Introduction
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Welcome to the 2025 publication of e-TEALS, our peer reviewed journal specialising in the didactics of English as a second or foreign language, and which seeks to reflect the latest research in the field. The four articles here result from papers presented at the 9th TEFL conference held at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities of Nova University, Lisbon, Portugal, in November 2024, and reflect the theme of the conference – Innovation in English language teaching: Adapting pedagogies to meet modern challenges. Increased diversity in the classroom, alterations in work and study patterns and the use (and abuse) of new technologies have significantly influenced the characteristics of language learning and teaching in formal educational settings in the last twenty years, and the objective of the conference was to focus on pedagogies in formal education that have contributed to successfully overcoming the challenges of our modern times.

Our first article by Kirsten Birsak de Jersey, Harriet Jeeves, Annika Kolb and Nurjona Pinguri focuses on how participation in the Erasmus+ INVITED project can develop teacher competences for implementing virtual exchanges (VE) in primary and preschool settings. The paper presents criteria for successful VE projects based on research review, a five-country teacher survey, and eTwinning quality standards.

In the second article, Nanna Jørgensen, Juljana Gjata Hjorth Jacobsen and Karen Lassen Bruntt write about Danish lower-secondary students' and teachers' experiences with digital and analogue literary texts in foreign-language learning, exploring reading habits, motivation, and the potential of various media formats to enhance literary engagement. Findings show interactive texts are not a universal solution, and the article offers recommendations for motivating literary reading.

Our third article considers the topic of motivation, and in it, María del Carmen Arau Ribeiro, Ágnes Ibolya Pál, and Réka Asztalos examine how involving learners in collaborative materials design boosts motivation, autonomy, and creativity in language learning. Drawing on data from two European projects and 200 university students, it shows that co-creation fosters ownership, engagement, and critical reflection. Students shift from passive learners to active agents when designing their own materials. Practical strategies are offered for integrating collaborative autonomy into diverse educational contexts.

Our final paper by Asuka Nakagawa again returns to the topic of virtual exchanges and investigates a Kolb-based Preparation–Reflection model for integrating VE into SLA classrooms. A three-week U.S.–Japan exchange revealed challenges such as anxiety and uneven participation, addressed through structured preparation, mediation, and reflection. Student reflections show increased autonomy and metacognitive awareness. The model offers practical guidance for sustainable, experiential VE implementation.

Many thanks to our contributors.

Recommendations for successful virtual exchange projects in early language education

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Abstract

Virtual exchange (VE) provides ample opportunities for language, cultural and digital learning, even young learners can benefit from these authentic communicative situations (e.g. Dooly & Vinagre, 2021; Pennock-Speck & Clavel Arroitia, 2023). The Erasmus+ project INVITED (Integrating primary and preschool virtual exchange projects into language teacher education) seeks to promote (future) teachers' competences to realise VE projects in the primary and preschool classroom.

The paper presents criteria for successful VE projects with young language learners that have been identified in the project. Several sources have been used in this process: a review of existing research on VE in the primary classroom, an online survey with teachers in five European countries on their experiences with and attitudes towards VE (INVITED consortium, 2024b, 2024c), and the criteria the European eTwinning programme uses to award their quality labels. After the discussion of the set of criteria that was compiled in the project, a practical example of a VE project between French and German primary school learners is presented to illustrate the criteria.

Keywords: Virtual exchange, telecollaboration, primary school, young learners, FL teacher education

INTRODUCTION

Virtual exchange or telecollaboration projects, in which learners communicate worldwide via digital media, offer many opportunities for linguistic, cultural and digital learning. As a growing number of examples show, even children in preschool and primary schools can benefit from this approach. The use of English as a foreign language in authentic communication situations can develop their language competences, boost their motivation and foster cultural learning (e.g. Dooly & Vinagre, 2021; Kratzer et al., 2025; Pennock-Speck & Clavel Arroitia, 2023). However, the developing linguistic, digital and cognitive competences of children of this age group place specific demands on VE projects with young learners. Due to their limited language competences, children need a considerable amount of scaffolding. Early language teaching focuses on oral language, so that written products can only be incorporated to some extent in the exchange. Furthermore, children will not be able to deal with complex topics for VE projects in English and they might not be familiar with the digital tools that are used.

These challenges led to the following research question: What are criteria for quality VE projects in early language education?. We will outline different sources that the compilation of criteria that was developed in the Erasmus+ project INVITED draws on, discuss the set of criteria and illustrate it with an example VE project from the primary classroom.

1. VIRTUAL EXCHANGE IN PRIMARY AND PRESCHOOL LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The idea of virtual exchange (VE) as "the process of communicating and collaboratively learning with peers from different locations through the use of technology" (Dooly & Vinagre 2021: 393) is gaining ground around Europe. Following principles of communicative and task-based language learning it provides opportunities for learners to use English in authentic communicative situations. Research on VE in higher education has shown that it promotes intercultural, digital and language competences (Evaluate Group, 2019). Virtual exchange was found to be a flexible approach that can be integrated in a variety of contexts and "an ideal opportunity to engage students in social interaction and collaboration with other participants whom

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they would be less likely to meet in 'normal' educational circumstances" (Dooly & Vinagre 2021: 394). Presenting an alternative to physical mobility, VE allows for real-life language practice and internationalisation also for disadvantaged groups (e.g. due to their socio-economic situation or their age). To promote the idea of VE, in 2005 the EU commission started the eTwinning initiative to provide a platform for schools across Europe to collaborate and engage in educational projects using digital tools. eTwinning is part of the Erasmus+ program and seeks to foster cooperation between teachers, learners, and schools through virtual exchanges.

While there is a multitude of projects and research on VE in higher education, "its application to beginner or younger learners is still lagging behind" (ibid.: 396). Nonetheless, first research projects and reports from primary classrooms show the potential of VE with young learners (see the summary of reports and findings in Pennock-Speck & Clavel Arroitia, 2023):

Children are often very enthusiastic to meet peers from other countries. For many of them, it is the first time that they use English as a lingua franca in an authentic communicative situation which might give them a sense of achievement and boost their confidence (Mont & Masats, 2018). Many teachers report that learners can surpass themselves and use language structures that are beyond their level, particularly in synchronous communicative situations (e.g. Cutrim Schmid & Whyte, 2015: 249; Dooly & Sadler, 2016: 67). Furthermore, there is evidence that VE in the primary classroom can foster cultural learning (Abe & Beecroft, 2024; Hempel, 2023; Okumura, 2020).

However, virtual exchange with young learners also presents some challenges. The limited technical as well as linguistic competences of children make it more difficult to address complex real-life topics and realise synchronous online meetings than this would be with older learners (Dooly & Sadler, 2016: 55).

2. THE INVITED PROJECT

The INVITED project (Integrating primary and preschool virtual exchange projects into language teacher education) aims to promote VE in primary and preschool language

learning contexts and to develop pre- and in-service teachers' competences to realise VE projects (INVITED consortium, 2024). The project group (a consortium of researchers from four universities in Germany, Spain, Slovenia and Poland in cooperation with local schools) experienced that pre-service teachers often find VE very appealing and benefit from taking part in VE projects in university courses. This personal experience can be backed up by research: Participating in VE projects on university level significantly increases future teachers' competences (Evaluate Group, 2019). It helps trainee teachers develop digital-pedagogical competences, intercultural awareness and foreign language abilities. The first-hand experience of overcoming communicative, organizational and technological challenges builds confidence regarding VE. However, when it comes to realizing such projects with younger learners, many teachers are still hesitant because of the children's limited linguistic, literacy and digital competences. Experts therefore identify teacher education as a "key area for improvement in VE" (Dooly & Vinagre, 2021: 401) and advocate teacher training on how to implement VE in the classroom.

Along these lines, the INVITED project tries to give pre-service teachers the opportunity to experience VE in cooperation with local schools as part of their university studies (for example during internships) and support in-service teachers through training, networking opportunities and the provision of best practice examples.

After a survey with pre- and in-service teachers on their experiences with and their needs regarding VE (INVITED consortium 2024b, 2024c), the project is building a community of teachers interested in VE with young learners and developing materials for teacher education on VE. The community is promoted through the project website as well as an eTwinning group on the European school education platform (ESEP) (INVITED consortium, 2024d). It provides opportunities to exchange experiences and materials, displays good practice examples and short how-to-do videos and hosts a series of webinars by experienced teachers. Furthermore, the project consortium is developing a teacher education module that will be incorporated into the partner universities' curricula as well as an online professional development course for in-service teachers to be published on the European School Education Platform (ESEP).

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3. QUALITY CRITERIA FOR VE IN THE EARLY LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Given the specific requirements of VE projects with young learners, the project consortium set out to develop quality criteria for VE in the early language classroom, drawing on a variety of sources: existing research on VE in primary school, the INVITED questionnaire survey with in-service teachers and criteria for the eTwinning quality labels. While virtual exchange can have multiple objectives and some projects with children primarily aim at a cultural exchange, the focus of this compilation of criteria lies on telecollaboration as an integral part of language teaching and learning.

a. Existing research on VE

The limited number of research or reports on VE projects in the early language classroom all focus on the primary classroom, we are not aware of any research in preschool contexts. Pennock-Speck & Clavel Arroitia (2023) give an overview of VE projects in primary school that are reported on in the literature. Only very few of these texts take an actual research perspective. In their overview, the authors conclude that there are three crucial factors for the success of primary VE projects: linguistic competence, classroom management and teaching style (ibid.: 121). In their own study, the scaffolding by the teacher seems to be the most relevant aspect, probably more so than with more advanced language learners. The study demonstrates how the different teaching styles of the two partner teachers and their classroom management support Spanish and French children to communicate despite differing language levels. The Spanish learners were more autonomous, taking initiative and asking questions freely, while the French children relied on their teacher heavily to prompt and assist. The Spanish teacher stepped back, offering few prompts, while the French teacher was more involved, providing frequent guidance. Their findings indicate that a careful balance between guiding and monitoring is needed to encourage autonomy and authentic interaction. Cutrim Schmid & Whyte (2015) come to a similar conclusion in their study with French and German learners. Dooly & Sadler (2016) show that the sequencing of the tasks plays an important role and that the actual telecollaboration of the children has to

be thoroughly prepared and reflected upon afterwards, thereby providing adequate language support. They advocate "pre- and post-telecollaboration tasks that introduce and repeat the target language through many different modes" (ibid.: 73). Okumura (2020) emphasizes the relationship between participants and highlights that "a good partnership of collaborators is indispensable for the success of online collaboration projects" (ibid.: 384), for example through get-to-know activities at the beginning of the project. Mont & Masats (2018) come up with a checklist for teachers, that is a collection of aspects to consider when designing a VE project. Among others they highlight backward planning of projects that requires "keeping the final product in mind from the very beginning" (ibid.: 109). The product of this main task should give children "a good reason to collaborate" (Canto, 2023). Characteristics of good tasks for VE projects that were developed in the E-LIVE project (2024) include that the outcomes are jointly developed and the "students depend on one another to complete the task" (ibid.). Bejarano Sánchez & Giménez Manrique (2018: 178) emphasize that learners should have an active role and a say in the whole process. Children would need to know what they are doing in each activity and why, and the project goals and contents should be explained and discussed with them.

Compared to the little research on VE in primary school, there is a body of research which focuses on VE in university contexts. Summing up several studies, Kurek & Müller-Hartmann (2017) identify four main criteria for good tasks in VE projects: tasks need to involve and challenge learners, they need to be clearly communicated, structured and sequenced, the use of technology should be meaningful and promote digital competences and the tasks should allow learners to develop an open attitude and promote cultural learning.

O'Dowd & Waire (2009) categorise VE tasks in three types and suggest these as a suitable order for a sequence of tasks in a VE project to gradually increase the complexity of encounters:

Information exchange activities serve as ice-breakers and help the partners get to know each other. They are predominantly monologic. Learners could for example post a profile of themselves on a shared Padlet, exchange videos in which they present an

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object that means a lot to them or share photos of their class. *Comparison and analysis* activities go beyond the presentation of information to the partners but make learners compare practices in their daily lives. Therefore, they have to engage in a dialogue with the partners. Young learners could for example compare their breakfast habits, hobbies or free-time activities and try to find similarities and differences. *Collaboration* activities require learners "not only to exchange and compare information but also to work together to produce a joint product or conclusion" (O'Dowd & Waire 2009: 178), for example a collaboratively developed calendar or a digital book.

b. INVITED teacher survey

At the beginning of the INVITED project, a survey with 309 in-service primary and preschool teachers in Spain, Slovenia, Poland and Germany was conducted to investigate their experiences with and attitudes towards VE (INVITED consortium, 2024c). The online survey was distributed to teachers via email using a convenience sampling which was considered suitable due to the intent to investigate attitudes in a rather unfamiliar area. It contained 40 questions and was divided into 6 thematic sections. Questions combined dichotomous, multiple-choice, Likert-type scales, numerical scales and open format. Open questions were categorised in a multiethnic team of distinct area specialists, which reduced the likelihood of subjective interpretations, whilst coding was mainly closed. Some of the results give insights into teachers' perspectives on quality criteria for VE projects (cf. fig 1): The participating teachers particularly highlighted the following aspects: Effective VE projects should provide opportunities for authentic communication (95,1% of teachers agreed) and foster cultural learning (90%). 79,7 % of teachers agreed to the need for pre-planned and structured tasks and 83,4% of teachers attribute VE projects with fostering children's learner autonomy.

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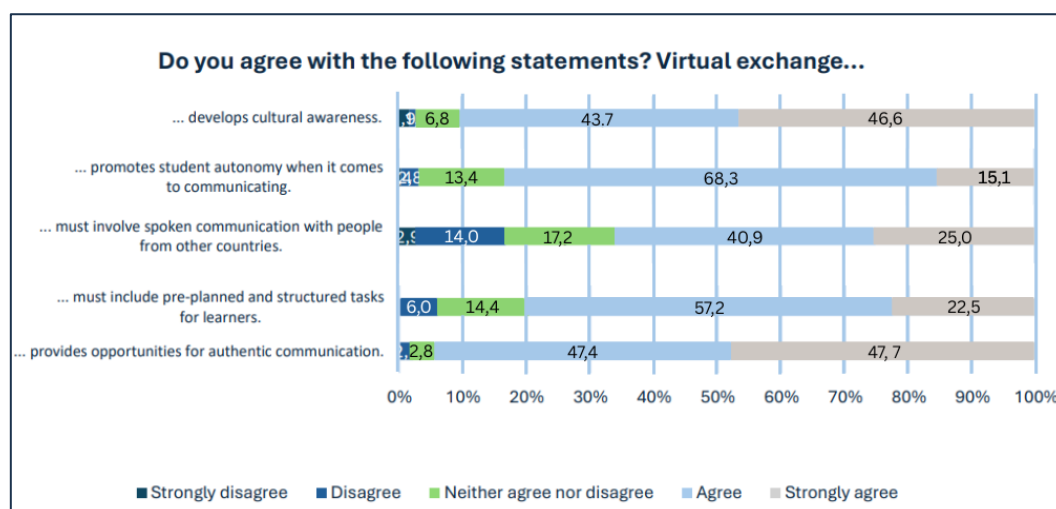Annika Kolb and Nurjona Pinguri

Fig.1: Teachers´ views on virtual exchange (INVITED consortium 2024c: 10)

The fact that 65,9% of the participants said that VE projects must involve spoken communication with people form other countries points towards a preference for synchronous communication.

c. eTwinning quality criteria

To promote the eTwinning initiative, both the national and the European support organisations award eTwinning quality labels for outstanding virtual exchange projects every year. The criteria for this award refer to different kinds of virtual exchange projects which not all aim at language learning and are designed for projects with different age groups. Nevertheless, they can inform the compilation of criteria for VE projects in the early language classroom. The eTwinning quality criteria are grouped into six categories (ESEP, 2022): *Collaboration between partner school* involves activities that go beyond basic communication. Students from different schools are supposed to interact, communicate and collaborate towards a shared goal and produce a "tangible outcome" (ibid.). The *use of technology* contributes to the pedagogical aims of the project and facilitates collaboration. The tools should be age-appropriate and accessible for all. Data protection, copyright rules as well as an online code of conduct are to be followed. In terms of *pedagogical approaches*, student-centred learning and children´s agency are highlighted as well as the use of "methods such as information gathering, problem solving, research and comparative work" (ibid.). According to the eTwinning criteria,

good projects feature a *curricular integration* in one or several subjects and follow a multi-disciplinary approach. *Results and documentation* of the project refer to an evaluation of project results at the end as well as the visibility of products beyond the individual classroom.

4. CRITERIA FOR VE PROJECTS AND TASKS IN EARLY LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Drawing on these sources and with the participation of experienced practitioners in the field, the criteria for VE projects in early language education were grouped into five categories: content, teaching methodology, communication, use of technology and outcomes (see figure 1). It goes without saying that no project will fulfil all the criteria, but they are supposed to provide a framework for evaluating projects and identifying good practice examples while taking account of the specific needs and prerequisites of young language learners.

a. Content

Considering the target group's age, interests, linguistic and cognitive competences, the choice of topic is fundamental for successful VE projects. In line with task-based approaches to language learning, relevance for the learners is indispensable for learning (eg. Kolb & Schocker 2021: 47f.). Only if themes and *topics are appealing, age-appropriate and relevant* to the children they will get involved and enthusiastic to work with the partner class, exchanging ideas and experiences and brainstorming together. Relevance can be enhanced if the topic stems from the children's daily lives and a real-world context which will allow teachers to include *cross-curricular content* (Dooly & Sadler, 2016). Real-world contexts involve different cultures and, when well-designed, VE projects can support the development of intercultural awareness, cultivating an understanding and appreciation of different cultures, which may involve unfamiliar reactions and practices of the partner class (Okumura, 2020). The choice of topic should also make sure that children from different backgrounds feel acknowledged and can contribute their unique experiences and ideas. This *inclusivity* might also entail *plurilingual expression*. A special focus on *early literacy skills* takes account of the learning needs of this age group.

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Area	Nº	Criteria	Definition
Content	1	Appealing and ageappropriate topics	Topics that are engaging and relevant for children taking into consideration their interests, as well as their linguistic and cognitive abilities
	2	Cross-curricular content	Content and/or activities that integrate concepts and skills from more than one subject area to encourage more holistic learning and competence development
	3	Inclusivity and different forms of otherness	Content and/or activities that (i) ensure that all children, regardless of their background or abilities are included and valued in the project; (ii) celebrate diversity and promote tolerance of difference
	4	Intercultural practices and plurilingual expression	Content and activities that foster understanding and appreciation of different cultures and/or encourage the use of multiple languages to enhance students' intercultural awareness and language skills
	5	Early literacy skills	Activities that develop reading and writing competences
Methodological Approach	6	Curriculum innovation through creative educational approaches, strategies, and methods (e.g., storytelling, STEAM, project-based learning, reflective learning, multisensory learning, etc.)	The use of novel and imaginative activities to enhance student engagement and learning outcomes
	7	Activation of children's creativity and higher order thinking skills	Encouraging children to think critically, solve problems, and express their creativity through challenging tasks
	8	Language scaffolding	Language support provided by teachers to help children participate in project activities. This includes modelling and practising the vocabulary and language patterns needed for different tasks, and providing feedback.
	9	High degree of children's agency in designing, shaping and evaluating the educational process	Allowing children to participate in decision-making and gain some control over their project and learning experience to foster independence and responsibility
	10	Different forms of collaboration (peer teaching, national and international group work)	Tasks that involve working together with peers, either within the same classroom or with children from partner countries to achieve common learning goals

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Communication	11	Synchronous and asynchronous communication between participating students	Facilitating both real-time (synchronous) and timeindependent (asynchronous) activities among students
	12	Opportunities for authentic language use in meaningful communicative oral, written and multimodal tasks	Inclusion of tasks that allow children to use language in realworld contexts employing multiple modes (linguistic, visual, aural, gestural, spatial) and different media (video, audio, digital, print)
Use of Technology	13	Creative, meaningful, and responsible use of diverse technological tools	Integrating technology in ways that are innovative and purposeful to support and enhance the learning experience and develop digital competences
Final outcomes	14	Visible results in the form of digital, multimodal and/or handmade products (booklets, posters, videos, etc.)	Encouraging the creation of tangible outcomes from learning tasks to showcase children's communicative, linguistic, intercultural, digital, social and citizenship competences
	15	Wider community impact including schools and families with local/global outreach	Ensuring that project activities have a broader influence, engaging not just the students but also their families, the school and the wider community

Figure 2: Criteria for good virtual exchange projects in early language education (INVITED consortium, 2024e)

b. Teaching methodology

As the research review has shown, teaching methodology and the role of the teacher play a critical role in VE projects with young learners. The need for a real-world topic so that the children have something to communicate about lends itself well to a variety of *learner-centred and holistic teaching approaches*, such as STEAM or project-based learning and can foster children´s *higher order thinking skills*. A good VE project can thus be the motor for innovative teaching approaches and have an impact on all partner classrooms involved.

The research review has demonstrated the indispensable role of *language scaffolding* in VE projects with young learners. Teachers need to provide structured support to guide learners through complex tasks, helping them build confidence and skills over time. This includes modelling and practising language structures the children need for synchronous and asynchronous activities (Pennock-Speck & Clavel Arroitia, 2023). Both research and teachers in the INVITED study highlight the sequencing of tasks which leads to the children systematically building up the language that they need for the

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collaborative tasks. The studies on VE in the primary school context have also shown that children's confidence in new situations may depend on the level of trust their teacher shows in them, conveyed through classroom management and teaching style. Teachers therefore need to monitor how much help they provide for the children to be able to continue comfortably but keep their independence at the same time.

Children's agency is on the one hand important to sustain motivation and involvement in a challenging project that might stretch over longer periods of time. On the other hand, it is a prerequisite to develop learner autonomy and children's ownership of their learning. This involves teachers handing over responsibility in their classroom management by agreeing on results and products together, allowing the learners to choose how to approach their work, and giving them control over their time when possible (Bejarano Sánchez & Giménez Manrique, 2018).

In line with research and the eTwinning quality criteria *collaboration* is an indispensable criterion for a good VE project. Only if learners work on a collaborative project together will they engage in negotiation of meaning (Canto, 2023). In primary or pre-school, the children could for example jointly develop a joint digital book, a calendar or a poster.

c. Communication

Communication naturally serves as the foundation for VE projects, enabling learners to build connections, work together and overcome challenges in both language and cultural understanding. It covers both *synchronous and asynchronous communication*, giving children various ways to build up their language competences and confidence in using the foreign language outside of their classroom setting (Kratzer et al., 2025; Pennock-Speck & Clavel Arroitia, 2023). "Providing opportunities for authentic communication" was what teachers considered to be most important in VE projects with young learners in the INVITED study (INVITED consortium, 2024c: 10). Although synchronous communication puts considerable demands on learners, these interactions enable students to engage directly with each other in a dialogue, offering opportunity to address questions or ideas on the spot and allow children to experience the exchange more immediately (Cutrim Schmid & Whyte, 2015). Collaborating with a real audience in

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an *authentic communicative situation* makes children feel their contributions matter, increasing their involvement and impact on the outcome (Dooly & Vinagre, 2021).

Asynchronous communication, such as making videos, writing messages or sending emails gives learners other ways of communicating which allow them time to think and consolidate the language and their thoughts. It also enables more monitoring and editing to take place. To make up for the limited linguistic competences, multi-modal texts like posters, digital books with audio recordings or videos provide helpful support for the children to get their message across.

d. Technology

Virtual exchange means that pupils are navigating a digital learning environment, relying on technological tools to facilitate communication and collaboration, such as video conferencing, online discussion forums, and collaborative digital workspaces. In effective VE projects in the early language classroom, these *tools should be used creatively, meaningfully and responsibly*. For young learners, the digital tools need to be user-friendly and accessible. The children should be able to creatively use these tools to get their communicative aims across, for example through a combination of pictures and written text or audio recording. Developing a sense of responsibility in the digital space includes safeguarding privacy, being conscious of data protection when choosing technological tools and adhering to a code of conduct for online communication (Mont & Masats, 2018).

e. The outcomes

The above-mentioned need for collaboration as a quality criterion for VE projects in the early language classroom results in a *visible product* of the project that was jointly developed by the partners (Canto, 2023). The outcomes can range from videos, eBooks, booklets, digital posters to podcasts, blogs, and interactive presentations. On the one hand, this common goal gives the project a purpose, on the other hand it showcases the children´s achievements and their developing language, cultural, digital or disciplinary competences.

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Good VE projects do not only impact the learning culture in the participating classrooms, but they can also *impact the wider community*. For example, in the ICEPELL project (2022), children painted rocks and leaves with positive messages like "Be a friend" and "Peace," then placed them in the school grounds, local parks and community spaces. In the sense of "taking action" involved in global citizenship education and with the active collaboration of local organisations and stakeholders, children can feel empowered to directly address real issues as they see their work being a contribution to their immediate environment and are supported in understanding global challenges.

The project "Reducing Plastic Pollution"

To illustrate the set of criteria that was compiled in the INVITED project, this section presents a VE project that took place between two primary school classes from France and Germany. The project explores plastic consumption, seeks to raise children's awareness of plastic pollution, encourages them to explore alternatives to plastic in their daily lives and ultimately seeks to empower the children to protect their environment through sharing ideas and strategies (Lakatos, 2023). With the choice of this topic, the teachers made sure that the content was relevant for the children and the project followed a cross-curricular approach since it addressed subject matter of science teaching as well as maths when the children compared the weight of plastic waste they had collected.

The exchange took place between two 4th year classes: a class of 21 children in Germany and a class of 25 children in France. The children were 9 to 10 years old. The class in Germany had been learning English for two years, the French class for three years. The time allocated for the project was three lessons a week, over a three-week period.

The structure of the project followed O'Dowd & Waire's (2009) phases (cf. figure 3): In the information exchange phase, the children in both classes were introduced to the topic of plastic in the environment by first burying an apple and some plastic items weeks before the exchange project started to see how the plastic did not decay. This hands-on

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multisensory activity ensured an age-appropriate access to the topic by showing the relevance of not only being careful with plastic waste but also of reducing plastic. Language scaffolding was provided, and literacy skills were fostered through creating a mind map to explore the role of plastic in the children´s daily lives and then collecting plastic waste from both school and home for a week. The learners also collected vocabulary and language structures for the first video conference between the two partner classes. These were then displayed on the board as language support during the meeting. The children shared their findings and committed themselves to collaborate and take action. The relevance of the topic was increased as the children understood the consequences of plastic pollution. By agreeing on a common goal they took over responsibility for the project and their own learning.

In the comparison phase, the learners collected additional plastic waste from around the school (in Germany) or beach (in France) and compared the weight of the materials gathered in their next meeting. They created a video about the clean-up activities to share with their partner class, including a comprehension check for their partners. During the collaboration phase, children jointly developed videos with the App ChatterPix in which animals suffering from plastic pollution asked for help, highlighting the impact of plastic on the environment. The videos were sent to the partner class which was supposed to find a solution for the different animals´ problems, thus making the videos a collaborative product (see example in figure 4). Technology was creatively used to communicate and develop a multimodal product since the app allowed the children to animate photos with voice over. The outcome of the project was a visible product that could be shared in the school community thus having an impact beyond the individual classrooms. The sequence of activities created a meaningful authentic purpose for both synchronous and asynchronous communication. In particular the synchronous communication in the video sequences showed the potential for cultural learning as this anecdote demonstrates: A German child spontaneously took of her shoe and used it to wave goodbye to the partners during the first video conference. The French learners were assuming that this was a German tradition and a French child copied her in the next meeting. After the misunderstanding had been cleared up, learners could discuss the

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danger of stereotyping and making assumptions about groups of people. At the same time, the anecdote demonstrates that a relaxed atmosphere and authentic situations stimulate interaction, as the children felt free to react spontaneously, and foster meaningful connections.

Project phase	Project activities
Information exchange	• Introducing the topic • Experiment: burying an apple • Making a mind map on plastic use • Collecting vocabulary and structures • Introducing each other in first online meeting
Comparison	• Collecting plastic waste at school and at home • Developing a video about clean-up days • Comparing collected waste and videos in second online meeting
Collaboration	• Jointly developing video about animals suffering from plastic pollution and asking for help

Figure 3: Overview of project activities

Partner 1 (problem): *Hi! I am a storck. I live in a nest. We use plastic for our nest.*

Partner 2 (solution): *We want sticks, not plastic for our nest. Thank you.*

Figure 4: Sample learner texts (collaborative video)

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5. CONCLUSION

Based on existing research on VE with young learners, a survey with teachers and an analysis of good practice examples, the paper gives answers to the question what are criteria for successful VE projects, taking account of the specific needs of young language learners. These criteria help to identify examples of good practice and support teachers in designing their own projects. Considering primary and preschool teachers´ need for training and support regarding VE that became evident in the survey, the framework might contribute to encouraging teachers to embark on more telecollaboration projects to provide young language learners with valuable opportunities to interact with and learn from each other. A limitation of this study is that the development of criteria relied mainly on the teachers´ perspectives. Further studies could include interviews with children, classroom observations and learner texts to get a variety of perspectives on the topic. Additional research on VE with young learners could also look into the interaction in live online exchanges as well as the children´s perspective on these exchanges.

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