-ups which surround telecollaboration in Europe. For practical reasons, most of the case studies focus on how one of the two exchange partners ran and integrated the exchange in their institutions.

The case studies were collected using techniques which are common to this area of research (Nunan and Bailey, 2009). In some cases, the case studies were drawn up based on face-to-face interviews on campus in the universities in question – this was the case, for example, of Trinity College, Dublin; University of Padua, Italy and Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg, Sweden. In other cases, the main bulk of data was collected through synchronous interviews via Skype and through asynchronous interviews via email. In most cases, the interviews were carried out with the teachers who were carrying out the exchanges. However, whenever possible, senior management were contacted and asked for their views on the role of these exchanges in their institutions. This interview data was then complemented by the examination of institutional documentation as well as by reviewing the websites and platforms which had been developed for many of the projects. At several stages throughout the writing up process, the informants from the different universities were provided with drafts of the case studies and were then requested to confirm information or to develop certain issues which were still unclear to the authors.

An outline of these different case studies is presented in table 4 below.

Name of Exchange	Participating Institutions	Student Profile
The SW-US Exchange	Chalmers University of Technology, Göteborg, Sweden & Clemson University, South Carolina, USA	Engineering students in Sweden and English students in the USA
SpEakWise	Trinity College, Dublin, Ireland & University of Hildesheim, Germany	Students of German and business studies in Ireland and students of international information management and of international communication in Germany
Telecollaboration at Padua	The University of Padua, Italy & various partner universities and telecollaborative networks	Students of foreign languages in Italy with students from various study backgrounds
V-PaL	University of Manchester, UK & Universities of Cagliari and Macareta, Italy	Students of foreign languages in the UK and in Italy
The Trans-Atlantic Network	Vasa Universitet, Finland; UniversitàdegliStudi di Trieste and UniversitàdegliStudi di Padova, Italy; Université Paris—Denis Diderot, France; ÅrhusUniversitet, Denmark; Hogeschool Gent, Belgium; North Dakota State University and University of Wisconsin, USA	Students of translation studies in the European institutions and students of technical writing in the American institutions
Le Francais en Premiere Ligne	University of Latvia & University of Grenoble, France	Students of French in Latvia with students of foreign language education in France
TheClavier Project	UniversitéBlaise Pascal, Clermont-Ferrand, France & University of Warwick, UK	Students of sports sciences in France and students of various undergraduate degrees in the UK

Case Study 1: The SW-US Exchange: Swedish and American Engineers discuss poetry online

Background and Educational Context

This opening case study represents a fascinating example of cross-curricular collaboration between Engineering students at Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg, Sweden and students of English at Clemson University in Clemson, South Carolina, USA which has been ongoing since 2004. 'The intercultural poetry exchange' started and was designed as part of two university literature courses, Fiction for Engineers in Sweden and World Literature in the US.

The Engineering students at Chalmers come from a variety of engineering disciplines and are principally MSc students with most of their engineering programme completed. Students are taking degrees in computer science, mechanical engineering, biotechnology, chemical engineering and interaction design. They have a range of electives to choose from and one of these is the course "Fiction for Engineers" taught by Magnus Gustafsson. In a weekly class, the set texts are discussed and students are prepared for their portfolio assessment including a term paper assignment. Although English is not the first language of these students, the course is conducted in English like all the MSc courses at Chalmers and some of the electives.

Although it may seem curious to engage engineering students in a telecollaborative exchange about poetry, Magnus has a clear vision of why such projects are useful and relevant. He explains: "All engineering programmes have an MTS (Man, Technology, and Society) requirement. Courses offered under that requirement tend to be superficial attempts at showing engineering impact on society. The blog exchange gives students first a real authentic audience with which to interact in interpreting society (the poetry has had an angle on society/man/progress – Eliot, Tranströmer, Dickinson). Their encountering, sometimes for the first time since upper secondary, students from the humanities tends to serve as powerful insights into MTS and that their technologically infused perspective is fruitfully combined with other perspectives."

Their partner university, Clemson University, is a land-grant institution focused largely on the sciences and engineering, but also having a commitment to the arts and humanities. The students taking part in the exchange are mainly English majors in the first or second year of their university coursework who are taking part in courses including World Literature, Introduction to Literature, Victorian poetry, or teacher education. The class meets twice a week with the aim of developing skills in critical thinking, close reading, and interpretation through assignments based on a series of eight works spanning a literary history from the epic Beowulf to Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger* (2008).

The exchange came about due to personal contacts between Magnus Gustafsson, the head of the Division of Language and Communication at Chalmers University of Technology, and Art Young and

Donna Reiss two teacher/researchers at Clemson. The colleagues met at a conference and decided to set up the exchange in order to enhance their respective literature courses.

Structure of the Exchange

The actual exchange usually takes place for a period of approximately two weeks in the middle of the term when both classes are engaged in their respective literature courses. The students in both classes are required to analyse poems by well-known Swedish and American poets. When poems by Swedish poets are discussed, students are provided with the poems in the original language, Swedish, as well as translated versions in English by different translators.

Students are asked to analyse the poetry together in online blogs. Although there is no explicit teacher participation in the online interaction, students are provided with detailed guidelines of what to blog about and how to structure their online interaction. Students are usually required to contribute three entries to the blog discussion. The first post requires students to write about their initial reactions to the poems under discussion. This is followed by their second post which involves students' reaction to some of the contributions made by their partners in the first round of messages. The third and final message from each student contains further reactions to the poetry discussion and also has their reflections on the way the online exchange has contributed to their understanding of the poetry. The third post also gives the students the opportunity to use their e-literacy skills to create a multimedia reaction to the readings.

During the first years the open source platform *Claroline*, hosted at the Swedish university was used. However, this was later discarded in favour of the free online blogging tool *Blogger.com*.

As regards assessment, in Sweden, the poetry exchange forms part of the students' journal assignment and can be used as a starter for their term papers; whereas in Clemson, the exchange forms part of students' written responses to literature and underscores the international dimension of their study.

Overcoming Barriers and Challenges

While the participating teachers are convinced of the value of this type of exchange for their students, they admit that they would like to receive more recognition from their institutions for their work. Magnus and Linda, the collaborating teachers in Chalmers, explain: "We haven't received any support for course development and the exchange has not received any recognition outside the division. We would like the work to be recognized among colleagues elsewhere in the university as it caters to learning outcomes and the graduate profiles across many programmes. There are always financial barriers for course development and given the potential of intercultural online exchanges also for other courses in the engineering programmes one would have liked some support for the project at departmental and management levels too...".

However, the exchange has made a contribution to the international profile of the division in Sweden. For example, the activity is mentioned in division assessment procedures and it is cited in

department activity plans under the context of 'continued international collaboration'. The colleagues believe however that this telecollaborative project and others should receive more attention at the institutional level.

The project does seem to have made an impact at a research level. The colleagues involved have published various publications about the exchange and this has allowed them to enter into contact with colleagues working in the research area of Writing across the Curriculum (WAC) and with other English writing departments in the USA. Linda also reports that "...the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) area in Scandinavia has shown an interest in the work we do, through exchanges like this one".

The exchange has had other positive effects on the Swedish division. For example, the colleagues say that it has served to establish a solid, lasting relationship with the partner university. They have received several visits from these partner faculties in the USA and have also visited them several times. Furthermore, based on the success of the exchange, another exchange with Miami University in Ohio has been established. This came about when Professor Paul Anderson attended a conference presentation about the exchange in 2008. Magnus and Paul started a conversation about how the blog or the exchange idea could also be used for courses in technical communication and the first run of an exchange was set up in the fall of 2008 with a technical writing course at MU and an elective 'English for Engineers' at Chalmers. Magnus was involved in setting it up but the Chalmers course was taught by Becky Bergman.

Conclusion

The SW-US Exchange is an interesting example of how students from very different academic areas (in this case engineering and English) can be brought together for an exchange which will help to develop basic transversal skills in both sets of students. The exchange also demonstrates that, while online exchanges may not receive much recognition on a departmental or institutional level, they can provide a way for academics to establish rich working relationships with colleagues in other countries and to provide a concrete and practical approach to international cooperation between universities.

The colleagues at Chalmers see the key to success in online exchange projects to be access to a network of practitioners and researchers who are working on similar telecollaborative ventures: Linda explains: "It is building up long-term relationships on a personal level which hopefully get extended. Also, conferences, workshops and other collaborative meeting spaces where the exchanges can be presented are important elements to meet up and share experiences." Magnus also underlines the importance of the work and commitment of his telecollaborative colleagues in Clemson:

"Donna Reiss' long experience in online learning and her strong commitment to learning rather than teaching and Art Young's depth in literature and his learning perspective focus were both components that helped make the exchange as successful as it has been and necessary conditions I believe for its sustainability. They also helped to find a colleague who could carry on their end of the exchange when they retired (Cameron Bushnell) who has since been central to the development of the exchanges in 2010 and 2011."

We hope that outcomes of the INTENT project, such as the series of workshops and conferences and the uni-collaboration.eu website, will serve to provide colleagues with the network of support and the outlet for presenting experiences which Linda and Magnus refer to here.

Case Study 2: SpEakWise at Trinity College Dublin

Educational Background and Context

The SpEakwise online exchange has been running for almost five years at Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland with different partner institutions from German-speaking countries. The project organisers at Trinity, Helen O'Sullivan, Breffni O'Rourke and Gillian Martin, chose the name SpEakWise because they wanted the project to raise awareness of issues around communication. The capital E in the title was intended as a recognition of the role of technology in the project.

The student group in Dublin which takes part in this exchange is in its final year of a Bachelors degree in Business Studies and German. The exchange forms part of a 5 ECTS subject in 'InterkulturelleWirtschaftskommunikation' (Intercultural Business Communication) which aims to explore "...the theoretical and practical dimensions of communicating in intercultural settings". The course runs for two semesters but the SpEakwise exchange takes place during the first 12 weeks in the first term between October and December and during the month of January. The course in Dublin has three hours allocated per week. During the first semester, two of these hours are dedicated to the study and discussion of course content and one hour takes place in the computer laboratory and is dedicated to the exchange. In Trinity there are three teachers who collaborate in the course and all three are comfortable with and interested in the telecollaborative exchange. Gillian Martin, one of the colleagues in Trinity, sees the online interaction as "...putting into practice the theoretical concepts" of the rest of the course.

Initially, the exchange ran for one year with a group of English Studies (Anglistik) students at the University of Vienna but this original partnership ended due to a change in teaching staff in the Austrian institution. Since then, for the past four years the coordinating teachers in Trinity have worked with the University of Hildesheim in Germany. The Hildesheim students come from various degree programmes including students taking degrees in International Information Management, International Communication and Translation Studies.

Contact was originally made with Hildesheim by personal connections between colleagues at both universities who had worked together previously in other research activities. Since the exchange has been set up, there have been different teachers involved, but all have been willing to maintain the exchange. The colleagues at Trinity consider it vital that the head of department at Hildesheim has supported the exchange. This has meant that the exchange has been continued even when teaching staff have moved on.

Structure of the Exchange

The SpEakWise exchange is based loosely on the original Cultura project and involves various intercultural activities (Furstenburg et al, 2001). The exchange takes place mainly in a Moodle platform and involves various tasks which are carried out in and outside of class-time and which involve communication in both sets of students' target languages – German and English. The tasks involve asynchronous communication in discussion fora combined with synchronous discussions in

text-based chat as well as group-to-group videoconferencing sessions. The Moodle platform is praised by the Trinity team as it provides asynchronous fora, chat tools as well as enabling students to identify themselves with photos. Positive feedback on the platform has also been received from the Hildesheim users.

The tasks in the exchange are varied but all have a cultural focus and aim to raise students' awareness of the role of culture in communication and of the perceptions which different societies can have of each other. The tasks include making introductory videos of students' home environments, exploring notions of collective cultural memory by observing street names, statues and stamps and discussing what they tell about each culture, word association questionnaires similar to those used in *Cultura*, discourse completion activities which encourage students to compare the realization of particular speech acts in their L1 and the L2, synchronous chat discussion sessions and, finally, videoconferencing sessions where small groups of German and Irish students role-play business negotiations. This final task is seen as particularly relevant for the Irish students who are all studying for a degree in Business Studies.

In interviews with students carried out for this report, the exchange received a great deal of praise. They welcomed the chance to use their German language skills in authentic communication situations with their partners in Hildesheim and they were also aware that apart from their language skills, they are also developing communicative skills and self-presentation skills which will later serve them in their careers in international business.

Barriers and Challenges

The barriers which the Trinity team have encountered are quite representative of the challenges which most university educators encounter when running telecollaborative exchanges. First, there are various technical impediments to running the exchange. Due to technical support limitations, Skype online telephony has not been installed to date for students in the university computer laboratories. This means that the team have not been able to integrate a tool which students are very comfortable with and which would allow free one-to-one videoconferencing. They also report that Moodle will no longer be available to them in the coming years as it is being replaced on an institutional level by Blackboard Learn 9.1 in September 2012. During the first three years of the exchange, WebCT was used as it was the platform supported at institutional level. However, both students and staff involved in the project found WebCT to be not very intuitive and, therefore, were happy to be selected in the piloting of Moodle. Having had very positive experiences with Moodle, they will now have to switch to another platform.

The Trinity team also encounter the widespread dilemma of not being able to attribute a significant amount of the students' final grade for their work on the project. As it currently stands, students in Trinity do not receive any academic credit for their work on the online exchange project. The teachers explain that the Intercultural Business Communication module feeds into the students' final degree mark. With this in mind, the course teachers are unwilling to risk students receiving a low mark due to a lack of successful communication with their German partners. Gillian explains: "If things don't work out in terms of communication between the students...this could lower their final marks... There are too many 'unpredictables' which could have serious

ramifications for the students.” These unpredictables may be technical and/or social in origin. Instead of awarding credit, the teachers explain that they present the exchange to students as something practical and potentially beneficial for their future careers – giving them practical insights into intercultural negotiations, the use of videoconferencing etc. In Hildesheim, the students have received 4 credits for participating in Speakwise for the first time in 2011-2012. Until then it had been an optional extra course and non-credit bearing.

Apart from these problems related to technologies and awarding credit, the exchange has also encountered the common problems related to incompatibility in the two universities’ timetables. Both universities begin and end their terms on different dates and teachers at both institutions need to invest considerable time each year trying to ensure that their classes’ timetables will coincide the following year in order to be able to hold synchronous chat and videoconferencing sessions. Despite these attempts, three dates for synchronous chat sessions posed scheduling problems during this year’s exchange due to events in the different institutions such as ‘Study week’ at Trinity College and ‘Open days’ at Hildesheim.

Integration and Overcoming Barriers

The academic, organisational and technical barriers outlined above provide a typical ‘case in point’ of the problems which university educators who are seeking to run telecollaborative exchanges are meeting on a day-to-day basis. However, this case study does offer an example of how educators can provide a useful and successful exchange structure for their students on a scale which is manageable and adaptable to developments in the partner institutions. Another member of the Trinity team, Breffni O’Rourke, pointed out, for example, one of the possible advantages of this exchange being an ‘add-on’ and not being fully integrated into the course programme with academic credit: “The positive thing is that if it [the exchange] did fail one year, it’s not dragging everything else down with it”. He also pointed to an important aspect of successful telecollaborative exchanges: He suggests that these exchanges can “gather momentum” and if an exchange has worked successfully for, for example, four years, it is more likely to be maintained by new incoming teachers and department heads.

Although the exchange has now been running in Trinity with different partner institutions for five years, the tutors readily admit that colleagues had been generally unaware of the project until very recently. This began to change in 2010 when the project was awarded *The European Language Label*, an EU-funded award which recognises creative and innovative ways to improve the quality of language teaching and learning around Europe. This has served to bring a certain amount of prestige to the project in the local institution and to raise awareness among staff and students of the value of this exchange. The course website proudly announces the award, as well as providing links to presentations and publications which have been based on the intercultural exchange.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this exchange provides an example of a relatively small-scale telecollaborative project which has successfully integrated a virtual exchange component into an interdisciplinary degree course in Business Studies and German. The keys to the project's success would appear to be the commitment of various staff members in Trinity and Hildesheim as well as the support of heads of department in the respective institutions. While the exchange has failed to achieve integration in terms of awarding formal academic credit to its students on the Trinity side, this has also allowed some flexibility which has helped the exchange to prosper.

Case Study 3: Telecollaboration at the University of Padova, Italy: an active, yet unsustainable, process

Educational Background and Context

The University of Padova was selected for a case study because a considerable number of educators have been implementing telecollaboration for different languages for over a decade despite the fact that they have all faced barriers and little institutional support for this activity. One significant step that has been achieved is that since 2010, students are now awarded credits (ECTS) for participation in telecollaboration projects outside of language courses, as opposed to telecollaboration being an add-on to a language course.

The University of Padova is a large public university with 13 faculties and over 50,000 students in the north-east of Italy. The University's Language Centre co-ordinates language teaching for much of the university, organizes language testing and language courses for incoming and outgoing Erasmus students and carries out numerous other activities and services for the University. There are 43 language teachers who work at the centre offering the following languages: English, French, Spanish, German, Russian, Hungarian, Portuguese, Modern Greek, Dutch, and Italian as a Foreign Language. The Language Centre, which was set up in 1999, has 4 computer labs, and has invested considerably in CALL (computer-assisted language learning). Until the recent budget cuts, the language teachers often attended national and international conferences, often presenting on CALL-related topics. The Language Centre is a member of the national association of language centres (AICLU) and the European association Cercles, and has hosted several of these organization's seminars and workshops, as well as the first EUROCALL CMC SIG workshop in 2008.

All degree courses have a compulsory English language exam though there is not English language teaching provision for all students. In some faculties there are typically over 50 students per class for English language lessons and at times also for Spanish and French classes. The development of intercultural competence is not included in any of the foreign language curricula.

Several language teachers have set up telecollaboration projects through personal initiative and contacts rather than any sort of mandate from the Language Centre or departments and faculties. Occasional in-service workshops have been held on technologies used for CMC and Web 2.0 technologies. However, it is largely through informal exchanges between colleagues and when attending conferences that information and knowledge is shared about the practice of telecollaboration and new projects set up. Unfortunately most projects have a limited lifetime of at most a few years.

Overcoming Barriers and Challenges

Although many projects have been carried out, practitioners at the university have encountered many of the common barriers to telecollaboration. These are related to issues such as the status of language teachers at the institution, technology issues, high student numbers, time and the issue of finding reliable partners.

In Italy, most foreign language teachers (called 'collaboratori edesperti linguistici' or CEL) are not academic staff with full responsibility for credit-bearing courses in degree programmes, but rather technical staff theoretically 'collaborating', as the name indicates, with professors. Consequently, they are not in a position to influence the development of course curricula, award credits for student participation in exchanges, or participate in department, faculty and university meetings in which internationalization policies are discussed. CEL courses are just one part of credit-bearing language courses and decisions regarding the official programme published and course assessment lie with the professor responsible for the whole course. At the same time, particularly in the non-humanities faculties where there is, in fact, no language professor, CEL have a certain degree of autonomy when developing their language courses, giving them the freedom to implement telecollaboration courses 'at their own risk'.

As regards technology, the University Language Centre initially adopted the proprietary FirstClass[®] computer conferencing software for computer-assisted language learning, but is currently switching to Moodle. Whilst teachers were happy using FirstClass[®] for exchanges based on asynchronous written communication, it was at times complicated to use for exchanges since partner classes had to be provided with accounts and passwords (and each password bore a cost). Another issue that arose, and continues to persist even using open source tools such as Moodle, is that if exchanges use a tool hosted on a server at one of the universities which is password access only, not only do students no longer have access to the material they have created during an exchange, but often the partner teachers do not either as the host university 'owns' the material. Indeed, the shut-down of FirstClass[®] has essentially cut language teachers off from an immense repository of data regarding telecollaboration exchanges at the University.

In order to avoid the problems of ownership of student-created content and one institution's control over a tool, some teachers opted to use freely available Web 2.0 tools for their telecollaboration projects. However, this led to another series of problems. Given the limited number of computer laboratories at the University, and the limited amount of time they are not occupied by courses, the Language Centre (and not only) has adopted a very strict policy regarding what students can and cannot do in the labs. The technicians set up firewalls that impeded students from accessing any Web 2.0 site, from blogs to social networks, as well as their personal email accounts. It is worth pointing out that students, upon admission to the University, are provided with a .unipd email account but very few students ever use it and continue to use their personal accounts. When approached by language teachers eager to use tools such as blogs, wikis and Skype, the response of the technicians was that the lab was for learning and not for fun. Although some technicians might have seen the educational value of using these social networking tools for telecollaboration, in the absence of any definitive policy from the Language Centre, the firewalls remained in place. In the end a senior technician took it upon himself to install Skype and

to allow access to Web 2.0 tools such as Blogger and PBwiki using a particular browser. This allowed the CEL to move beyond asynchronous text exchange to audio conferencing using Skype. This process highlights the importance of communication between administrative, technical and teaching staff in establishing telecollaboration as a normal practice. When this communication is absent, we find a situation like that in Padova where exchanges work only when there is the will on the part of at least two members of these three players to implement the project.

Undoubtedly limited financial resources are also a barrier. The choice to use Web 2.0 tools was also determined by the fact that it would be at no cost for the universities involved. However, equipping a language lab for telecollaboration requires both technical staff and equipment. With regards to the former, there is not enough technical staff to provide cover during exchange sessions to resolve technological problems when they arise. This means that language teachers often find themselves dealing not only with teaching and learning issues, but also the technical issues. Consequently, teachers who do not feel technologically competent tend to avoid telecollaboration. Regarding the latter, acquiring headsets for audio communication was a significant sign of progress, but webcams could not be installed since the labs are also available for for self-access and there was a risk of theft during unsupervised periods.

There is also significant debate and concern among technicians and administrative staff regarding privacy. As in many universities in Europe and abroad, the advent of social networking and Web 2.0 has created a series of 'unknowns' that are only being dealt with as they arise. Due to lack of resources, the most practical response on the part of administrative and technical staff is to limit access rather than explore new possibilities.

Finally, finding partnerships which work well is a further issue which teachers have found very important. The fact that exchanges have continued with one of the US partners (Nicoletta Marini-Maio) since 2002, despite her changing universities in the US is an indication that the partnerships worked well, and that educators on both sides were satisfied with the exchange and when teachers at Padova were not able to do an exchange, the contact was passed on to other colleagues.

Integration and overcoming barriers

To overcome these barriers as best as possible, the practitioners at Padova have come up with various strategies.

Interculturewiki

Interculturewiki was set up by Sarah Guth, a language teacher at the University of Padova, to overcome some of barriers discussed above, such as the limitations of FirstClass[®] and the lack of support from technical staff. Interculturewiki is located on a free remote hosting service offered by PBwiki, which has targeted in particular the academic community. While permissions and access were quite limited when she first implemented it in 2006, since then PBwiki has made numerous improvements so that now pages can be password-protected and .pdf files of student-created

content easily downloaded. The PBwiki team have always responded within a few hours when there were technical problems and the tool is very user-friendly. More importantly, perhaps, is that other colleagues have used Interculturewiki for their own exchanges because they can easily cut, paste and copy pages in the wiki such as course description and calendar, hence reducing the amount of time that must be invested in developing a project. In other words, rather than re-inventing the wheel each time, through respectful sharing of contents on a wiki, it has been possible to carry out numerous exchanges, each of which has improved on and differentiated itself from the initial exchanges. Finally, language teachers at the University have appreciated the fact that the software is easy to use freeing them from their dependence on technicians.

OIEs as optional extra activity for ECTS credits

Since 2010, students in the large language classes in the Modern Languages Department and the Faculty of Political Science have been offered 3 ECTS credits for telecollaboration. They may opt for this as an alternative to work placements, which are hard to come by, particularly for those enrolled in first-level degrees. This arrangement is intended to address the problem of large class sizes, as well as offering those interested in telecollaboration ECTS credits for their participation and commitment. A limited number of places can thus be offered and students are assigned to the exchange on a first-come, first-served basis. This possibility has become part of the official course program of Modern Languages and Literature in such a way that students may attain 3 ECTS for participation in telecollaboration (virtual exchange) or Erasmus (study abroad) in the place of an internship inasmuch as these activities are useful for students' future work. In the Political Science Faculty exchanges which deal with content related to the courses have been set up, for instance Human Rights in Italy and Guatemala and the Soliya Connect Program (see Appendix 1), where students receive 6 ECTS for full participation.

Outsourcing telecollaboration

At the faculty of Political Science a form of 'outsourced' telecollaboration has been adopted. The Faculty pays a fee to Soliya (www.soliya.net) and ten places are made available for students to participate in the Soliya Connect Program, a telecollaboration project designed for students of International Relations, Media Studies, Conflict Resolution and similar disciplines. Since the program is carried out in English, the lecturer in charge of the English course for Political Science, Francesca Helm, has offered this as an alternative to the credit-bearing English course for those students who are already at an advanced level of English. The advantages of outsourcing are that the very complex organizational and technical aspects, as well as the curriculum itself, are set up by Soliya so the university professor does not need to dedicate much time to these, even though a certain degree of technical support is still required locally. How much the professor becomes involved in the program is a personal choice and at the University of Padova, Francesca Helm is quite involved with her students through a course blog and bi-weekly seminars relating to the project. In other universities where the program has been adopted professors either organize their whole courses around the program, or leave the Connect Program as an independent module.

Harnessing support of doctoral students and other staff members

A PhD student at the Department of Modern Languages, Marta Guarda, chose telecollaboration as the subject of her thesis after her experience of two projects, and since starting her doctoral thesis

has become involved in several telecollaboration projects supporting her professor. Most recently she has set up her own project involving students from the Modern Languages department and the University of Innsbruck, for which participating students in Padova receive 3 ECTS credits.

Some of the students at the Faculty of Political Science who participated in the Soliya Connect Program subsequently followed a facilitator training course online with Soliya. Subsequently they became facilitators for a small telecollaboration project involving students from the University of Padova, University of Jordan, University of Amsterdam and University of Kuwait.

The Language Centre set up face-to-face Tandem Learning between students and staff of the University of Padova and Erasmus and Boston University students in Padova for their semester and/or year abroad *before* their arrival in Padova. Since it was impossible to meet all the requests for English language Tandem partners, after speaking to the coordinator of the Boston University Program in Padova, the secretary at the Language Centre set up an eTandem project with the support of technical staff and a student who is doing a work placement at the Language Centre. The student is now doing her dissertation on this small project using an action research framework, and a proposal for a second round is being prepared. The student is now doing her dissertation on this small project and using an action research framework, and a proposal for a second round is being prepared.

Conclusion

There has been significant teacher initiative at the University of Padova and the overall positive experiences of the first teachers to set up projects spread to colleagues encouraging them to embark on similar projects. In particular, the success of telecollaboration at the Faculty of Modern Languages and Literature is due to students' positive reaction to the experience, i.e. although it might require extra work (initially without any credits), students encouraged their classmates to sign up for telecollaboration projects because they had found it relevant and stimulating. There has also been a move from proprietary software to freely available Web 2.0 software as colleagues shared with one another the fact that these tools worked, in addition to a move from bilingual exchanges to lingua franca exchanges using not only English as a lingua franca, but Spanish and Hungarian as well. Nonetheless, exchanges often don't last for more than one semester. Considering the amount of energy and commitment setting up these projects involves, this degree of turnover is unfortunate. The causes can be linked to lack of administrative and technical support in addition to the lack of decision-making power language teachers have. Although progress regarding the awarding of credits has been made, telecollaboration at the University of Padova will only become a sustainable activity if it becomes an integral part of course curricula and if language teachers are provided with consistent and adequate administrative and technical support as well as the necessary number of paid hours.

Case Study 4: V-PAL (Virtual Partnerships for All Languages) at the University of Manchester

Educational Background and Context

The V-PAL (Virtual Partnerships for All Languages) has been running for the past four years at the University of Manchester in the UK and engages students of Italian in online oral interaction with partners in different Italian institutions. The exchange caters for students at Manchester who are studying a joint honours degree in two Modern Languages. However, the project also serves other students who may be studying a pure degree in Italian, or Italian with another non-language subject, such as law, business, history of art.

Similar to other case studies, the tutor and online exchange organiser in Manchester, Elena Polisca, recounts that she initially found it difficult to find partner universities through official channels to participate in telecollaborative exchanges with her students. As is often the case, it was through a personal contact with a colleague from Cagliari, Sardinia who was visiting Manchester that she was able to set up the first online partnership. This was soon followed by a second virtual partnership with the University of Macerata thanks to a colleague who had left Manchester to work in that Italian institution.

Elena explains the reasons why she took the initiative to set up the exchanges in the following way: “I believe in peer-to-peer tandem work for lingua-cultural purposes. I also want to provide my students with extra opportunities to learn about my language and culture outside the classroom. I am also very interested in e-learning, and naturally, these two aspects merged.”

Structure of the Exchange:

Students at Manchester participating in the exchange meet their individual partners virtually through Skype on a weekly basis and have to produce a portfolio of language activities that have been designed by Elena and her colleagues. The students have to take part in a minimum of 8 weekly virtual meetings via Skype in order to complete the course successfully. The tasks have a strong lingua-cultural focus and students have to discuss a topic of their choice from within the course booklet. These topics include getting to know each other, Folklore and Traditions, The Media, Young People’s Language, Sport, Accommodation, etc. Students can also create their own topic prior to agreement with their course tutor. After each topic, the students have to do a write-up exercise in Italian to report what the conversation was about and to reflect on what they have learnt from the online session. They then send the rough copy of this report to their Italian partner, who corrects any language errors. This final draft is then added to the students’ portfolio for later evaluation by their course tutor. Apart from these student Skype meetings, students also attend two online seminars via the University of Manchester's VLE Blackboard. In the seminars, students from all the participating universities come together to discuss two topics, one in each language.

As regards assessment, students receive 50% of their final mark for their portfolio work, 15% for their oral performance during the recorded Skype sessions, 10% based on peer assessment and 25% based on their end-of-year exam.

Overcoming Barriers and Challenges:

Elena admits that setting up and running the exchange each year is very time-consuming and that she would appreciate more administrative support. However she recognises that this will be difficult to achieve. She explains: “Our support staff is already overworked and the whole set-up is down to me every year (forming students dyads, etc.) for every single little detail. More technical support would also be welcome. The e-learning team has been helpful, but sometimes they don't know how to answer my queries, which is time-consuming...”

She also highlights the coordination problems which can arise as she tries to suit the needs and timetables of her own students and those in her Italian partner universities. She mentions, for example, that her partner tutors at Cagliari are keen for their students to have their virtual sessions at their Language centre during class time and not during the students' own free time. This means that both tutors have to coordinate two-hour slots during the week when both sets of students are in class and online together. She also recognises the challenges of collaborating with colleagues in the Italian universities using only virtual communication tools: “It can also be difficult to understand what your colleagues want out of the scheme [the exchange] if you are only communicating via email and sometimes on Skype. It's difficult to have transparency.” To avoid the instability which can occur when working with distant colleagues, she drew up a contract agreement with them which outlined the basic structure of the course and ensured the commitment of the collaborating partner tutors to maintain the exchange until its conclusion each year.

However, Elena has made a major step towards the integration of these exchanges by achieving the recognition of these courses as official credit-bearing modules in her institution. After the projects had been run on a trial basis for two years, Elena decided that should become an integral part of the existing curriculum in order to justify the time investment on the part of both the tutors and the students. Following negotiations with her head of department, her proposal for two credit-bearing course units (for students in their second and final years of study) were brought to the School's Undergraduate Programmes Committee who approved them immediately. Since then, the V-PAL courses are optional courses which are offered along with the core language courses. Each course lasts one semester and is worth 10 UK credits. (Students in the Italian institutions receive 6 ECTS) For students who take these courses and eventually graduate, the courses will appear on their degree transcript alongside all their other courses. Both these online exchange courses also appear in the University's directory of course units, which is published online by the language department. These courses get the same coverage as any other 'bigger', conventional face-to-face course.

As regards the impact which these online exchange-based courses have had on her colleagues, Elena has this to say: “I think some colleagues are genuinely impressed, but when they realise the amount of work it takes to set such thing up they are a little discouraged. And to be honest, unless it becomes a credit-bearing module, staff will have to do it above their day-to-day workload, which

could become unfeasible (and it did exactly that for me, which is why – partly – I wanted to get formal recognition for them).”

Senior management at Manchester see the value of such exchanges for the university’s international profile and developing its internationalisation policy. Prof. Mathew Jeffries, Assistant Associate Dean in the Faculty of Humanities, says that “...the University recognises the value of online intercultural exchange as part of its growing internationalisation. While much attention has been focused on the University’s research standing...this kind of project can also play a part in raising the institution’s international profile. It is conceivable, for instance, that links established via V-PAL could develop into full-blown ERASMUS exchange agreements...”.

He also acknowledges that the key to the success of this exchange has been its integration into the formal academic programme at the university: “Key to its success has been the fact that it is a credit-rated unit, formally integrated into the curriculum, and not just an optional extra. Thus students have the opportunity to improve their language skills in a relaxed and informal manner, yet still acquire credit for it.” However, the commitment and expertise of a motivated telecollaborative teacher is also vital for the exchange’s success: “...it is clear that they require a dedicated individual to organise and maintain them, and here Italian has benefited very much from the involvement of Dr Elena Polisca”.

In conclusion, the V-Pal exchange represents a fascinating example of an exchange that has moved from being a peripheral add-on activity to a fully-recognised and credit-carrying course for students at the University of Manchester. This has been achieved by the enthusiasm and hard-work of the collaborating tutors, but also by its integration into a carefully structured and evaluated course and by the recognition by management at the University that such online exchange can be a valuable part of a language students’ university education.

Case Study 5: The Trans-Atlantic Network (Various European Universities)

Educational Background and Context:

In contrast to other telecollaborative scenarios presented here, this case study does not focus on how an online exchange is run and has an impact on a particular university. Instead, this project serves to demonstrate how a large number of educators can establish a workable on-going system of exchange based on common themes of study in their institutions – in this case technical writing and translation studies. The Trans-Atlantic project is a loose network of European universities in Finland (Vasa Universitet), Italy (Università degli Studi di Trieste and, more recently, Università degli Studi di Padova), France (Université Paris—Denis Diderot), Denmark (Århus Universitet) and Belgium (Hogeschool Gent) working with two universities in the USA (North Dakota State University and the University of Wisconsin) which has engaged several thousand students in online collaboration over the past 12 years. The members describe themselves as a ‘grassroots network’ which connects technical writing students in the USA with students of translation studies across Europe.

The project is worthy of interest in that it is a representative example of how educators in various universities can engage their classes in telecollaborative exchange in a dynamic yet structured manner, thereby sharing experiences, good practice and partners to the benefit of a large number of students. Birthe Moustén, the project coordinator in Denmark explains the logic behind the exchanges in the following way: “The thread throughout these exchanges is the dialogue to communicate on a text, negotiate with people and mediate the text into the right text and message for the target audience.”

Structure of the Exchange:

In a network of universities as diverse as this one, it is not surprising that exchanges develop in different ways, depending on the classes and universities involved in each particular bi-lateral project. However, all exchanges have the common aim of providing their students with first-hand experience of the process of authoring and translating technical texts.

Usually, the bi-lateral exchanges work in the following way: Students from the partner universities in the USA (studying degrees in English and Technical Communication) are engaged in the writing of an original set of instructions (for example, for building a connecting wall, cleaning a gun, assembling a bicycle, hitting proper golf shots). The Americans are then paired with students in one of their European partner universities. After having shared some information with their partner about their personal and academic backgrounds, the American students send their original texts to their European partners. The European students (usually Translation Studies undergraduates) then carry out translations of these texts into their native language. They use online communication tools such as wikis, Skype or email to clarify with their American partners certain aspects of the original text and discuss potential cultural problems in the translation. When the text has been successfully translated and localized for the target culture, the partners then meet in a videoconference for a debriefing and a discussion on the process and results of the project.

Apart from this basic model of exchange, different bilateral exchanges may have added characteristics. For example, in the case of exchanges between Trieste and the USA, the Italian project leader Federica Scarpa also requires students to provide a print-out of their email exchange (to check the relevance of the questions they have asked their partner) and to produce a brief report of the project (describing aspects such as work methodology, difficulties encountered and their solutions). Some translations are also selected randomly to be discussed and evaluated in class. These final reports and other 'post-exchange' activities are used in other bilateral exchanges as well.

The exchanges tend not to be fully integrated into study programmes at the different participating institutions as the exchanges change from year to year. For example, John Humbley at Université Paris-Denis Diderot explains: "The exchanges do not in any way figure in the university guides, because we are never quite sure how they are going to work. They are slotted into either translation or technical writing courses and the evaluation is a substitute for a similar exercise done alone. But the students' participation is evaluated in their continuous assessment."

Overcoming Barriers and Challenges:

Participants in the projects mention many of the common challenges and problems in online exchanges. For example, many bilateral exchanges in the network have encountered that the misalignment of calendars between European and American universities means that exchanges can only take place during a short period of time. Exchanges between Trieste and North Dakota State University, for example, only have a two-week time frame, usually at the end of November, during which documents of around 1500 words have to be discussed and translated. Similarly, exchanges between Paris and Wisconsin have an "exchange window" from early October to early December. To deal with this limitation, partner teachers draw up a detailed calendar of exchange which details on a week-by-week basis what each partner class should be doing. This helps to make students clear about their responsibilities at each stage of the exchange and ensures that the exchange can be completed on schedule before the term comes to an end.

Transatlantic time differences are also a challenge for organizing and running videoconferencing sessions between partner groups. In order to deal with this problem, coordinators announce the dates and times of the videoconference sessions at the beginning of the semester so that students have time to enter the sessions in their timetables. Furthermore, coordinators make sure that students come to the videoconference sessions well prepared with concrete questions and topics for discussion with their partners. In this way, the videoconferences are focused and lead to enlightening discussions between the groups.

Apart from the obstacle of limited contact time together, partner classes often encounter other typical problems related to online exchanges such as the occasional lack of reliability of partner students and a lack of support and interest from the home institution. For example, Federica Scarpa, project coordinator at Trieste, reports that "...the only problems encountered deal with the occasional failure of our partner students to actually take part in the project or to respond to the Trieste students' enquiries". She also explains that one of the pluses of the exchange is that

her students have to learn to deal with both having to translate source texts which are not always well written and technical compatibility problems while working on the exchange. As for the latter, she says that her exchanges often involve "...technical problems related to file formats that Italian students – who are students of translation and therefore generally less computer-literate than their US counterparts, who are studying to become technical communicators – have to cope with".

Another participant in the project is quite negative about the impact the project has had in her institution: "My university, I'm afraid, has not really responded to my work in this regard. Indifference is the word, I'd say. Some of my colleagues have been interested and supportive, but the university has not. And, I'm afraid, the decision-makers at our university have not recognised my work in this regard as being valuable. This means that I basically see it as my personal project, and I do not really involve anybody in it anymore."

Conclusion

The Trans-Atlantic network is not a traditional exchange, in the sense that a large number of universities are involved and take turns to participate according to the particular teaching needs and requirements which each local coordinator may have in a particular year. While the institutions do not appear to have achieved a strong integration of the exchanges into their curricula nor have they achieved a significant impact on their institution, the adaptability of the network has meant that it has continued for over a decade and several thousand students have benefitted from the exchange during this time.

The participating coordinators also appear to have benefitted from the activity. For example, Birthe Moustén at Århus Universitet, Denmark reveals how such an exchange can contribute to the international dimension of an academic's career in general: "...I have benefitted extremely from having these activities. I have been in contact with lots of people. I have had people visiting me, and scholars have visited my university because of these programmes. My students have got lots of connections in the English-speaking world, which might come in handy for them in the future."

Case Study 6: Latvia-France: A foreign language course entirely based on Telecollaboration

Background and Educational Context

It was difficult during the development of this report to identify universities in Eastern Europe which have participated in telecollaborative exchanges. However, there are of course some examples. At the University of Latvia, for instance, the lecturer in French Dina Savlovskā has not only engaged her students of French in an online exchange, but has gone so far as to establish a fully recognised course (credited with 6 ECTS) which is entirely based around her students' online interaction with the partner class of trainee French teachers in Grenoble, France. The course in Riga carries the term 'telecollaboration' in its title ("Langue et culture par la télécollaboration") and demonstrates how a telecollaborative exchange can provide a valuable addition to a university's foreign language programme.

The initial link between Dina Savlovskā in Latvia and François Manguot in Grenoble was established in 2008 when François carried out a course on "Teaching French with the Internet" in Riga. Following numerous emails discussing the compatibility of the objectives for their different classes, the two colleagues agreed to set up an exchange involving future teachers of French who are completing a Masters Degree in Foreign Language Education ("Master français langue étrangère") and the students in Latvia who are studying a degree in French Studies. The exchange forms part of "Le français en première ligne" project which engages student teachers of French in authentic online teaching experiences with students of the French language in other countries. The project has been running since 2002 and has connected student teachers from Besançon, Lyon and Grenoble in France with partners in Australia, the USA, Spain, Japan, Brazil, Cyprus and Latvia.

Structure of the Exchange

In the online exchange, the French MA students are taking a 7.5 ECTS module entitled "Apprentissages collectifs assistés par ordinateur" and are required to design 10 online language learning tasks in a Moodle platform for the French learners in Latvia and other partner countries to carry out. In this way, the French students are given authentic practice in online foreign language teaching and the Latvian students are given the opportunity to learn French language and culture through the tasks and the online interaction with their French teacher/peers.

During the first three weeks of the exchange students from both institutions present themselves and their home countries using multimedia tools such as Powerpoint, Photopeach, Youtube etc. Following this 'getting to know you' stage, ten language and culture-learning tasks are developed and presented by the Grenoble student-teachers to their Latvian partners on a weekly basis over a ten week period. These tasks are based on pre-assigned themes such as learning how to talk about local cuisine, cinema, national stereotypes, etc. These themes form the basis for the Latvian students' study programme and this is approved by Dina's university authorities. Normally, the tasks involve getting students to explore and report on authentic websites or to view online videos

and discuss them in the project's Moodle forums. (Task and interaction examples are provided at <http://w3.u-grenoble3.fr/fle-1-ligne/>)

The Latvian class meets once a week (90 minute session) with their teacher in a computer laboratory to work on the tasks together and to discuss the learning outcomes. As the course does not have a textbook, all the class activity is based on the materials and discussions which emerge from the telecollaborative exchange. They are also expected to spend 3 hours per week working on the tasks outside of class time. The students' final mark has equal weight to those of other language courses at the university.

The Grenoble group meets 4 hours each week during one semester for this module. (Two hours are held in a computer lab and this is then followed by two hours on the same morning in a normal classroom.) The students' final mark is divided between a critical analysis of an existing online task (40%), the participation in the online exchange and the completion of an online journal where students show their reflections on the experience of teaching online (60%).

Overcoming Barriers and Challenges

The fact that the class in Riga is based completely on the online exchange has inevitably involved a lot of extra work for the local teacher and she reports a lack of awareness of this issue at institutional level. Dina explains: "Financial aid is vital. All telecollaboration projects require three times more work than a traditional course but the administration does not seem to understand this. I participate in the exchange mainly because I am interested in it."

A course such as this one does indeed require a great deal of teacher input. Dina not only organizes the local class sessions and helps her students to carry out the tasks, but she also has to function as a provider of feedback to the students in Grenoble, informing them regularly through a special forum on the Moodle website how the Latvian students are reacting to the tasks and the corrections provided by Grenoble.

However, despite this extra work, the course has had important impact on the internationalization programmes of the two universities. In 2009 Grenoble and Riga signed "Un Accord Cadre" or Memorandum of Understanding which recognized the link between the classes and committed both institutions to carrying out the telecollaborative exchange and exploring further links together. These links may include the physical exchange of students and teachers as well as exchange at research level.

The French project 'Le français en première ligne' also continues to have great success, and is being disseminated by the Agence universitaire de la francophonie (AUF) as a model of good practice which can be copied by other French institutions. It has in fact been used as a model for similar projects at Paris 3, Strasbourg and Clermont-Ferrand universities.

Conclusion

This case study is remarkable as it demonstrates how telecollaboration can form the basis for an entire language course. However, it also underlines how telecollaborative partnerships (and their subsequent benefits for students and institutions alike) are often dependent on the commitment and hard work of individual teachers who often do not receive sufficient support from their departments.

Dina suggests that the keys to success of the project are “... responsibility of the participating partners, well-trained teachers, continuous hard work on the part of the teachers and continuous support by specialists”. From the French perspective, François believes that the long-term success of these exchanges depends on a very regular, in-depth form of contact between the project coordinators on each side.

Case study 7: Clermont Ferrand and Warwick Universities: The Clavier Project

Educational Background and Context

Since 2011, educators at Université Blaise Pascal in Clermont-Ferrand in France and the University of Warwick in the UK have been organising a large-scale online exchange for approximately 300 students in each of their institutions. Teresa MacKinnon, the coordinator at Warwick, originally came into virtual contact with her online partner-teacher Simon Ensor at Clermont through an online discussion about language pedagogy. Both educators were interested in exploring whether they could set up a stable exchange network for a large number of students with relatively little staff direction and assessment. Teresa explains: “Our arrangements were possibly unconventional. We looked to open the student’s network to include peer support chosen by the individual from native speakers and encouraged awareness of the advantages and disadvantages this can bring. Increasing the choice and making it as easy as possible to find people who share your interests for social as well as academic reasons seems important.”

Students in both institutions study a foreign language but none are taking specialised foreign language degrees. In France students study sports sciences with English, while the students in England are taking various undergraduate degrees (in, for example, maths, management, history, politics and economics) which include an optional module in French or another foreign language of their choice.

Structure of the Exchange

This exchange is characterised by the high degree of freedom and initiative which is allowed to the students. This is clear from the wide variety of online tools made available to students and from the open nature of the tasks which the students can carry out together online.

At the beginning of the exchange, Warwick Language Centre provides a Moodle platform for the exchange where students from both universities are asked to upload their profiles and to look for partners in the partner university. Students are not matched by their teachers with partners in the partner institution. Instead, they are encouraged to explore the student profiles on the Moodle course and then contact those with whom they wish to work. During the second term, the coordinators at both universities circulate a research consent form and ask students for their permission to investigate their activity in order to better understand the online interaction which was taking place. They also assign a new, randomly chosen partner to work together on their “language learning history”. This text has to be written in the target language with the assistance of their telecollaborative partner. They then submit their story online via the Moodle platform.

Students are not obliged to use any particular tool to communicate with their partners but an instant messaging tool BBIM is provided as a free download in the Moodle platform. The exchange portal also provides an RSS feed for the exchange’s French and English twitter accounts. Students can also enter into contact together using their own Facebook pages and Skype as well as the chat tool in Moodle.

As regards assessment, Teresa explains that at Warwick University, students do not usually receive specific academic credit for their online activities: “...it is an enrichment activity to support their language learning as they only get two hours a week contact time”. However, she also points out that an e-portfolio (Mahara) has recently been introduced for student reflection on their language

learning experience and those students who are working at an advanced level can include data from their virtual exchange (i.e. chat logs etc.) as evidence of learning. This e-portfolio carries 20% of the total mark in their language course. In France too, students are not formally assessed for their participation in the exchange. However, they do have the option to add extracts from their online exchange to their language English portfolios.

Overcoming Barriers and Challenges

Due to the relatively informal and 'class-independent' nature of this exchange, the Clavier Project team has avoided many of the problems which telecollaborative teachers often encounter. The exchange does not intend to be an integrated, assessed part of the foreign language programme and therefore does not encounter challenges related to coordinating class timetables in both institutions, academic recognition of activity etc. It does, however, rely on the motivation of the organising teachers and of the students themselves who have to use the platform and tools to find a particular partner and develop their own discussion topics and schedule outside of a class structure.

As regards institutional recognition and integration, Teresa reports that in Warwick "...we did get clearance for a press release and our Institute of Advanced Teaching and Learning have been supportive". A recent institutional teaching and learning review also praised the initiative and proposed the project's application to other languages. The document states:

"The Review Group commends the Language Centre's development of the virtual exchange between Warwick students and students at UniversitéBlaisePascal in Clermont-Ferrand. The Review Group advises that the Language Centre should continue to develop similar virtual exchange programmes and take a more active role in seeking international placements and links with overseas institutions, including the University's core partners, noting that the Centre is in a position to share best practice and advise other departments in this regard."

The challenge of organising and running such an exchange can obviously be difficult for the teachers involved. Teresa explains that "...as we have many part time staff, a lot of this type of work is carried out by full time contracted staff. We were fortunate with our model as it was based around facilitating student interaction and therefore mostly in their [the students'] hands."

In order for such exchanges to work, Teresa believes that each institution needs "...at least one champion or project leader on the team to get the ball rolling and share good ideas to inspire others". She suggests successful exchanges require finding partner-teachers who "...understand each other, even if they have slightly different expectations. Allowing sufficient time for staff to engage with student queries is also important". She also believes that the Clavier exchange will become more successful as time goes by as it becomes more embedded in the students' approach to language learning at both universities.

In the future, the institutions involved will be looking at how projects such as this one can strengthen the links between virtual and physical mobility between institutions. Clermont Ferrand, for example, is hoping to formalise a three year link with students of French at Warwick which will mean financial support to facilitate staff visits as well as providing higher visibility for the online initiative. Furthermore, Evan Stewart, director of the Language Centre at Warwick, recognises the

possible link from virtual mobility projects such as Clavier and physical mobility: “Warwick already has one of the best records in of UK universities in terms of outgoing student mobility. This [project] supports mobility with less outlay on the part of students who may be deterred from physical mobility for financial reasons.”

7. Discussion of Findings

This report has collected and analysed survey data from over 200 university educators, mainly (but not only) specialised in language education and teacher training. Their input has provided potentially valuable data, not only for telecollaborative practitioners and researchers, but also for educational policy makers at institutional, national and also European levels. The data collected from the teacher surveys was enhanced by survey data gathered from over 100 students with experiences of varied forms of OIE. Following the survey, seven case studies were collected to provide 'thick' descriptions of different forms of telecollaborative exchange and to provide more qualitative insight into how practitioners are overcoming barriers to successful telecollaborative activity. But what have been the main outcomes of these two stages of research? This section of the report aims to bring to light the most significant findings of our research. In section 7.1, the authors present what we feel are the most important outcomes of the surveys in sections 4 and 5 and outline their implications for university management and educational policy makers. Following that, in section 7.2, we summarise the most significant trends and findings from the case studies in section 6 and we bring together the different integration strategies which practitioners were seen to be using in their institutions.

7.1 Implications of survey results

Survey outcome 1:

Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents were teachers and students of English as a foreign language since this has become the most commonly taught foreign language in Europe, but a considerable number of teachers of French, German and Spanish also responded, as well as teachers of less commonly taught languages. OIE is an activity which can be engaged in by teachers and students of any language, and we feel it is particularly suitable for the teaching of less commonly taught languages for which there are fewer commercially produced educational materials and often fewer opportunities for interaction.

Recommended actions:

Information and academic publications about OIE need to be made available in different languages. Pedagogical frameworks, activity types and tasks, and practically oriented workshops should be convened to support educators and institutions in their efforts to exploit the benefits of virtual mobility through OIE. This is particularly needed for teachers of less commonly taught languages.

Survey outcome 2:

Responses to the survey indicate that OIE both supports foreign language learning and engages foreign language learners in communication with speakers of the target language. Much of the early literature focused on telecollaboration refers to language learners and 'native speakers', though we note that awareness that the concept of 'native speaker' is increasingly problematic to define, and perhaps also somewhat outdated, in the context of recent increases in migration, transnational flows, and Internet-mediated plurilingual and multicultural contact zones. For learners of English in Europe in particular, it is likely that they will more often be called upon to communicate and work with 'non-natives' than with 'native' speakers. A small majority of the OIEs reported in the survey were bilingual exchanges and there were a few examples of

plurilingualexchanges. However there were also a considerable number of monolingual exchanges and OIEs involving a lingua franca, often English. Some educators mentioned, however, that in their predominantly lingua franca exchanges, multiple other languages were also used. In this sense, code switching and making use of various linguistic repertoires can now be recognised as intercultural communicative strategies rather than as deficiencies in foreign language competence.

Recommended actions:

To promote plurilingualism, predominantly monolingual exchanges should include activities which raise awareness of participants' different languages and aspects of plurilingual education – which, according to Council of Europe language education policy, promotes:

- an awareness of why and how one learns the languages one has chosen;
- an awareness of transferable skills in language learning, and the ability to use them;
- a respect for the plurilingualism of others, and an appreciation of the value of languages and varieties, irrespective of their perceived status in society;
- a respect for the cultures embodied in languages and the cultural identities of others;
- an ability to perceive and mediate the relationships which exist among languages and cultures;
- a global integrated approach to language education in the curriculum.

Survey outcome 3:

The pedagogic aims of most of the OIEs reported included not only the development of language skills, but also emphasized intercultural communicative competence and, to a slightly lesser degree, students' online literacies and learner autonomy. OIEs thus address 4 of the 8 key competences for Lifelong Learning. OIEs designed for trainee teachers and for students of translation also helped participants develop specific competences related to their future professions, such as designing tasks for language learning, or dealing with authors of texts and/or customers in translation.

Recommended actions:

OIEs offer the opportunity to acquire transversal skills, or key competences as defined by the European Commission, and also specific professional skills for future workers who are increasingly likely to have to communicate and/or work online. They thus provide relevant learning opportunities for students of most academic disciplines and should be made available to students studying in all subject areas in higher education.

Survey outcome 4:

The majority of OIEs reported in the survey involved countries in Europe and the US. There were few OIEs between European countries, and also few connecting Europe and the so-called 'developing world' or emerging countries/economies. This data is confirmed by the Exchange 2.0 coalition in their report (2011). UNESCO also reports that "the enormous challenge confronting higher education is how to make international opportunities available to all equitably" and to address the current trends of internationalization; otherwise "the distribution of the world's wealth and talent will be further skewed" (UNESCO 2009 Trends in Global Higher Education: tracking an academic revolution).

Recommended actions: Greater efforts need to be directed toward promoting OIEs between European member states, and also between European member states and other parts of the world in order to increase intercultural understanding and to promote international cooperation and development. OIEs, which can be set up for all subject areas, not only foreign language education, have the potential to support the European Commission's Development and Cooperation projects such as Education for All, Erasmus Mundus and Edulink.

Survey outcome 5:

The survey revealed that few foreign language educators find OIE partners through institutional partnerships such as Erasmus: most use contacts they have made through colleagues and at conferences.

Recommended actions: Universities should strengthen bilateral agreements that are already in place through OIEs across a broad range of academic content and subject areas. While universities in many European countries are currently facing drastic reductions in budgets, foreign language educators should be encouraged to attend international conferences and participate in mobility programmes, as this can help them in finding partners for OIE activities, increase internationalization efforts, and promote intercultural interaction that serves to develop the capacity of students to operate effectively in diverse teams and communities.

Survey outcome 6:

There is overwhelming agreement amongst survey respondents that OIEs can support physical mobility by engaging learners with students in their future host institution before departure, and also support learners whilst abroad. The European Commission has also suggested that virtual mobility can support physical mobility, and recommendations have been made to this effect. Support through information and communication technologies (ICTs) is also reported to be an indicator of quality in Erasmus mobility³⁹. However we found little evidence of OIEs being used to support physical mobility: only a handful of survey respondents indicated projects involving Erasmus or pre-departure Erasmus students.

Recommended actions: International offices and language centres preparing students for Erasmus should have support in setting up OIEs between their Erasmus partners as both pre- and potentially post-mobility activities.

Survey outcome 7:

Many educators who responded to the survey had had experience of OIE as part of their training and/or through European projects. Furthermore, those who had tried OIE with their students were likely to repeat the experience, since most respondents with experience had had more than one exchange.

Recommended actions: It is important to involve language educators and trainee teachers in European and international projects, and to include OIE in teacher education programmes if OIE is to become part of mainstream practice. It is also important to provide educators with support, particularly in their first experience of OIE.

³⁹<http://www.emqt.org/component/content/article/126.html>

Survey outcome 8:

The most frequently used tools are email and virtual learning environments, but there is also considerable use of audio/video conferencing, which until recently was not readily available. The main difficulty reported in using audio/video conferencing was the organizational one of coordinating with partners in different time zones. In terms of language learning, OIEs thus have the potential to improve not only students' writing and reading skills, but also speaking and listening. Web 2.0 tools such as blogs and wikis were reported to be used quite often by over 40% of respondents, whilst social networks have not yet become common tools, with around 20% reporting use of these.

Recommended actions: Training courses need to make educators more aware of Web 2.0 technologies and the potential they offer for spoken as well as written language development. Increasing the number of intra-Europe partnerships will not suffer from major time zone differences and may make synchronous exchanges easier to organise.

Survey outcome 9:

OIEs are carried out by highly motivated educators who may also have a research interest in OIE. The findings of this survey thus support the conclusions of a preliminary study by O'Dowd (2011). There is considerable discrepancy between the technical and institutional support that educators would like to have in order to engage with OIE and the support that practising telecollaborators receive. Lack of time and difficulty in organizing OIEs emerge as the main factors hindering the adoption of OIE by other educators, alongside lack of institutional recognition and support in many cases.

Recommended actions: Educators need more technical and institutional support if OIEs are to become part of established practice in higher education institutions in Europe. Furthermore, telecollaborative educators need to be given support, recognition or reward by their institutions for engaging students in this activity, which could take the form of hours available to dedicate to this activity, or the availability of extra support staff to support this type of work.

Survey outcome 10:

OIEs are assessed by 60% of respondents, specifically intercultural and communicative competence in many cases. However participation in OIE does not always bring students credits and is not always institutionally recognised. Many students and educators indicate that there is lack of student time to dedicate to OIE, particularly if the activity is not formally assessed.

Recommended actions: As mentioned above, there is a need to formally acknowledge OIE as a legitimate activity within university curricula so that both educators and students can commit sufficient time for this activity. Department heads should seek to award OIE-based courses with academic credit in the same way that traditional subject and language classes currently receive. Official recognition might also take the form of inclusion of telecollaborative activity in the European Diploma Supplement. Additionally, the development and/or implementation of foreign language and intercultural communication assessment instruments may raise the visibility and support the use of OIE within the EU, and further, rigorous and broadly disseminated assessment strategies could facilitate the inclusion of OIE activities as credit bearing components of university curricula.

Survey outcome 11:

In relation to the themes dealt with in intercultural exchange, it was seen that educators and students are often insecure about addressing 'sensitive' topics such as religion, politics, and terrorism in OIE discussions.

Recommended actions: If intercultural dialogue, as defined by the Council of Europe in the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue, is to take place through OIE, educators need training so that they can create a safe environment where sensitive topics can be addressed and disagreement can take place with respect for different views and positions.

Survey outcome 12:

Finally, the survey respondents clearly believe that the impact of participating in OIEs can be powerful, many students report becoming more open to others, accepting and understanding of difference, and realising that their own points of view are not necessarily "the best or only ones". This outcome is an important one and should support the promotion of OIE in higher education.

Recommended actions: Further research needs to be carried out to measure the short-term and long-term impact of student participation in OIE both on the students themselves and on universities' internationalization programmes.

7.2 Implications of the Case Studies

The collection of case studies presented in section 6 of this report serve to provide an insight into the different types of telecollaborative projects which are being carried out in Europe and allows the identification of some of the ways in which telecollaboration is being integrated into university institutions and their study programmes. A review of the collection of case studies reveals some significant aspects of current telecollaborative practices which are worth reviewing here briefly.

The first significant aspect to emerge from the case studies is that telecollaboration should not be considered an activity for foreign language students alone. The case studies reported here demonstrate how OIE has a role to play in the education of engineering students (case study 1 in Sweden), and business studies students (the students from Dublin in case 2), among others.

Second, positive feedback from senior management in Manchester and Warwick demonstrates that telecollaborative exchanges are often recognised in many universities as valuable activities for internationalisation and for the development of student mobility. However, in almost all the case studies reported here, practitioners found their institutions to be unaware of the extra time and workload which such projects require and that their management were either unwilling or unable to provide adequate support to staff who wanted to organise such exchanges. Institutional recognition of both the value of, and extra work required to create OIE activities, is a logical next to promoting telecollaboration across higher education curricula.

It was also evident that telecollaboration not only benefits students' learning but can also contribute to educators' academic careers. Practitioners in Sweden and the UK pointed out how their OIE's had led to them establishing connections to new academic networks and to engaging in staff mobility visits with other universities. Significantly, telecollaboration is also seen by many

practitioners and senior management as a useful 'first step' on the way to developing physical mobility exchanges between institutions. This has the case between Riga and Grenoble, who have signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' for staff and student mobility thanks to their telecollaborative partnerships. The universities of Warwick and Clermont were also reported to be negotiating similar mobility agreements.

Finally, the case studies clearly demonstrate how telecollaboration can have different levels of integration into study programmes. For example, the Claivier exchange at Warwick takes place independent of credit-earning courses; at Trinity, while the SpEakWise exchange forms part of a regular study module, it does not carry credit itself; the TransAtlantic network does give students a certain amount of course credit for their work, while at Manchester and Latvia (and in some cases in Padova), students' marks and credits are based exclusively on the work they carry out in their telecollaborative exchanges. This confirms that telecollaboration does not need to take a 'one size fits all' approach. Exchanges can be designed and integrated according to the needs and realities of the institutions involved. Having said that, it is the belief of many educators and of the authors of this study that the more these exchanges are recognised and awarded academic credit, the more likely they are to be considered of value by students and academic staff. For this reason, the case studies also attempted to highlight strategies for integration and to identify what experienced practitioners considered to be the keys to success for exchanges.

Among the strategies for integration which can be identified in the case studies, one of the most significant is the signing of an exchange agreement or contract between practitioners (as seen in the V-PAL exchange). This can provide partners with a sense of security when planning exchanges and drawing up course guides for the coming academic year. A further key strategy for integrating OIEs is obviously to ensure that students will receive credit for these courses. In case studies 3, 4 and 6, students in the universities of Padova, Manchester and Riga take part in official academic courses where all the academic credit is based on their work in their online exchanges.

Various other, perhaps more informal, aspects emerge from the case studies as keys to successful integration. First, the colleagues at Trinity College in Dublin pointed out that a long-lasting exchange can often increase the likelihood of the exchange continuing due to the mere momentum which it generates. For this reason, it is desirable for institutions to maintain the same exchange partners for as long as possible and to opportunistically bring in new colleagues and collaborators to keep long running programmes robust.

Second, the support of department heads was reported by practitioners to be vital, as it ensures that exchanges continue even when particular staff members change institutions. Third, prestige and importance can be gained for exchanges by winning academic awards (e.g., Trinity College) and holding press launches to announce the exchanges to the general public (as in Warwick). The Padova case study illustrated how word of successful exchanges spreads among students, which has a multiplier effect; and that the appropriate choice and use of technologies can make it easier for other teachers to start organising exchanges for the first time.

Finally, most practitioners viewed regular, fluid contact between educators as one of the keys to success. In order for exchanges to be successful, teachers need to be motivated, to believe in the value of the exchange and be willing to engage in regular virtual contact with their partner teacher. It is hoped that the www.uni-collaboration.eu website, under development as part of the

INTENT project, will provide a platform to support such practitioners in finding new partners, and sharing and developing new tasks and tools for their telecollaborative activities.

8. Conclusion

The terms ‘virtual mobility’ and ‘virtual Erasmus’ have become key terms in the literature on student mobility and internationalisation in Europe in recent years. It is not surprising that in the age of Web 2.0 and social networks, university educators and management are looking increasingly to information and communication technologies to prepare their students to learn and work in a globalised world and, at the same time, to support their institutions’ participation in international activities. This report has presented the quantitative and qualitative findings of a study which attempted to establish how one valid form of virtual mobility – telecollaborative exchange – is being employed around Europe in pursuit of these aims. To our knowledge, this is the most extensive survey on telecollaboration which has been carried out in Europe to date and, as such, we believe that its findings will make an important contribution to this area of research in the future.

While we believe the results of the surveys and the case studies to be significant and worthy of attention, it is important to acknowledge here the limitations and potential weaknesses of the methodology used when collecting the data for the surveys and the case studies.

First, the research team had to struggle to establish a representative sample of the population. As it is impossible to know with any certainty how many university educators around Europe are actually engaged in telecollaborative exchanges, it was also impossible to be sure that the practitioners who participated in the survey were representative. Having said this, it is important to point out that our attempt to contact practitioners for the survey was ambitious, and the number of personal and professional networks involved was very extensive.

There are of course other issues common to surveys such as this one which should be briefly acknowledged here. These include the question of ‘external validity’- i.e. to what extent it was impossible to know if those who volunteered to participate in the survey were representative of the population as a whole. Were the practitioners and students who went to the trouble of answering our surveys representative of these groups in general? It is difficult to establish this with any certainty. Second, there is the issue of “self-reporting” – i.e. the tendency of respondents to represent themselves (and their projects, in this case) in a good light. This might have been a particular danger in the case studies where respondents were asked to present in detail their own particular projects. Having said that, it is important to point out that most practitioners were quick to acknowledge and describe the limitations of their projects, as well as the problems and barriers they had encountered.

This report has demonstrated that while the activity of OIE is proving increasingly popular and is being used and integrated in a myriad ways, its long-term success depends on its wider recognition and greater integration in European university education as a whole, and on increased information and support for educators who may be interested in taking up the activity. The remaining activities of the INTENT project will strive to achieve these aims of recognition, integration and dissemination of telecollaborative activity in European universities. Our next step will be to release an online platform (www.uni-collaboration.eu) that will enable practitioners and potential practitioners to find partners and resources for their telecollaborative activities.

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Appendix 1

Institutions with educators who responded to the survey

LIST OF UNIVERSITIES WHO CONTRIBUTED

Austria

Albert-Ludwigs Universität Freiburg
Die Wiener Volkshochschulen GmbH
Leopold-Franzens University Innsbruck

Belgium

Université Catholique de Louvain
University of Leuven

Bulgaria

American University in Bulgaria

Cyprus

University of Cyprus

Czech Republic

Masaryk University

France

Ecole des ponts ParisTech
ENI du Val de Loire
Ens de Lyon
ENSICAEN, école d'ingénieurs
ENST- Telecom-Paris Tech
Euromed Management Marseille
IPB/Enseirb-Matmeca Bordeaux
IUT Paul Sabatier
Pôle Universitaire Léonard de Vinci
Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3
Telecom-Bretagne
Université Blaise Pascal
Université de Bretagne Sud
Université de La Réunion
Université de Nantes
Université de Poitiers
Université de Savoie
Université de Strasbourg
Université de Toulouse
Université du Maine
Université Lille 3 Charles de Gaulle
Université Lumière Lyon2

Université Lyon 2
Université Montpellier 3
Université Paris 8
Université Stendhal, Grenoble 3
University of Nice-Sophia Antipolis
University Paris Diderot

Germany

b.i.b. International College
Bergische Universität Wuppertal
Eberhard-Karls-Universität Tübingen
Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena
Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main
Hochschule Emden/ Leer
Hochschule für Wirtschaft
Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen
Koblenz University of Applied Sciences
Leibniz Universität Hannover/ Niedersachsen
Leuphana Universität Lüneburg
Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg
Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg
Pädagogische Hochschule Weingarten
Staatliches Seminar für Didaktik und
Lehrerbildung (BS) Karlsruhe
Technische Universität Dresden
TU Darmstadt
Universität Bremen
Universität Hannover
Universität Leipzig
Universität Lüneburg
Universität Münster
Universität Siegen
Universität Wuppertal
University of Paderborn
Volkshochschule Kehl

Greece

Technical University of Crete
University of the Aegean

Hungary

ELTE Budapest
Eötvös Loránd University

Ireland

Cork Institute of Technology
Dublin Institute of Technology

IT Tralee
Trinity College, Dublin
University of Limerick
Waterford Institute of Technology

Italy

University of Bologna
University of Padova
University of Pisa
University of Siena
University of Trieste
University of Verona

Latvia

Latvijas Universitāte

Lithuania

Vilniaus Kolegija/ University of Applied Sciences

Netherlands

University of Applied Sciences, Amsterdam
University of Groningen

Norway

University of Oslo

Poland

Adam Mickiewicz University
Jagiellonian University
NKJO Opole
Państwowa Wyższa Szkoła Zawodowa w Pile
Pomeranian University
Silesian University
Szczecin University
UMCS, Lublin
University of Wrocław
Uniwersytet Śląski w Katowicach
Uniwersytet Warszawski
Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities
WSP w Łodzi
Wyższa Szkoła Lingwistyczna w Częstochowie

Portugal

Instituto Politécnico da Guarda
Instituto Politécnico de Castelo Branco

Universidade de Aveiro
University of Coimbra

Romania

Babes Bolyai University

Slovenia

University of Ljubljana

Spain

Autónoma University of Madrid
EHU / UPV
Florida Universitaria
Universidad Politécnica de Valencia
Universidad de Jaén
Universidad de León
Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia - UNED
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
Universidad Pública de Navarra
Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
Universitat Rovira i Virgili
University of Granada
University of La Rioja

Sweden

Folkuniversitetet West
Malmö University

Switzerland

University of Geneva
University of Zurich

United Kingdom

Coventry University
Manchester Metropolitan University
School of Oriental and African Studies,
University of London
The Open University
University of Glasgow
University of Leicester
University of Manchester
University of Nottingham
University of Sussex
University of Warwick