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# Exploring Student Teachers' Experiences of Engaging in Hands of the World, a Contextualised Global Intercultural eTwinning Project

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## ABSTRACT

This paper considers the impact of student teachers' participation and engagement in the award-winning eTwinning international Hands of the World (HOTW) project which connects over 2000 students and their teachers in 50 schools across the world. Students participated in a wide range of educational collaborative experiences, before and during the first COVID-19 lockdown of 2020, to develop their knowledge and understanding of intercultural education. Student teachers live and work in an interconnected and intercultural world and having a knowledge of how to embed diversity, inclusion and cultural awareness into their practice is important to ensure that their pupils develop a positive intercultural mindset. An explanatory design analysed students' end of year reflections on participating in the project, which were publicly available on the project's Padlet™ page. Data were analysed thematically focusing on participation and derived benefits. The findings revealed a continuum of engagement with some students participating at a lower level, where they would observe and question, whilst others had a higher level of engagement engaging in the activities and/or applying the project to practice. Our analysis enabled us to identify that although there were various barriers to participation, the design of the project enabled students to engage at various levels with a higher level of engagement evidenced during the COVID-19 lockdown. Our findings suggest that effective intercultural learning in teacher education requires a range of intercultural opportunities that can be accessed at a variety of levels and at different times throughout the year to provide a rich learning experience.

**Keywords:** intercultural pedagogy, diversity, global citizenship, inclusion, teacher education

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## 1. Introduction

The importance of developing student teachers' knowledge and understanding of intercultural education, and how to embed this into their practice, is paramount due to the interconnected and globalised world in which they live and work. As Thomas. L Friedman (2005) noted, 'the world is flat', with people now competing successfully for work opportunities across the globe. As a result, this flat, globalised world requires interaction with people from many cultures, whether this be online or within local communities, which for many, are no longer single culture communities. In the UK alone, in 2019, 612,000 people immigrated to UK whilst 385,000 people emigrated to other countries (ONS, 2019). These figures are similar to previous years, thus highlighting the diverseness of cultures in the UK which has resulted in an increased recognition of diversity and inclusion in society. Due to the diverseness of society, it is important, according to Banks (2008), that young people develop knowledge, attitudes and skills to enable them to participate in their own microcultures and in the microcultures of others within the global community through an education that helps 'the



*individual gain greater self-understanding by viewing themselves from the perspectives of other cultures' (p.3).*

The importance of intercultural education was emphasised in a PISA report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development with the development of global competence described as a necessity which must be firmly embedded in education systems (OECD, 2018). By developing their global competence, young people will be able to enjoy harmonious living within multicultural societies which aligns with one of the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4, which has an emphasis on learning to live together sustainably (United Nations, 2021). The British Council support this by providing various guidelines, resources and support for education pertaining to intercultural learning. One of these resources, which is aimed at headteachers and policy makers, is a guideline to promote inclusion and diversity which stems from the Inclusion and Diversity in Education Project, which involves young people from eleven western European countries coming together to develop best practice and to share their views. The result was the creation of the European Youth Charter on Inclusion and Diversity in Education where educating young people and teachers about cultural diversity and enabling pupil voice are at the heart of their proposal (Rashid & Tikly, 2010). The British Council guidelines also drew on the model of the 'culturally inclusive school' which promotes nine key themes, for example, leadership and staff training in diversity and inclusion, a culturally inclusive curriculum and pupil voice (Booth & Ainscow). As a result, the British Council's guidelines evolved around four themes: *'Raise achievement of all learners, respect and celebrate diversity, promote learner voice and incorporate best practice into their processes of improvement and self evaluation so as to make these practices sustainable in the longer term'* (Rashid & Tikly, 2010, p. 7).

Within Scotland, the importance of young people having an intercultural education is also clearly articulated by the Scottish Government where their vision is that the Scottish community can enhance global citizenship through enabling communities and young people to build relationships with others and to understand their role as global citizens (Scottish Government, 2016). The importance of supporting young people to be good global citizens is firmly embedded in the Scottish standards for teacher education where student teachers need to demonstrate that they are embracing, valuing and respecting global education through incorporating sustainability and local and global citizenship in their practice to support learners to develop an *'understanding of themselves, others and their contribution to the development and sustainability of a diverse and inclusive society'* (Scottish Government, 2021, p. 5).

There are different ways that intercultural learning can be embedded into practice from the simplest form of storybooks and discussions, to participating in an intercultural project with another school around the world. As straightforward as this may appear, intercultural learning might not be prominent in student teachers' practice due to the many demands that they have on their time at university where course work and assessment may take precedence over exploring intercultural learning opportunities. Student teachers may also have an interest in other educational issues, for example, digital literacy, outdoor learning, behaviour management strategies, and dedicate their time to their interests and development needs, rather than to additional learning. Opportunities to participate in intercultural projects, whilst at university or on placement, may not be available or possible due to a variety of factors and, as a result, students may only receive a brief introduction to intercultural learning through a lecture and professional reading rather than having a richer learning experience through engagement in a live project.

This research, therefore, explores the experiences of a small group of student teachers who were involved in an intercultural project whilst studying a one year postgraduate degree to become a primary teacher.

## 2. Methodology

### 2.1. Context

Student primary teachers at the University of Dundee were introduced to intercultural learning through a live contextualised global intercultural project called Hands of the World: Can You See What I Say (HOTW), (Tonner-Saunders, 2020). The project runs yearly, during the months of October to June, and involves more than two thousand pupils from over forty schools around the world, alongside student teachers from four universities in Europe. The main aim of the project is for pupils to '*work collaboratively to develop an understanding and appreciation of identities, cultures and languages*' (Tonner-Saunders, 2020) through a range of project activities that involve digital technologies, music and Makaton signing (Makaton, 2020).

The HOTW project provides a rich learning environment, not just for the pupils, but also for the student teachers to enable them to make links with pedagogical approaches and theoretical models of practice. Intercultural learning (Borrelli, 1991), cooperative and collaborative learning (Johnston & Johnston, 1999), social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978) and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2000) are some of the approaches firmly embedded in the project's activities, online communities, and professional development opportunities.

Full details of the project can be found at: <https://bit.ly/37Pe8pL>.

### 2.2. Method

This study employed an interpretivist, exploratory approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) exploring students' subjective comments and reflections on participating in various aspects of the project to develop an understanding of their experiences. Primary cross-sectional qualitative data, in the form of documentary evidence, referred to by Macdonald and Tipton in Gilbert (2008) as socially produced documents from a community at a specific time, were accessed on the projects' publicly available Padlet™ pages.

The project's Padlet page can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/3nlMEPt>.

### 2.3. Participants

The participants involved in the research were students at the University of Dundee undertaking the one-year postgraduate primary teaching course. Prior to the COVID-19 lockdown, students attended campus most days each week where they had full timetables of lectures, workshops and tutorials and undertook two placements in schools. Due to the COVID-19 lockdown, the students' final six-week placement from April 2020 was cancelled, resulting in the placement being substituted by some relevant online learning. At the beginning of September 2019, the students were invited to learn about intercultural learning through being a member of the project's Facebook group, attending live professional development webinars, viewing the recordings of the webinars later, or being active members of the HOTW project. Participation was voluntary, resulting in the participant numbers varying over the duration of the project due to students selecting which webinars or project activities they wished to engage in. This research focuses on a small group of students (n=12) who provided feedback voluntarily on the project's public online space pertaining to their overall experiences of participating in the project and on their development of intercultural

education. The gender and age of the participants are not known as individuals provided only their names. As these were not variables to be considered, this information was not required.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

Due to interpreting varied and multiple perspectives on a social media platform, an inductive social constructivist thematic approach was employed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), to enable the researchers to listen to what others stated in a specific context. The researchers could then generate meanings from the students' posts exploring an online community of learning that had not previously been researched (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach is seen by Creswell & Creswell (2018) as interpretive enquiry through a holistic account that describes the bigger picture that emerges through '*reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in a situation*' (p.176).

The researchers analysed the qualitative data using a framework analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Both researchers engaged in each stage of the process which involved firstly, the familiarization of data through close examination of online posts and thereafter the identification of key themes to enable development of a coding framework related to the student experience of participating in intercultural learning under the two themes: Participation (Enablers and Challenges) and Benefits (Pedagogy and Practice). These higher-order themes were used to code all data using a collaborative online spreadsheet. Analysis of the qualitative data provided a picture of how student teachers had developed their skills and abilities in relation to intercultural learning.

## 3. Results and Discussion

### 3.1. Levels and Types of Participation

Students' participation and engagement in the project was explored and within the students' feedback a continuum of participation emerged, as illustrated at Figure 1, where Observation and Questioning were the lowest levels of participation with students taking a less active role through watching or taking part in discussions during the project's webinars and/or on the project's Facebook group. The third and fourth levels involved a higher level of participation where students at the Active Level undertook project activities in a non-school setting with their peers, family or independently, whilst those at the highest level applied the activities in a school setting, which could be on placement or with a HOTW project class.

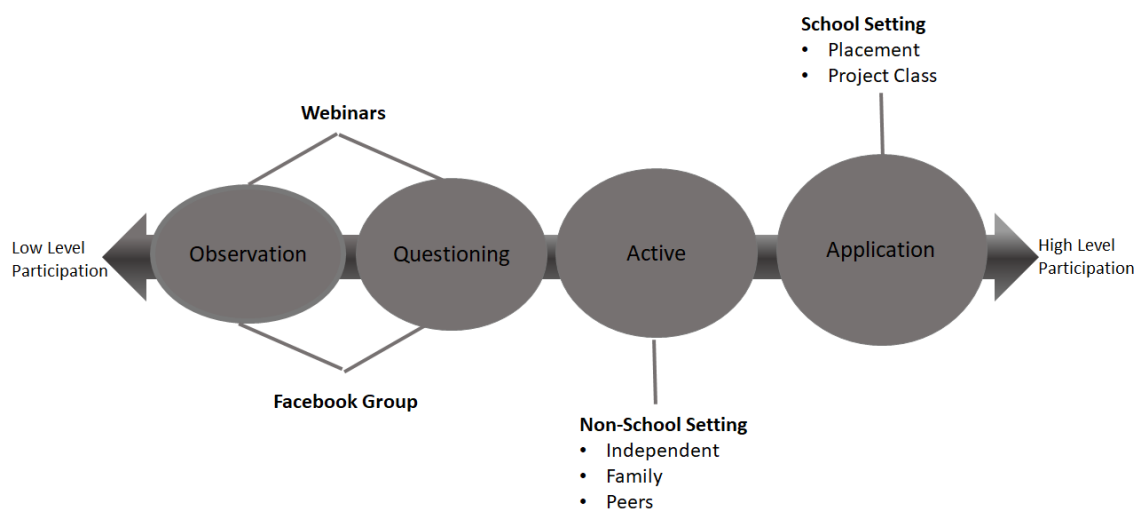


Figure 1: Continuum of Levels of Participation

Before the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, over half of the students were positioned at the lower level of the continuum where 67 % were Observers (n=7) or Questioners (n=1) compared to only 33 % of students having a higher level of participation (Active: n=2, Application: n=2). The main reasons for these students' lower engagement in the project were the demands of coursework and placement to prepare for being a teacher where they did not have time to participate, as highlighted by three students, where Dianne found additional work during placement overwhelming, whilst Niamh found it difficult to choose what to focus her limited spare time on (Table 1, Quotes 1-3). Although these students found it difficult to participate in the project, they did still engage through an observation role where they read/ watched the latest information that was released, watched the recorded webinars at a time that was suitable or followed teachers' posts on the project's Facebook group. Even at the Observation level, students still found this a valuable learning experience, as discussed by Lisa and Mark who learnt a great deal from the Facebook posts and messages (Table 1, Quote 4-5).

Of the four students who managed to participate at a higher level, two students had a more active level of engagement with others through participating in the music and Makaton weekly lunchtime activities on campus with their peers, where they found the relaxing and social aspects beneficial to their learning and wellbeing (Table 1, Quotes 6-7). Only two students were able to apply the project to practice during a placement where they both involved their placement class in the project's postcard activity. There is the possibility that there could have been more students apply the project to practice in their final placement, if it had not been for the COVID-19 lockdown, as was the case for Steph (Table 1, Quote 8).

Table 1.

*Excerpts of Students' Engagement in the Project Pre-COVID-19 Lockdown*

Quote	Name	Data Excerpts
1	Nikki	<i>'Initially I did not join the HOTW project due to having too much on my plate at University.'</i>
2	Dianne	<i>'In my first placement I was not ready to be part of the project due to having so much time to learn and do, that it felt overwhelming to think about being part of the project.'</i>
3	Niamh	<i>'There is <b>so much to learn</b> in one year at University to prepare for being a teacher making it difficult to decide <b>what to focus extra time</b> on that I found it difficult to engage with the project whilst I was at University.'</i>
4	Lisa	<i>'I learnt a great deal from reading teachers' posts as it was like listening to the rich informal conversations in the staffroom where so much can be learnt.'</i>
5	Mark	<i>'This project gave me lots of ideas of how to embed ICT into my teaching and create intercultural lessons through the project activities, the webinars and following the conversations that the teachers posted on FB.'</i>
6	Louise	<i>'Whilst at University, the Music and Makaton sessions were my relax learning time to learn and have fun with my peers.'</i>
7	Steph	<i>'I was able to learn about Makaton at the lunchtime sessions with my peers where we could chill out together.'</i>
8	Steph	<i>'At the time my placement had been cancelled and I wanted my placement class to be part of the project.'</i>

Although the COVID-19 lockdown closed the door for potential opportunities to apply learning from the project to practice, it provided opportunities for students to have more active involvement in the initiative as they had more time available and the project activities were tailored to encourage them to participate at home, both independently and with their families. As a result, all student engagement rose to the higher levels during the lockdown period with 67% of students (n=8) now participating at an Active level of engagement and the remaining 33% of students (n=4) participating at Application level. Time available to



participate in the project was identified strongly by many students as a enabler for higher levels of engagement as they no longer had placements to attend and they did not have to travel to university, which for Nikki, had previously taken up three hours of her day (Table 2, Quote 1). Also, being at home everyday, the project provided a useful focus for some students, as described by Lisa, who tried a different project activity each day (Table 2, Quote 2). For others, it provided opportunities for shared learning with family members, as reported by Peter who worked through the project activities with his wife, a qualified teacher, who viewed engagement with the activities as useful professional development opportunities. Students Sarah and Niamh engaged with younger family members who provided them with the motivation to participate (Table 2, Quotes 3-4). With regards to applying the project to practice, more students were able to do this than previously. This was due to the project's activities being accessible by creating weekly differentiated challenges and due to many schools working with children in online environments. Amy, who had participated in the project with a placement class pre-COVID-19, was able to work with that class online and participate fully in the project (Table 2, Quote 5). Three other students took up the opportunity to teach a class online aiming to develop their teaching skills and were motivated by the teachers in the project whom they found helpful and approachable (Table 2, Quotes 5-7).

There was also an increase, during lockdown, in engagement in the activities at the lower level of participation, the webinars and Facebook group. In the lockdown period, all students attended the live webinars, rather than watching the recorded lectures, and there was more student presence on the project's Facebook group where students 'liked' posts, made comments, asked questions and shared activities and ideas. For most, this would not have been possible if they were still at university and had other time commitments. Hope, for example, would not have been able to have a live presence due to the additional family time commitments (Table 2, Quote 8). This was not the case for all with a family, as Niamh found it difficult to allocate larger periods of time to the project in lockdown due to commitments with her young family, however, due to the project's structure, specifically the webinars, she was able to watch the recordings at a time that suited her (Table 2, Quote 9). This structure had the added benefits for other students who wished to revisit learning in the webinars where they could assimilate the learning at their own pace, as was the case for Lisa (Table 2, Quote 10). With regards to the Facebook group, previously, only a small number of students engaged in the group (n=2), however, during lockdown more students were able to engage, with 42% of the students (n=5) now having a presence and participating at the Questioning level.

Table 2.

*Excerpts of Students' Engagement in the Project During COVID-19 Lockdown*

Quote	Name	Data Excerpts
1	Nikki	<i>'Would I have been able to do this if I was travelling for 90 minutes each way to university each day, I do not think so, therefore, thanks to lockdown, time was gifted to me.'</i>
2	Lisa	<i>'Due to being stuck at home during lockdown, I gave myself a goal to try something new each day and found that the HOTW project perfect as it gave me lots of short activities to try to develop my understanding of intercultural learning and develop my ICT skills.'</i>
3	Peter	<i>'Due to this, during lockdown, my wife and I tried all activities that were shared as we both enjoyed learning together and thinking how we could plan and manage the lesson with her class, since I did not have one due to COVID-19.'</i>
4	Sarah	<i>'due to having time with my brother and his wish to try things out with me, I found that I was much more active which made my learning about intercultural learning more real and relevant.'</i>

5	Amy	<i>'Due to my mentor from my first placement still wanting to take part in HOTW, and seeing me as the person who knew what to do, I worked with my first placement school and teacher to participate in the activities online.'</i>
6	Gillian	<i>'Due to the teachers being approachable and helpful, I took up the opportunity to work with a school to teach the children some English through using Makaton and a simple nursery rhyme.'</i>
7	Steph	<i>'When the opportunity was posted to be able to work with a teacher and her class and teach the class an activity, I was very excited as now I could experience lockdown teaching.'</i>
8	Hope	<i>'Due to lockdown, I had more time on my hands...This I would not have been able to do if I were at university each day then doing all the parenting things that need done. Again, due to having so much more time, I was able to attend the live webinars and take part in discussions on the FB group.'</i>
9	Niamh	<i>'I found them very helpful as each teacher only spoke for ten minutes...This was really helpful as during lockdown I had young family at home and it was much easier to do lots of small learning activities rather than having to devote hours.'</i>
10	Lisa	<i>'I also found the webinars very helpful in that they had lots of presenters who only spoke for ten minutes. This kept me focussed due to everyone getting to the point. I was then able to go back and watch and listen to the parts in the recording that I wanted to spend more time learning about what a teacher had mentioned.'</i>

### 3.2. Benefits of Participation

From the students' feedback, it is apparent that there are shared and unique benefits of participating in the project at different levels. At the Observation level, which was mainly through the webinars and watching the project unfold on the Facebook group, students found the webinars helpful and valuable in developing their intercultural and digital pedagogy (Table 3, Quote 1). Through following the teachers' posts on the Facebook group, Mark shared how it helped develop his digital pedagogy with regards to online learning whilst Gillian and Steph mirrored this style of learning to the rich learning that occurs through listening to teachers' conversations in the staffroom (Table 3, Quotes 2 – 4). What was interesting was how one student, Amy, now saw Facebook in a professional light for learning rather than just for socialising (Table 3, Quote 5).

For those students who made reference to engagement at the Questioning level, their learning took a social constructivist approach to develop their intercultural pedagogy. Lisa found being able to seek support and advice through asking the community of teachers on the Facebook group questions very helpful (Table 3, Quote 6). Due to the supportive and welcoming nature of the teachers in this group, students felt confident to make posts and let their voices be heard, where they felt like a valued member of the community, as was the case for Peter and Louise (Table 3, Quotes 7-8).

The majority of students participated at the Active level during the COVID-19 lockdown where they all shared how they found this experience valuable, enjoyable and fun with regards to developing their intercultural pedagogy and knowledge and understanding of social justice, inclusion and diversity. One example of a student's development can be seen in Nikki's feedback, who engaged in in the project activities during lockdown (Table 3, Quote 9). What students found beneficial about engaging in the project's activities, was that they were contextualised and real where the students could experience learning in a real-life project through the eyes of a pupil. Sarah and Niamh, who had younger family members at home, engaged in the activities with them enabling both to see how children react to the activities, thus making it real and relevant to them (Table 3, Quote 10 - 11).



Similarly, those that participated in the project at the Application level, where they worked with a placement class and/ or a class involved in the project, they also enjoyed working and learning in a context. One of the main benefits of participating in the project with another school, was that the students received valuable support from the teachers, who helped the students plan, manage and organise a lesson in an online environment. Without this support, Steph would possibly not have participated in a lesson and may not have had the valuable learning experience that she shared in her feedback (Table 3, Quote 12). Due to having this support, specifically with regard to the technical side of the lesson, this enabled students to focus on the teaching of the lesson rather than the technology. Afterwards it gave some students more confidence to use digital technology for intercultural learning. For one student, who was already confident in using technology, Peter found that his technical expertise enabled his placement class to participate thus developing his confidence during placement (Table 3, Quote 13). The informal nature of lessons took away pressure for some students due to not being assessed, as was noted by Gillian (Table 3, Quote 14). The impact of participating in the project with a class was felt strongly by many, especially Amy who involved her placement class in the project before and during the COVID-19 lockdown. Amy now has a great desire to embed intercultural learning into her future practice (Table 3, Quote 15).

Table 3.

*Excerpts of Students Engagement in the Project During COVID-19 Lockdown*

Quote	Name	Data Excerpts
1	Amy	<i>'The webinars were also very valuable in teaching me many activities and online tools that can be used for intercultural learning'</i>
2	Mark	<i>'The FB group was really helpful as I learnt a lot about what to do and not to do by following the posts where teachers discussed what went wrong and gave advice how to solve technical problems. During lockdown at the beginning, I found this very interesting as the teachers were all looking for ways to work online.'</i>
3	Gillian	<i>'I learnt a great deal from reading teachers' posts as it was like listening to the rich informal conversations in the staffroom where so much can be learnt'</i>
4	Steph	<i>'read posts in the FB group where it was like sitting in the staff room listening to teachers talk about teaching.'</i>
5	Amy	<i>'As for the FB group, this is the first professional teaching FB group that I have joined and it has shown me that FB is not all about random pointless posts, instead, it is a place to learn from others.'</i>
6	Lisa	<i>'When I was not sure about how to do something the FB group helped as I was able to post questions for help and immediately teachers in the project or student teachers would respond to give advice.'</i>
7	Peter	<i>'The Facebook group was very supportive, and I also felt like a teacher here where I could make contributions... Once I managed to take the plunge and place a comment on the page, there was no stopping me.'</i>
8	Louise	<i>'I never felt like a student teacher in the FB community due to everyone working together where everyone's voices were heard and valued.'</i>
9	Nikki	<i>'Being part of the HOTW project has developed my knowledge and understanding of how to incorporate intercultural learning into my practice. Before, I was not sure how to tackle social justice, inclusion, diversity, however, the project has given me so many different ideas of how to do this with my own class and even better, how to connect my class with school around the world.'</i>
10	Sarah	<i>'I found that I was much more active which made my learning about intercultural learning more real and relevant.'</i>
11	Niamh	<i>'This made the learning for me and my children real rather than trying something out that had been suggested or something I had read.'</i>

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12	Steph	<p><i>When the opportunity was posted to be able to work with a teacher and her class and teach the class an activity, I was very excited as now I could experience lockdown teaching. I would not have been able to do this without the guidance and support I was given from my HOTW teacher and University. This experience has stuck with me as being one of the most valuable learning ones I had during lockdown and has made me determined to be part of this project with my class so that we can work collaborative with others in exciting ways.</i></p>
13	Peter	<p><i>'After some technical hitches, I managed to work out how to connect the pupils to which my class teacher was highly impressed. This made me feel confident and feel like I was contributing rather than just learning all the time.'</i></p>
14	Gillian	<p><i>'Being given the experience to teach her class, without the pressure of it being an assessed lesson, took a huge amount of pressure from me.'</i></p>
15	Amy	<p><i>'An amazing experience that has left a huge impact on my desire to want to create inclusive learning environments that connect children with others around the world.'</i></p>

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#### 4. Conclusion

This study captured the insights of students as they participated in the HOTW project which revealed the benefits and challenges of engaging with this particular model of intercultural learning. From the outset students were given choice in relation to how they participated in the project and in relation to the level at which they took part. Rooted in Constructivism (Boyd & Bee, 2014), the project gave students the opportunity to engage at four levels of participation. Firstly, students could opt to watch webinars and read posts on the project's Facebook group, at the second level, they could engage in discussions and ask questions, at the third level they were encouraged to engage in project activities independently or with family and peers and, at the highest level, they applied their learning in schools, either on placement or virtually with a HOTW project class. It was clear that students derived benefits at all levels. When participating at the first level of engagement, students were able to read the ideas of experienced teachers and peers and to add this to their existing knowledge and understanding. One student likened this aspect of the project to overhearing useful conversations about teaching in a staffroom. At the next level, students could ask questions and engage in discussion through webinars or social media which helped to develop their confidence and enabled them to address specific concerns they had in relation to pedagogy and technical issues which had arisen in online learning. One student noted that they were surprised that social media could be a useful tool in the promotion of learning, that it could a worthwhile professional tool rather than merely for personal use. Throughout the webinars teachers scaffolded the learning to ensure students were building on existing learning and developing new knowledge and understanding. Students benefited from a first-hand experience of learning with and from each other through social media and within an online community of learning. They reported that they were motivated by the warm welcome and support they received by teachers involved in the project. They looked to these teachers for advice and guidance which replicated the interaction they would have with a mentor on placement. At the third level, students benefitted from trying new initiatives and trialling online tools to promote learning independently and with friends and family. This was reported to have been beneficial and enjoyable and it was clear that having the possibility of involving family members enabled the students to see how children experienced the project first-hand. It was also helpful in practical terms in that childcare was not required at that time. Students were encouraged, at the highest level of the project, to apply their knowledge and the HOTW initiative gave them access to a project school allowing them to transfer their new knowledge and understanding into positive professional action.

It was clear that student-teacher participation in intercultural learning increased during the COVID-19 lockdown. Prior to the lockdown, students reported that time was a major impediment to their participation and that coursework and placement demands prevented them from engaging in the project. When they did engage pre-lockdown, it tended to be at lower levels such as through observation or questioning. Whilst this resulted in some valuable learning, it did not provide the rich learning experience afforded to those who found time to engage at the higher levels. Students who did engage more deeply benefitted from active participation in the project activities and from opportunities to socialise with their peers, which chimes with Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Approach (1978). They were also able to apply their new knowledge and understanding directly to practice. Unfortunately, prior to lockdown, only four students of the twelve strong cohort were able to take part in the project at higher levels of engagement, with time identified as a major barrier to full participation.

Post lockdown, a very different picture of engagement emerged and it was evident that more time had become available due to travel time being reduced and placements being cancelled. Students now found themselves at home for extended periods and valued the online aspect of the project which meant that they could continue to engage with their intercultural learning and in activities on how to teach in an online world from the comfort of their own homes. As well as evidence of an increase in engagement in the project overall, there was also evidence of more application of the learning with some students reporting that they had involved family members in the project activities whilst others continued to apply the learning in the virtual learning environment with project schools.

Although it is noted that lockdown brought with it very unusual circumstances, examination of the change in relation to participation in the project pre and post lockdown emphasised the extent to which time presents a very real barrier to engagement in intercultural learning. As it was viewed as something additional, and not part of core coursework or placement, students were reluctant initially to devote valuable time to developing their expertise in this area. The fact that intercultural learning can be delivered successfully online, however, does go some way to addressing this challenge and students did appreciate the flexibility of online learning and the opportunity to engage family members in their studies in a positive and meaningful way. They were motivated to continue to learn because the learning was relevant and contextualised. The project gave students the opportunity to view learning through both the lens of a teacher and of a pupil. They were exposed to new ideas, strategies and teaching tools and had the opportunity to try them out in a safe and encouraging environment. Throughout the project students recognised that they had a voice and that they were valuable members of a supportive learning community. In line with Wenger's (2000) view of a Community of Practice, they inspired each other, learned together and took their learning into practice. This was a small study with only twelve participants, but it did unearth some interesting insights into both the challenges and benefits on intercultural learning. Our findings suggest that given time, choice in relation to the types and levels of participation, support from experienced teachers in an encouraging online environment and experience of a relevant contextualised project, students will be motivated to take part, and maintain their engagement, to develop their intercultural pedagogy.

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