

## **Empowering use of digital tools by EFL trainee-teachers through reflective practice**

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This paper focuses on the development of reflective skill by foreign language trainee-teachers, underlined as a key competence to develop for future teachers within their training (Farrell, 2019). Building on previous work in the field (Wigham, 2012), we are also interested in the connections between synthetic worlds and language teaching-learning.

We question the English as Foreign Language (EFL) trainee-teachers' (ETT) sense of reflection skills following their participation in an intercultural virtual exchange (VE) project, which articulates virtual reality (VR) and reflective practice. We also analyse the guidance offered to students as regards the reflective tasks.

The context for our study is the Erasmus+ E-LIVE Project (Engaging Languages in Intercultural Virtual Exchange). Within this European project, ETT from France and the Netherlands participated in a six-week virtual exchange organised around four tasks. Through authentic VR simulation during the third task, students had the opportunity to apprehend VR from a learner-centred perspective which involved them producing an in-world machinima. The fourth task required students to co-design a VE task for their future school pupils. Following each task, the ETT completed reflective reports focusing on the task, communication, collaboration, intercultural experience and digital tools. Indeed, (semi)authentic action is shown as a necessary step to enhance reflective practice and to bring out objects of reflection (Schneuwly, 2015).

Our data corpus consists of pre- and post-questionnaires, post-VE focus group interviews, and a corpus of reflective reports produced by the ETT in France. Based on a scientific review and our data exploration, we use qualitative coding grids to analyse this data corpus. We aim to emphasize how the reflective processes (Derobertmeasure, 2012) and the objects of reflection (Farrell, 2019) appeared both in the reflective task instructions, and in the students' task productions. Comparing these analyses with the ETT' perceptions of their reflections and skill development afterwards offers insights into the impact of the scenario on the development of the ETT' reflective practice and pedagogical skills.

It appears that using VR as learners and reflecting on their experience helped the ETT to understand the potential uses of VR in an EFL classroom, as they expressed the development of their technological skills. Therefore, our observations lead us to identify factors that enabled students to adopt in-depth reflections about EFL teaching-learning, and to open discussions about the guidance of trainee-teachers into their reflective practice.

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