

## **Bridging Cultures in Hybrid Spaces: Lessons from Virtual Exchange and Seasonal Schools in Intercultural Learning**

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In recent years, higher education has undergone a rapid transformation, shaped by increasing intercultural dynamics and the shift from analogue to digital learning environments. This proposal draws on our institution's experience in organizing Virtual Exchanges (VEs), Summer/Winter Schools and Intercultural Learning as part of student exchange abroad as innovative platforms for intercultural dialogue, co-creation, and collaborative learning.

Our Virtual and Physical Exchange initiatives connect students and educators from diverse cultural, linguistic, and disciplinary backgrounds through carefully structured online modules. These exchanges promote critical reflection, empathy, and the negotiation of difference—key competencies in global citizenship education. In parallel, our physical Summer and Winter Schools provide immersive, intensive environments where participants engage face-to-face with intercultural challenges, often building on prior virtual collaborations. MILSA, our intercultural learning program for students going on exchange abroad, with thematically focused input, reflection and discussions before, during and after exchange in both physical and digital exchange.

This presentation explores how these hybrid models foster inclusive and equitable learning spaces. We will share practical strategies for designing and facilitating intercultural encounters in both virtual and physical formats, including task design, moderation, and support structures that builds a safe space for students and support their wellbeing. We will also reflect on tensions that arise—such as linguistic asymmetries, differing academic norms, or power imbalances—and how we address them constructively.

Through case studies and participant reflections, we argue that thoughtfully designed intercultural programs not only enhance student learning but also contribute to institutional transformation. Finally, we discuss the role of educators and administrators in creating sustainable, critically engaged, and ethically grounded intercultural learning opportunities in an increasingly digital world.

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