

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) in the Education of Teachers of Additional Languages – Theoretical Background and Practical Experiences

[A Aprendizagem Internacional Colaborativa Online (COIL) e o Intercâmbio Virtual Crítico (CVE) na Formação docente de Língua Adicional – Fundamentos Teóricos e Experiências Práticas]

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Abstract: This article offers a reflection on the role of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Virtual Exchange (VE) as potential avenues for enhancing the education of additional language teachers. To ground this reflection, we review the literature on approaches to additional language teaching, with particular attention to the emergence of the Communicative Approach and other frameworks that emphasize social interaction, critical thinking, and learner agency. Furthermore, we provide an overview of COIL, VE, and Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE), as well as of Critical Decolonial Theory and its relationship to the concept of Global Education for Sustainability. Finally, we present concrete examples from a partnership between a Brazilian and a German institution – not as prescriptive models, but as possible pathways for collaborative practice.

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Resumo: Este artigo oferece uma reflexão sobre o papel da Aprendizagem Internacional Online Colaborativa (COIL) e do Intercâmbio Virtual (VE) como caminhos possíveis para aprimorar a formação de professores de línguas adicionais. Para fundamentar essa reflexão, apresentamos uma breve revisão da literatura sobre abordagens para o ensino de línguas adicionais, com atenção especial ao surgimento da Abordagem Comunicativa e de outras abordagens que enfatizam a interação social, o pensamento crítico e a agência do aprendiz. Além disso, apresentamos uma visão geral do COIL, do VE e do Intercâmbio Virtual Crítico (CVE), bem como da Teoria Decolonial Crítica e sua relação com o conceito de Educação Global para a Sustentabilidade. Por fim, apresentamos exemplos concretos de uma parceria entre uma instituição brasileira e uma alemã – não como modelos prescritivos, mas como possíveis caminhos para a prática colaborativa.

Palavras-chave: COIL; Intercâmbio Virtual; Teoria Crítica Decolonial; Língua Adicional; Formação de Professores

1 Introduction

Internationalization in higher education in general and even more in Additional Language Teacher Education is recognized as a fundamental component of academic infrastructure, shaping quality standards, strategic planning, and funding mechanisms amid global demands (LEAL; MORAES 2018). There are multiple factors to consider in this process to ensure that the partnerships established genuinely benefit all involved institutions and participants. In this article, we detail our cooperation experience with the University of Education Weingarten (UEW; Pädagogische Hochschule Weingarten – PHW in German) as an example of a space for developing critical and reflective projects, eschewing the old approach of imposing universal models to be followed. Our experience in this context showed a distinctly dialogic orientation within the team, fostering an environment conducive to mutual learning and the co-construction of knowledge.

The project “Internationalisierung der Lehrkräftebildung an der PHW – Integrated Mobility for Global Education (ILaP – InGE)”, funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), aims to promote the internationalization of teacher education in dialogue with the United Nations’ goals of sustainable development. The project provides opportunities for exchanges through scholarships funded by the program, offering access to students who otherwise would not be able to finance their stay in Germany. In addition, through faculty exchanges, partnerships are established, enabling cooperation across different areas of study.

As representatives of the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC – Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina), we present in this article our experience with interactions and connections between institutions located in various parts of the world⁴. To this end, we report on our experience in Virtual Exchange (VE) projects already delivered within this context and on the planning of future collaborations.

The collaborative nature of COIL can be understood as an approach that leverages the connection between educational institutions to foster interaction between students and educators, who link their practices in virtual environments – not only to conduct exchanges, but to discuss broader topics (HACKETT *et al.*, 2024, p. 1078; CEO-DIFRANCESCO, BENDER-SLACK, 2016, p. 148).

COIL is conceptualized as a space for exchanges that transcend borders, making networked connections possible. The term originated in the context of State University of New York (SUNY) in 2006, subsequently expanding to Europe (HACKETT *et al.*, 2024, p. 1079). According to the document outlining the initiative, the main idea is “globally networked learning and virtual exchange, [...] a new teaching and learning paradigm that promotes the development of intercultural competence across shared multicultural learning environments” (SUNY COIL CENTER, 2015, p. 4).

In a world that demands participation and empowerment for technology use (REIG, 2012) and active citizenship, as well as global relationships among individuals and institutions as a way to address issues that affect all humanity – while also considering local demands – such collaborative work can serve as another opportunity not only to enhance technological and linguistic skills, but also to develop critical digital literacy and an openness to learning from different realities, people, and contexts. It further entails self-awareness and self-knowledge, which involve personal and social transformations and shifts. Adopting this posture is a prerequisite to participating in collaborative networks.

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We begin the article by summarizing important theoretical discussions in language teaching methodology from the communicative approach to the present and give an overview on Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL), Virtual Exchange (VE) and Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE), as well as Critical Decolonial Theory. Then, concrete examples are provided not as prescriptive models but as possible pathways for collaborative work in practice.

2 Changing Language Teaching Methodologies (1975–2025)

In this section, we focus on methodologies that have been influential since 1970. The methodology of additional language teaching has undergone several waves of profound changes from the early study of classical languages like Greek, Latin, or Hebrew in religious contexts in the Middle Ages for clerical elites, to the grammar-translation method, mostly aimed at reading classical or canonical texts to access class-specific erudition; then to audio-lingual and structural approaches designed to enable more efficient international mobility, communicative methods to enhance effective social interaction and integration in pluricultural contexts, socio-constructivist and project-based teaching that sought to foster participant autonomy, education as a minimally invasive and self-organizing process; and finally, approaches that require considerable digital literacy and access to provide intercultural virtual online learning opportunities. In general, all these methodological phases include many aspects of the previous approaches⁵, while attempting to overcome specific deficits and shortcomings of their predecessors.

In the 1970s, additional language pedagogy shifted from grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach was deeply influenced by the Speech Act Theory of J.L. Austin and John Searle, which posited that language is not just a vehicle for conveying information but a form of action. Speech acts – such as promising, requesting, questioning, or declaring – highlight the

⁵ For a more detailed description of the methodological shifts up to the 2010s, see Weininger (2013).

performative and interactive nature of language use. CLT thus emphasized real-world communication, focusing on learners' ability to perform language functions in authentic contexts, rather than rote memorization of rules or isolated vocabulary and mimicking chunks of language out of context (RICHARDS, 2006).

Building on communicative principles, the 1980s and 1990s saw the rise of socio-constructivist approaches. Inspired by Vygotsky (1978) and Bakhtin (1993), these methods viewed language learning as a social process, where knowledge is co-constructed through interaction and dialogue. Classrooms became collaborative spaces, with peer-to-peer engagement, group work, and authentic tasks central to learning. Teachers acted as facilitators, scaffolding learners within their "zone of proximal development". The focus was on meaningful communication, negotiation of meaning, and the integration of all language skills in context (Cf. LANTOLF, THORNE 2006).

By the late 1990s and early 2000s, project-based learning (PBL) emerged as a powerful strategy for fostering student autonomy. Mark Warschauer (1997) and others highlighted how technology-based projects could empower learners to take charge of their own learning. In PBL, students work collaboratively on extended tasks, often integrating digital tools, to solve real-world problems or create meaningful products. This approach enhances motivation, critical thinking, and language skills by making learning relevant and learner driven.

Autonomy, responsibility, and self-assessment became key objectives, preparing students for lifelong learning in a globalized world. We observe that project-based learning is increasingly popular, but it is often used only as a complement to traditional practices, disregarding its deep epistemological and ontological foundations (JORDÃO 2014: 17). A relevant aspect for project development is considering the process of meaning construction. Clarissa Jordão (2014) reviews the literature on meaning makers, project-based pedagogy and critical literacy in her article. With globalization, it is necessary to rethink the idea of "language" as a construction that depends on the speakers and their social practices. The pedagogical proposal must consider individuals in their lives as agents in their social contexts, capable of actively and meaningfully producing meaning (JORDÃO 2014: 23) and not merely as recipients. Thus, from a participatory,

social, and collaborative perspective, learning involves socially produced practices and meanings, not just linguistic knowledge and grammatical rules (cf. JORDÃO 2014: 20).

In the 2010s, Sugata Mitra's research (2012) introduced the idea of learning as a self-organizing process. His "Hole in the Wall" experiments and the concept of Self-Organizing Learning Environments (SOLEs) demonstrated that, given the right environment and questions, learners – especially children – could teach themselves collaboratively with minimal teacher intervention. This model challenged traditional hierarchies, emphasizing curiosity, group inquiry, and the natural emergence of knowledge through collective problem-solving. The teacher's role shifted further towards facilitator, encouraging exploration and allowing greater scope for peer support.

In the 2020s, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Virtual Exchange (VE) became prominent, leveraging digital platforms to connect learners across cultures and borders (RUBIN, 2020). For a majority of less digitally literate teachers it was the COVID-19 pandemic that pushed them into this direction without much choice. These approaches integrate experiential, project-based, and collaborative learning in virtual environments. Students from different countries work together on joint assignments, developing intercultural competence, digital literacy, and teamwork skills. COIL and Virtual Exchange democratize access to global experiences, enabling students who cannot travel to engage in meaningful international collaboration, thus reflecting the culmination of fifty years of pedagogical innovation towards autonomy, collaboration, and real-world engagement.

As summarized in Chart 1, over the past five decades, additional language teaching has evolved from teacher-centered, form-focused methods to learner-centered, collaborative, and technology-enhanced approaches. Each shift has moved the field closer to fostering autonomy, intercultural communication, and lifelong learning skills, preparing students for participation in a globalized, digital world.

Chart 1. Timeline of key methodological shifts⁶

Era	Approach	Key Features	Influential Thinkers
1970s – 1980s	Communicative Language Teaching	Speech acts, real-world tasks, interaction	Austin, Searle
1980s – 1990s	Socio-Constructivism	Social interaction, scaffolding, peer learning	Vygotsky, Bakhtin
1990s – 2000s	Project-Based Learning	Autonomy, real-world projects, technology integration	Mark Warschauer
2010s	Self-Organizing Learning	Minimal intervention, group inquiry, SOLEs	Sugata Mitra
2020s	COIL & Virtual Exchange	Online collaboration, intercultural competence	Jon Rubin, COIL pioneers

Source: The authors

Furthermore, in recent years, the search for an idealized language teaching method has given way to methodological variety and teacher autonomy, allowing them to adapt strategies to the specific needs of their context. In the words of Kumaravadivelu (2003), teachers, by analyzing their practices and seeking solutions to classroom challenges, become “thinkers” and “strategic practitioners”. By expanding this role beyond the teaching sphere, and by awakening students’ social and political awareness, they assume the role of “intellectual transformers”, as the scholar describes when arguing for teacher agency in the post-method era. (KUMARAVADIVELU 2003: 14). Based on Paulo Freire (1997, 2000), this view sees teachers as intellectual transformers, promoting the emancipation and empowerment of individuals through a liberating education. It highlights the importance of freedom and flexibility so that teachers can initiate, develop, and evaluate their own classroom projects.

⁶ Weininger (2001) includes a much more detailed synoptic overview of these methodological approaches, including key technologies and the roles of teaching materials, teachers and learners.

3 Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE)

In this section, we present a broader review of the discussion of relevant aspects of COIL, VE and CVE. We highlight studies that have addressed issues related to terminology, pedagogical mentoring, hospitality in online classes, critical intercultural awareness, social justice and sustainable development, teacher education, and internationalization.

Robert O’Dowd’s (2018) important overview article maps the evolution of online intercultural learning – from early additional-language telecollaboration projects to today’s diverse “virtual exchange” landscape – and argues for a unified, cross-disciplinary field supported by the UNICollaboration network (<<https://unicollaboration.org>>). The paper traces the proliferation of terms (telecollaboration, e-tandem, COIL, global virtual teams, *etc.*), advocates “virtual exchange” as an inclusive umbrella label and offers a working description of Virtual Exchange: structured, sustained online intercultural interaction integrated into curricula under educator guidance. The examples cited give credits to pioneers from the 1990s (IECC, e-tandem, early additional-language projects online) and an introductory state-of-the-art panorama provides a vital foundation for the field of virtual exchange. By forging common terminology, spotlighting policy endorsements, and launching a dedicated scholarly network, this article charts an ambitious path forward. The challenge now lies in deepening empirical inquiry, balancing model representation, and translating awareness into widespread, equitable practice.

In this sense, Gutierrez *et al.* (2022) investigate how pedagogical mentoring can scaffold students’ synchronous and asynchronous interactions in Virtual Exchange (VE) environments. Through action research across three VE projects involving 167 participants from six universities, the authors identify mentoring stages and concrete strategies to enhance intercultural communication and collaboration. They argue that without explicit guidance, learners – despite being “digital natives” – often lack the formal digital, linguistic, and intercultural competencies needed for successful online collaboration. This paper examines how VE teachers use pedagogical mentoring to

improve students' online communication, drawing on conversational logs from discussion forums (asynchronous) and recorded videoconferences (synchronous), as well as student e-portfolios with structured reflections, and pre- and post-project semi-structured interviews conducted with 167 students (undergraduates and pre-service teachers) with CEFR B2–C2 proficiency, spanning Spain, Ireland, the USA, and Sweden. The authors identify three essential mentoring phases for successful intercultural online communication and Virtual Exchange: (1) Pre-interaction: technology familiarization, netiquette, organizational skills, and addressing initial anxieties; (2) During interaction: guidance on turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, mediation strategies, and handling technical issues; (3) Post-interaction: critical reflection on tool affordances, intercultural learning outcomes, and personal skill development. The results suggest that teachers in a Virtual Exchange may have to integrate multi-stage mentoring into course design rather than assume digital fluency, be aware that training must address both technical proficiency and intercultural communication strategies and plan reflective activities in the post-exchange phase to solidify learning and uncover hidden affordances or challenges of each communicative mode.

Under a different perspective, a recent paper by Ferreira and Pereira (2025) aims to explore how “hospitality” emerges in live online classes of Virtual Academic Mobility (VAM) under the COIL model, framing hospitality as a socio-relational phenomenon – an ethical, transformative encounter between hosts and guests, analyzed through the two dimensions of symmetry (equality vs. inequality of welcoming needs) and synchronicity (timing of welcome: pre-, syn-, and post-encounter). Their theoretical framework draws on Bakhtinian communication theory to treat every utterance in interviews as co-constructed meaning and uses Perazzolo's typology of hospitality to trace patterns of asymmetry (one-sided welcome), symmetry (mutual openness), and “ametry” (no real welcome) (Ferreira, Pereira 2025: 8-10). Based on semi-structured interviews, their results reveal different patterns of asymmetry (teachers support students' technical and linguistic needs and give clear instructions via chat channels) and symmetry (collaborative group tasks and “ice-breaker” activities that positioned students and teachers as co-learners), as well as ametric behavior, such as not switching cameras on, not responding to partners' utterances and questions *etc.*, which indicate a relational

vacuum, disconnect or breakdown between participants. Their concept of hospitality and welcoming strategies in online communication fills a conceptual gap regarding relational quality in virtual exchange, especially relevant in context-rich cultures as was the case with the Mexican and Brazilian participants, providing important insider accounts from both teachers and students.

3.1 Core issues in CVE

Malin Reljanivoc Glimäng (2022) examines how a transnational virtual exchange (TVE) on sustainability can foster critical intercultural awareness among university students. Drawing on frameworks of “safe” versus “brave” spaces (HAUCK; HELM 2020) and “soft” versus “critical” global citizenship education (ANDREOTTI 2006), the author analyzes reflective student e-portfolios from teams in Argentina, Poland, and Sweden. The core finding is that, while action-oriented tasks generate intercultural dialogue, truly critical, “brave” reflection often remains a private, post-task process rather than an explicit, collaborative endeavor.

Moving onward in the same direction, Mirjam Hauck (2023) argues that Virtual exchange (VE) leverages digital technologies to facilitate intercultural dialogue and advance internationalization at home (I@H). She notes that while VE broadens access and simulates study-abroad experiences, it often perpetuates inequities related to technology, language dominance, and institutional barriers. She introduces Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) as a framework that embeds equity, inclusion, and social justice into VE practice. Hauck (2023) proposes CVE as an evolution of VE, explicitly oriented toward social justice and sustainable development, based on a four-pillar framework: (1) Low-bandwidth technologies; (2) Focus on underrepresented student groups; (3) Alignment with UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); (4) Public engagement through partnerships with NGOs and local actors (HAUCK 2023). Hauck also defends the integration of translanguaging (*i.e.*, using various or all languages present in the context of the VE and a multimodal approach) to promote equitable multilingualism and multimodal communicative competence, the adoption of critical digital literacy (CDL) to empower students as agents of social change and grounding CVE in critical global

citizenship education (CGCE) to foster reflexivity, critical analysis of power differentials, and collaborative action to improve existing issues. Hauck's CVE framework reframes VE by placing equity and social justice at its core. It addresses digital divides through low-bandwidth solutions and champions student agency via CDL and CGCE. The systematic use of translanguaging is particularly innovative, acknowledging students' full linguistic repertoires and fostering truly inclusive dialogue. However, her seminal article remains largely conceptual, setting up goals rather than describing practical guidance for overcoming entrenched institutional constraints (*e.g.*, lack of faculty incentives). The dependence on SDG alignment may also risk superficial compliance rather than deep, context-specific engagement. Finally, while translanguaging is advocated, concrete strategies for supporting educators new to multilingual pedagogy are not developed.

3.2 Teacher Education and CVE

Antje Goller (2025) examines how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD/BNE) is actually integrated into German teacher education programs and identifies gaps and opportunities. Drawing on UNESCO's SDG 4.7 indicator, she analyzes a survey of 504 in-service teachers, 66% of whom support mandatory ESD in initial training, yet 64% never encountered it during their studies. Lexical searches of study and examination regulations at the 20 largest German teacher-training institutions find explicit ESD references in only 6% of the analyzed documents (14% under broader search terms). Qualitative studies show as main obstacles faculty members' varied ESD conceptions and widespread time constraints, lack of competences, and limited institutional support. ESD-related continuing education mostly seems to be supported by a small number of already interested teachers.

We consider that CVE, as suggested by Hauck (2023), can contribute to a stronger integration of ESD at a larger scale, not only in Virtual Exchange settings, but also in teacher education as a whole, especially if the Virtual Exchange project involves participants from countries with critical perspectives on the UN view of SDGs, like in our case. Complementing Goller's research, it must be said that at least at our university in Brazil (Federal University of Santa Catarina - UFSC) SDGs and specifically decolonial

and anti-racist perspectives (and DEI⁷ in general) are extensively cited in our syllabi and course programs, as is the case in nationwide Brazilian educational legislation and guidelines.

Gabriella von Lieres and Sabine Lang⁸ present four distinct virtual exchange (VE) formats piloted with teacher-training cohorts at the University of Education Weingarten between 2020 and 2022: previous onboarding of incoming on-site exchange students, short intensive online course and semester-long binational courses (Virtual Mobility, involving teachers and students from UFSC), and Blended Intensive Programs (BIP) that add to the latter a short on-site stay. Framed as responses to the dual demands of intercultural and digital competence in schools, these formats range from simple “onboarding” sessions for incoming exchange students to fully blended intensive programs combining online collaboration with on-site study visits. The authors offer rich, practitioner-driven vignettes illustrating how diverse VE models can be embedded in teacher education. They also identify cross-cutting factors (organizational, temporal, technical, didactic, linguistic) and their interplay, providing valuable guidance for teacher educators, as well as an alignment of four different VE designs with national curricula and accreditation needs, demonstrating feasibility in many real-world settings.

3.3 CVE and internationalization

Latin American contexts, of course, differ profoundly from the European situation as documented by Carmen King Ramírez (2022): Latin American universities rank among the world’s lowest in student exchange rates (OECD, 2019), yet internationalization is widely acknowledged as critical for 21st-century competencies. Virtual Exchange (VE) offers an inclusive, cost-effective “internationalization at home” alternative to traditional mobility. Drawing on the Latin American COIL (LatAm COIL) network – a regional arm of SUNY’s Collaborative Online International Learning model – this study profiles the

⁷ Diversity, Equity, Inclusion; the fact that DEI policies nowadays are being radically reverted by certain political and economic players does not mean they are obsolete, in the opposite. We consider our article as a manifesto advocating for the full implementation of DEI principles, not as a strategy to mask and perpetuate traditional privileges, but to finally overcome them and reach true Education for Sustainability.

⁸ Lieres; Lang (2024): Virtual Exchange in Teacher Training – An Overview of Four Formats Carried out at University of Education Weingarten

academics and administrators driving VE efforts in Latin America and identifies the support they need to sustain VE programs. The study portrays the demographic, professional, and personal profiles and experiences of 60 LatAm COIL members (of 152 in Latin America) from 47 universities across 10 countries (however, Mexico and Colombia represent more than 70% of respondents). The overall result is that a vast majority is open to experimenting with VE to increase access to intercultural experiences for their students; however, they have little previous experience or incentive and are concerned about how to overcome obstacles such as language and digital literacy skills, access to technology, and curricular alignment.

The BRASUIS study (FINARDI, SALVATORI, WEHRLI 2022) examines how a 14-week virtual exchange (VE), modeled on COIL, fostered Global Citizenship (GC) and Internationalization at Home (I@H) among 26 students and 8 faculty/guests across three universities (two in Brazil, one in Switzerland). It addresses glaring North–South imbalances in higher-ed internationalization by assessing a South-North VE collaboration’s impact on partner institutions’ curricula and mindsets. The methodology of this study combines qualitative design using focus groups, researcher observations, and student/faculty reflection reports with content analysis of themes/attitudes toward language anxiety, stereotype deconstruction, translanguaging, and intercomprehension. The content came from 10 synchronous plenaries with guest speakers and 10 autonomous student tandems over 14 weeks with weekly reflective tasks, glossary co-building, mini lectures on multilingualism, globalization, and stereotypes. English was used as Lingua Franca supported by Portuguese/German intercomprehension modules. The focus of this study is mainly on procedural and formal aspects of this VE project, despite having a clear decolonial approach regarding power differentials and the asymmetry in GC and GC Education (GCE) among the participating countries. In fact, the authors dubbed the project “Guaraná com chocolate”, *i.e.*, two famous products of the two countries (a traditional Brazilian soft drink and world-famous Swiss chocolate), knowing that the cocoa at the base of the worldwide dominance of Swiss chocolate is mainly grown in the Brazilian state of Bahia (location of one of the Brazilian universities). The authors found that initial anxiety due to insecurity and feelings of (linguistic) inferiority on the Brazilian side shifted to an attitude of comfort, confidence, curiosity, and that joy replaced anxiety,

demonstrating successful use of translanguaging and intercomprehension to develop global mindsets. VE tandems directly confronted and dismantled common Brazil/Switzerland stereotypes, leading to mutual “amazement” and recognition of shared realities. Despite clear differences in infrastructure, previous experience with VE and institutional support, this study illuminates how a structured VE can equalize internationalization deficits in Global South universities and contribute to promote decolonial awareness in universities of the Global North.

4 Critical Decolonial Theory and Global Education for Sustainability

In order to strengthen the views on Global Education (GE) or Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) of relevant actors in less privileged countries (generally called “Global South”⁹), it is inevitable to refer to Critical Decolonial Theory, sometimes associated more with political, historical, or sociological discussions, intercultural debates or analyses of power differentials. However, as we will show in this section, despite originating almost a century ago, the decolonial perspective is of central relevance for the discussion of today’s GE, ESD and education itself.

Frantz Fanon, in works like *The Wretched of the Earth* (cf. FANON, 1952, 2004), analyzed the psychological and social effects of colonialism, emphasizing the need for radical decolonization. Fanon warned that post-independence elites in the Global South could easily become complicit in perpetuating colonial structures if they simply inherited power without transforming society. He advocated for a “new humanism” and genuine liberation that transcends both colonial and neo-colonial domination. Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse* (CÉSARIE 2000) on colonialism is central to decolonial thought, critiquing European “civilization” as inherently violent and exploitative. Césaire introduced the concept of *negritude* and called for a decolonization that is not only political but also cultural and epistemological, challenging the dominance of Western values and

⁹ We use the dichotomies North-South or East-West in this article because they are widely applied in the referred discussion, but we are totally aware that they are inadequate as they tend to reproduce stereotypes and mask profound heterogeneity and complexity involved in Global Education.

rationality. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) is foundational for decolonial theory, exposing how Western scholarship constructed the "Orient" as an exotic, inferior "Other" to justify colonial dominance. Said argued that colonialism persists culturally and epistemologically, with Western narratives shaping global understandings and marginalizing indigenous voices. His work catalyzed critiques of Eurocentric knowledge and inspired subsequent theorists to interrogate the power embedded in representation and discourse.

bell hooks (1994) advanced a decolonial feminist pedagogy rooted in anti-racist struggle, intersectionality, and the linking of social justice, feminism, and ecology. She criticized both patriarchy and colonialism, insisting that education must be a liberatory, engaged practice that centers marginalized voices, especially women of color. Decolonial feminists such as María Lugones (2010) further complicate intersectionality by foregrounding the coloniality of gender, challenging Western binaries and advocating for the recognition of indigenous and non-Western gender systems. Critical decolonial theory, rooted in the works of Said, Fanon, Césaire, bell hooks, and other "Global South" and feminist thinkers, provides powerful tools to challenge the ongoing coloniality embedded in global education and sustainability agendas. These critiques urge a move beyond the superficial inclusion of marginalized voices, calling instead for a radical re-centering of knowledge, agency, and power in the hands of those historically excluded from the global order. Even models that theoretically are set to change global injustice and inequality are mostly coined, installed and propagated by actors and representatives of privileged nations, even when they rely on ideas and discourses of representatives of oppressed, marginalized or excluded nations.

Edward Said's concept of *Orientalism* demonstrates how Western educational systems continue to construct and represent the "East" through Eurocentric colonial lenses, simply replacing "East" with "South". In modern global education, this manifests in several key ways. Contemporary educational curricula often perpetuate privileged representations by centering Western achievements while marginalizing other civilizations and knowledge systems. Global education systems tend to maintain (neo-) colonial power structures through the stereotyping of students from non-Western backgrounds or universalization of their own norms and values (as a critical analysis of

SDGs might argue). The dominance of English as the global language of education and lingua franca of many VE projects reflects ongoing colonial structures. Fanon viewed education as a tool of both oppression and liberation. His analysis reveals how (neo-)colonial education systems were designed to train a “European” elite that could collaborate with colonizers, creating dependency relationships that persist today. Contemporary global education maintains these structures through what scholars describe as “educational neocolonialism” (cf. NGUYEN *et al.* 2009; ANWARUDDIN 2014). Fanon’s concept of internalized oppression explains how colonial education creates what he called psychological colonization. This process continues in modern educational settings, where “colonized education affects both the colonizer and the colonized... influences their worldviews, their identity, their self-esteem, and their physical, mental and spiritual well-being” (cf. MULDER 2016: 1).

The persistence of Western-centric knowledge systems, the marginalization of indigenous epistemologies, and the ongoing psychological effects of colonial education demonstrate that the project of decolonization remains incomplete. However, Fanon and Said also point toward possibilities for resistance and transformation through critical pedagogy, curriculum decolonization, and the validation of diverse knowledge systems. Understanding these continuities is essential for developing truly equitable and inclusive global education systems that honor all forms of knowledge and ways of being.

Paulo Freire (2000) extends Edward Said’s revelation of cultural colonialism and Frantz Fanon’s diagnosis of material-psychological domination into the educational arena. By exposing the “banking model” – depositing knowledge to keep learners passive – of schooling and proposing dialogical, problem-posing praxis, Freire shows how colonial hierarchies survive inside classrooms – and how critical pedagogy can become a decolonial weapon for Global South learners by naming oppression that parallels Fanon’s call for reclaiming humanity and insisting on horizontal teacher–student relations, breaking the discursive monopoly Said critiqued and the authoritarian structures Fanon condemned. Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* translates the macro-level colonial critiques of Said and Fanon into micro-level pedagogical practice. Together, the three authors reveal a continuum: Orientalist knowledge justifies colonial violence, which is then domesticated and perpetuated daily through banking education. A decolonial future,

therefore, hinges on Freirean liberating education that is historically specific (Fanon), reducing colonial structures and epistemically insurgent (Said), validating non-Eurocentric knowledge systems – a dialogical praxis capable of dismantling the classroom as the last fort of empire.

Additionally, in partnerships such as the one proposed in this article, it is necessary to constantly observe the process with a critical eye, since we are shaped by coloniality and often fail to recognise the gravity of perpetuating these power structures. As Lynn Mário Menezes de Sousa and Ana P. Duboc (2021) explain, identifying, interrogating, and interrupting coloniality is essential, as it proclaims the separation between the “developed” and those who “need to develop”.

María Lugones, in *Toward a Decolonial Feminism*, introduces the concept of the coloniality of gender, challenging Western feminist assumptions about the universality of gender categories. Drawing on Aníbal Quijano’s theory of the “coloniality of power”, Lugones exposes how European colonialism fundamentally transformed gender relations and identities across colonized societies. Lugones calls for the “undoing” and “unlearning” of colonial gender categories, urging feminists to recognize and reclaim Indigenous, communal, and nonbinary understandings of gender and social relations. Her theorizing encourages intersectional and coalitional feminist practices that go beyond Western ideas of individualism and binary gender, instead building alliances among those marginalized by colonial and patriarchal systems (cf. LUGONES 2010).

Geni Núñez Longhini is a Guarani Indigenous activist, psychologist, writer, and academic. Her work bridges Indigenous epistemologies with anticolonial feminist thought, addressing subjects such as race, ethnicity, gender, and the impacts of colonialism and whiteness within Brazilian society and beyond. Núñez Longhini (2022; 2023) criticizes the dominance of “monocultures of thought”: Western, colonial, and heteronormative systems of knowledge, affection, and relationality imposed on Indigenous peoples.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui (2021) is a Bolivian Aymara sociologist and one of Latin America’s most influential decolonial thinkers. Cusicanqui highlights how colonial power structures persist in postcolonial societies, not only through external domination but also within the nation-state, elite classes, and educational institutions. For Cusicanqui,

decolonization is not only a theoretical project but must be embodied and practiced collectively in everyday life – as lived resistance, not mere academic discourse (cf. DIAZ-HERRERA 2020). Cusicanqui criticizes how many decolonial discourses, especially those exported from the Global North, appropriate indigenous concepts while stripping away their political and epistemic force. She criticizes both Latin American elites and “fashionable” decolonial discourses that fail to challenge colonial dynamics at their core. Instead, Cusicanqui calls for a continual, collective, and practical decolonization – one that centers indigenous ways of being, knowing, and resisting, and that refuses closure, synthesis, or erasure of difference.

Isabelle Munyangaju (2024) critically examines the concept of decoloniality, highlighting its increasing relevance in debates on global power imbalances and persistent structural inequalities. The author seeks to move the discourse beyond binary views of victims versus perpetrators, advocating for a more nuanced and holistic framework aimed at achieving global equity. Munyangaju highlights decolonial theory’s increasing relevance in debates on global power imbalances and persistent structural inequalities. The paper discusses case studies – such as land reform in post-apartheid South Africa, integration of Indigenous knowledge into Latin American university curricula, and vaccine manufacturing in Africa – to illustrate both the challenges and potential pathways for realizing decoloniality and global equity in practice. Munyangaju considers that the journey from decoloniality to global equity demands a paradigm shift that goes beyond recognizing historical injustices.

Sharon Stein’s article (2019) examines the current impasses in critical studies of the internationalization of higher education, given the multiple contemporary crises. The author argues that, although there is a growing interest in critical approaches, these efforts risk becoming symbolic if they do not deeply address the complexity, uncertainty, and complicity involved in the process of institutional change. Stein contextualizes her argument by pointing out that internationalization has historically been portrayed as a neutral and positive process, promoted in the name of globalization, competitiveness, and excellence. However, this view often ignores the negative impacts associated with the maintenance of colonial, Eurocentric, and commodified logics. In response, a field of critical internationalization studies has emerged that seeks to question these structures,

emphasizing the ethical and political aspects of the international expansion of education. Despite this critical shift, Stein identifies an “impasse”: this critique has been institutionalized by universities themselves, which, by adopting ethical or anti-colonial discourses, dismiss the need for deeper changes. To further the debate, Stein and her research group, “Gesturing Towards Decolonial Futures”, identify major global challenges that require a reassessment of the role of internationalization: the current socio-economic system, rooted in systemic colonial violence and hidden exploitation, is ecologically unsustainable due to unchecked growth and consumption. This unsustainability is manifesting as intensifying global crises, which are, in reality, symptoms of deeper systemic and ecological issues. Addressing these “wicked problems” is hampered by a limited capacity to imagine viable alternatives, often stemming from a fear of uncertainty and a desire for control. Overcoming these challenges requires ethically integrating diverse knowledge systems to foster a more sustainable and equitable future (STEIN, 2019, p. 2).

With regard to sustainability, it is worth highlighting Ailton Krenak’s critique. In general terms, the author criticizes the traditional notion of sustainability and calls for reflection on the way it has been approached. Sometimes, the concept of sustainability and its actions are superficial and incapable of tackling the root causes of environmental problems, as they are limited to palliative measures, such as responsible consumption, but “what is it possible to sustain?” (KRENAK 2009: 22). For him, the environmental crisis stems from the false separation between humanity and nature; we are part of the Earth, and we need to recover this connection (KRENAK 2009: 63-67). Krenak advocates an ethic of belonging, simplicity and reuse, proposing the replacement of linear practices with a circular and regenerative logic inspired by ancestral cultures. In this sense, it is essential to rethink values, overcome individualism and create new collective narratives that prioritize the future of the planet. Without a doubt, critical virtual exchange can contribute to this.

After exposing some relevant theoretical perspectives that have guided the COIL and VE projects at UEW and UFSC, we will discuss practical aspects and questions that came up in the different settings and share our experiences which may be of interest to colleagues who are interested in this new way of teaching and teacher education.

5 Practical experiences with COIL and Virtual Exchange involving teachers and students from UFSC and UEW

In this section, we will present some of our practical experiences in the field of COIL related to the theoretical discussions above.

5.1 Virtual Mobility (VM)

Building on our long-standing on-site student exchange with the University of Education Weingarten (UEW – *Pädagogische Hochschule Weingarten*, PHW in German), eight undergraduate students of German Language and Literature, two teachers from the Federal University of Santa Catarina (UFSC) and nine students from UEW participated in a compact virtual class (2 ECTS) taught by Sabine Lang from the UEW on “Globalization and Culture as Challenge for Learning and Teaching”, within the context of a project to promote internationalization of teacher training (ILAP) funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The setting was a classic example of Virtual Mobility (VM), where our students were able to participate in a class regularly taught at UEW. Teaching materials were made available on UEW’s Moodle platform, accessible to UFSC students via guest accounts. The course included a reading list, synchronous class contact hours held on Zoom, and several free online teaching tools, such as Padlet, Miro, Mentimeter, WordCloud *etc.*, to enhance the dynamics of interaction during the virtual classes or breakout sessions for student group work.

German was the language used in class and in most reading materials, creating at the same time a fantastic learning opportunity and a considerable challenge for some of our less proficient or more introverted Brazilian non-native participants. UEW students had to produce a graded essay or portfolio to receive credits, while UFSC students received a certificate of participation validated as extra-class academic activities. Our participants were very active in class and group work, provided highly positive feedback, and overall had an experience similar to traditional on-site student mobility; however, without the linguistic and cultural immersion of everyday life, limited to just one class and avoiding the expenses of intercontinental travel (which would have been impossible

back in 2020 given the pandemic restrictions). Due to the topic and Sabine Lang's professional facilitation, there were plenty of intercultural learning opportunities, and participants were eager to explore the extent to which perceptions of different aspects of the subject were shared or divergent. However, there were some participants on the German side who came from a migration background, and they were visibly reluctant to engage in the lively discussions among German and Brazilian participants.

5.2 Virtual Exchange involving undergraduate courses (VE)

In early 2023, two of the authors of this paper spent one week at UEW during a networking event with the ILAP project partners from Germany, Spain, Israel, USA, India (virtually represented due to visa issues), Chile and Brazil, including a 3-day intensive workshop with Robert O'Dowd, one of the pioneers in the field of VE. Later in the same year one of the authors started a VE project with a colleague from the department of German as a second language at UEW. Both were teaching a class on German Phonetics and Phonology at that moment and wanted to put into practice what they had learned in O'Dowd's workshop. They based their preparations on the *SUNY Faculty Guide for Collaborative Online International Learning*¹⁰, which contains very useful general guidance and detailed, practical, step-by-step suggestions on how to develop a VE. Many details must be taken into account when planning a Virtual Exchange. Common issues include time zone differences, diverging schedules or reduced semester overlap. Another important point is deciding which tools should be used for online meetings, group interaction, and the publishing of outcomes, *etc.* It is important to decide on a form of grading or certification for participants, because a considerable part of the motivation to engage in a VE depends on it. They had only six weeks of semester overlap, and class schedules made online time during classes impossible (6:30 p.m. in Brazil, which would have been 11:30 p.m. in Germany – or 9 a.m. in Germany, 4 a.m. in Brazil, depending on the group schedule). A decision was made to use a very basic, low-level technical approach, and a simple Padlet page was prepared for the general outline of the VE, where

¹⁰ See SUNY COIL CENTER, 2015.

the 20 participants (12 from UFSC, 8 from UEW) had two weeks to post a short, multimodal presentation of themselves¹¹.

The teachers defined the composition of the student groups with two from each country and at least one with teaching experience, as well as the topic of the VE: *assimilation¹² of speech sounds in German and Portuguese and how to teach it to future students*. Students worked on two group tasks: (1) collecting and analyzing examples of assimilation in the two languages and (2) teaching a tongue-twister in their own language to non-native group members. In our 90-minute kick-off session on Zoom, we had several icebreaker activities, presented the setup, and had group tasks in separate breakout rooms to create initial contact among participants of each group and to make sure our choices regarding group composition were functional. The five groups had four weeks to prepare their tasks. No tools, formal, or procedural aspects were pre-established, as the teachers judged that, after the pandemic, all participants had already developed personal preferences and skills that allowed them to select their ways of collaboration autonomously.

The results were presented by the groups in a final 90-minutes online session. We were surprised by how smoothly the entire VE took place, despite the various challenges and possible pitfalls mentioned above. There were no dropouts; all groups produced and presented relevant and consistent outcomes, and student feedback was very positive¹³. The main outcome on the content level was that participants could deepen their theoretical knowledge of the topic (acquired in previous separate class sessions) through hands-on practical interaction, collecting, explaining and teaching concrete assimilation examples to their counterparts. The fact that the Brazilian students had to teach their German colleagues something about their native Portuguese language simultaneously clarified the category of assimilation for the German participants, allowing them to identify this mechanism at work even in a language they did not speak. It added a fun factor with the tongue twisters (mainly based on assimilation-related difficulty) and helped to reduce, at least partly, the inevitable asymmetry of using German once again as the language of

¹¹ More details on the setup, see Weininger (2025).

¹² Adjacent speech sounds in any language adapt to each other depending on their point of articulation and create difficulties for non-native learners.

¹³ Main feedback: we should do that more frequently.

communication and analyzing a phenomenon of German in the VE project. There was less opportunity for intercultural learning, except for some comments of our students who found the way their German counterparts communicated via email “a bit strange”. Grading, in this case, was straightforward, as the presentations in the VE counted as normal assessments in the respective on-site classes.

5.3 Virtual Exchanges Integrated with Extension Projects

In 2023, the UFSC-UEW partnership initiated virtual exchange experiences using English as the language of communication. These virtual exchanges have been coordinated by one of the authors, an English faculty member from the Foreign Language and Literature department at UFSC, and a faculty member from the English department at UEW. In this section, we report on how these virtual exchanges have been planned and implemented, highlighting some of the crucial elements involved in crafting VEs, as already mentioned in section 5.2 (context information, project definition, assessment, and reflection).

The initial challenge in implementing the virtual exchange was finding a format that would be suitable for each educational context. In this case, the German partner teaches Pedagogy students who are enrolled in an MA program and attending a subject named *Integrating the Global Citizenship Goals and Culture in the EFL Classroom*. Conversely, the Brazilian partner works with *Letras* undergraduate and graduate students, many of them majoring in English, but others majoring in other languages (Spanish, French, Italian or German). The courses taught by the Brazilian partner are generally related to teaching or learning English, or more related to research methodology. Furthermore, some of the courses are taught in Portuguese and include students who are majoring in other additional languages, not only English.

Thus, while the German teacher has a group of students enrolled in a subject that is clearly connected with cultural exchange, the Brazilian teacher has a harder time convincing her students to join the VE, either because they feel it is difficult to interact in English or because they are not planning to become teachers.

Considering these differences, the VE experiences on the Brazilian side have been conducted as part of an extension project, while in Germany they were a regular module

for MA students. The extension project solution has proved effective, as it allows opening the virtual exchange experience to both undergraduate and graduate students from all *Letras* programs, as well as to Pedagogy majors at UFSC. Furthermore, this solution aligns well with the Brazilian higher education system, given that current national curriculum guidelines require that undergraduate and graduate students complete a set number of extension activities.

Once the partners had agreed on a format, another important step was to define a final project that is relevant to all participants and related to the Global Citizenship Goals. Chart 2 summarizes the projects that were proposed for our VEs.

Chart 2. Final project options for the VEs

2023	<p>Option 1: creating a lesson or short project for students that could be used in both countries to promote intercultural and global competence in EFL classrooms.</p> <p>Option 2: creating a short video that promotes a global issue that is important in both countries.</p>
2024	Creating a contextualized lesson plan that will be used in a specific EFL teaching context in Brazil
2025	<p>Option 1: creating a short video or podcast discussing how education will change in the next 5 years or the role of Artificial Intelligence in education, while considering the perspectives of both cultural contexts.</p> <p>Option 2: creating a short video or podcast reporting the results of a small survey you have conducted with teachers and/or students about how they are using Artificial Intelligence. Here they could compare different data from the two countries.</p> <p>Option 3: creating a short video or podcast that discusses how social media could be incorporated in the regular school curriculum. Here they can also include possible differences due to different cultural contexts.</p>

Source: The authors

As can be seen in Chart 2, in the first virtual exchange, students were provided with two options. In the second virtual exchange, the project choice was constrained by the course syllabus of some of the Brazilian undergraduate students¹⁴, as they were involved in gathering information about different outreach projects aimed at teaching English to learners of different age groups in their city. For this reason, the Brazilian students chose the teaching context and had to share information about this context with

¹⁴ In 2024, most Brazilian students were attending a subject taught in Portuguese and an attempt was made to integrate the subjects' content with the virtual experience activities.

the German students to create the lesson plan. Finally, in 2025, students were provided with three options for the final project. The first two options involved addressing the impact of artificial intelligence on education, and they could create either a video or a podcast to discuss the topic based on their own opinion (option 1) or by conducting a short survey and reporting the results (option 2). The third option involved creating a video or podcast to discuss ways of incorporating social media in the school curriculum.

As mentioned in section 5.2, another central issue in the planning of virtual exchanges is to decide how to assess students. Chart 3 shows how assessment has been implemented in our extension VE experiences.

Chart 3. Task considered for assessment purposes

Activities	Procedures
Taking the role of weekly leader	Posting summaries of team discussions for each task on team's Padlet; Sending tasks and links to coordinators
Attending team online meeting	Meeting team members online (1 to 1:30 hour weekly meeting) to work on assigned tasks
Working collaboratively	Get-to-know each other; Cultural box; Cultural Questionnaire; Project
Attending general-group meetings	Online general meetings
Presenting final project	Online presentation and/or participation in video or podcast
Evaluation of VE experience	Completing online form containing survey questions

Source: The authors

As can be seen above, participants have to complete asynchronous and synchronous activities so that the VE coordinators manage to keep track of who is actually engaged in the virtual exchange. Occasionally, a few students quit the exchange program, and when this happens, either they or their teammates inform the coordinators about it. However, the drop-out rate is low (about 10%). The actual grading of each activity, especially the final project, is a decision made by each coordinator; however, this must be decided before the virtual exchange starts, and the evaluation criteria must also be presented to the participants beforehand as well.

Considering that the German students' participation in the VE is part of the course syllabus of an MA subject, their assessment includes additional tasks, especially diary-writing and weekly discussions among the German participants. On the other hand, for

the Brazilian participants, assessment does not involve grading and is based on ensuring they are involved in completing the required activities displayed in Chart 3. The more lenient approach to assessment of the Brazilian students is related to the fact that, for them, the virtual exchange is an extension activity.

It is important to explain that the three VEs have been organized around three main stages: Stage 1: Getting to Know Each Other (2-3 weeks); Stage 2: Comparing and analyzing cultural practices (2 weeks); Stage 3: Working on a collaborative product – Team's Project (2 weeks). Stage 1 is key for students to find a common schedule to meet every week, to bond, and to get organized to start working together. Stage 2 is intended for them to become aware of cultural similarities and differences, but it is also an opportunity for them to feel more confident about their abilities to communicate in English. Finally, Stage 3 is the most challenging, but also the richest moment of virtual exchanges. Students need to work together to complete a project and to overcome all the challenges that are part of group work, keeping in mind the cultural differences that become more evident when they need to negotiate and interact more intensely in a virtual environment.

Organizing virtual exchanges as part of extension projects has proved an interesting experience for both Brazilian and German partners, despite certain challenges. As Chart 4 shows, the positive points outnumber the negative ones. A major challenge in organizing virtual exchanges is finding a schedule that is suitable for both partners. Although the Brazilian and the German institutions organize the academic calendar in semesters, the starting and finishing dates differ, as well as the national and local holidays. Generally, the Brazilian first semester starts in March, while the German semester starts in late April. Thus, having more flexibility to organize a 6 or 7-week virtual exchange program is essential, and this is much easier to do when the virtual exchange is part of an extension project in Brazil. Similarly, a flexible schedule is very important for finding a common day and time when most students can attend the general online meetings, considering the time zones.

Chart 4. Pros and Cons of Virtual Exchange Integrated with Extension Projects

Positive Points
Easier to find a schedule for general meetings
More flexibility for final project options
Easier to handle differences in academic calendar, time zone and class time
Participation of students from different programs
Integration between graduate and undergraduate students
Students volunteer to participate
Assessment is more lenient
Shortcomings
Brazilian coordinator does not have regular meetings with students
Less control of students' participation
Work not counting as teaching hours for Brazilian coordinator

Source: The authors

In section 5.2, it was pointed out that it is interesting to provide students with more than one option for the final project. Again, this is much easier to do when working with extension projects, as this allows coordinators to look for an education-related topic and a task that suits all students. This highlights another positive aspect of organizing virtual exchanges as part of extension projects: expanding the scope of participants. In this format, students from different graduate and postgraduate programs can be invited to participate, which both enriches the possibilities of at-home internationalization and provides students with more opportunities to expand their cultural and linguistic knowledge. Furthermore, this format allows students to engage voluntarily in the virtual exchange experience, potentially resulting in higher commitment to the tasks. Finally, coordinators might also feel less pressure to handle assessment when the virtual exchange is part of an extension project, given that grades are not required and that the focus can be on participation, monitoring how students complete the tasks, and observing how they react to the whole experience.

Reflecting on the three virtual exchange experiences so far, some negative points were listed on Chart 4. The first one involves the few opportunities for the Brazilian coordinator to interact with the Brazilian students, given that not all of them are her regular students. This situation poses some challenges when it comes to assessing student

participation. Furthermore, extension activities do not count towards regular teaching hours. However, coordinators can register the extension project in a way that reflects the hours of work involved in planning and implementing the virtual exchange.

5.4 Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE)

Just recently, two of the authors participated in a new edition of the weeklong ILAP¹⁵ project meeting at the UEW, which featured a two-day intensive Workshop on CVE with Mirjam Hauck from the British Open University who proposed this concept (see section 3.1). During the stay at UEW, a new VE iteration conducted by three teachers of German as a foreign/second language from UFSC and UEW, approaching the subject of “Decolonial analysis and creation of language teaching materials” was decided. Building on the positive previous experiences with our shorter VEs, the partners will now use a whole semester, allowing for a more detailed and in-depth approach to the subject, but at the same time requiring much more preparation and planning to sustain student participation and engagement, as well as relevant results. Besides our two universities (UFSC and UEW), this VE intends to connect some participants from universities that are not involved in the ILAP+InGE project: one in Namibia that had a previous on-site exchange project coordinated by one colleague at UEW and one in Northeastern Brazil, where due to the relevant local context decolonial theory is strongly represented. At the same time this will broaden access to CVE and reinforce the decolonial perspective, aiming to invert the traditional “North-South” asymmetry in international academic collaboration and enhance our potential to move from “soft” to “critical” global education (ANDREOTTI 2006: 6).

6 Concluding Remarks

Throughout this article, we sought to reflect on how Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) and Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) contribute to the ongoing

¹⁵ DAAD extended funding for five more years, including some new partner universities in South Africa, Norway and Austria; the project is now called “Internationalisierung der Lehrkräftebildung an der PHW – Integrated Mobility for Global Education” (ILaP+ – InGE).

transformation of Additional Language Teacher Education in response to the complex, interconnected demands of our global, digital, and decolonial era. Drawing on confluent theoretical frameworks – language teaching methodology, internationalization of teacher education through COIL, VE, CVE and critical decolonial thought – we framed our collaborative experiences as part of a broader movement to reimagine what internationalization can and should mean in contemporary higher education.

Our analysis and examples show that COIL and CVE offer more than technological innovation; they foster dialogical, situated, and pluricentric encounters across borders. Rather than importing ready-made models from the Global North, our work demonstrates how teacher education can evolve through egalitarian collaborative practices anchored in mutual interest, academic curiosity, and shared responsibility. As our experience with ILAP–InGE and multiple VE initiatives illustrate, intercultural learning can emerge when we co-construct pedagogical spaces based on trust, reciprocity, and openness to difference.

We emphasize that integrating decolonial theory into internationalization initiatives challenges us to go beyond surface-level inclusion and instrumental understandings of “global citizenship”. Inspired by Paulo Freire’s call for truly liberating education and Fanon’s critique of psychological colonization, we recognize that every instance of knowledge exchange also involves dynamics of power, language, and epistemic justice. Thus, we see in these collaborative projects the chance to rethink not only how we teach, but also what we value and how we relate to one another across historical and cultural asymmetries.

Our findings also support the importance of flexibility in institutional design. Extension projects, alternative assessment formats, and interdisciplinarity have enabled us to include students and faculty from multiple countries, disciplines, and educational backgrounds. This democratizes access to international experiences and aligns with the broader goals of Global Education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) as outlined by UNESCO. At the same time, we remain critically aware of the SDGs’ contradictions, as noted by decolonial thinkers like Ailton Krenak and Boaventura de Sousa Santos, who call for an ecologically and epistemologically plural vision of sustainability anchored in lived, local realities.

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Finally, we hope that this article can inspire colleagues to engage critically and creatively in designing COIL and CVE projects. The future of teacher education and global learning lies not in the replication of colonizing paradigms, but in the collective effort to author new ways of teaching, relating, and conceptualizing education – across languages, borders, and systems of knowledge. In doing so, we move not only toward more inclusive education but also toward more just, equitable, and sustainable global futures.

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TEACHING

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Declaração de Disponibilidade de Dados

Os dados que fundamentam esta pesquisa podem ser obtidos sob consulta com os autores.