

STATE UNIVERSITY OF MARINGÁ
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, LANGUAGES, AND ARTS
LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE GRADUATE PROGRAM (MASTER'S/DOCTORAL'S
LEVEL)

MILENA PAULA DE OLIVEIRA ALONSO

**INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME AND VIRTUAL EXCHANGE UNDER THE
INTERVENTIONIST PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHANGE LABORATORY: THE
COLLABORATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF A LOCAL UNDERSTANDING**

MARINGÁ - PR

2026

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INTERVENTIONIST PERSPECTIVE OF THE CHANGE LABORATORY: THE
COLLABORATIVE CONSTRUCTION OF A LOCAL UNDERSTANDING**

Thesis submitted to the Languages and Literature
Graduate Program at the State University of Maringá
(UEM), in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor in Language Arts.
Concentration area: Linguistic Studies

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MARINGÁ - PR

2026

Dados Internacionais de Catalogação-na-Publicação (CIP)
(Biblioteca Central Maria Grazia Zolet - UEM, Maringá - PR, Brasil)

A454i

Alonso, Milena Paula de Oliveira

Internationalization at home and virtual exchange under the interventionist perspective of the change laboratory : the collaborative construction of a local understanding / Milena Paula de Oliveira Alonso. -- Maringá, PR, 2026.

213 f. : il. color., figs., tabs.

Orientadora: Profa. Dra. Luciana Cabrini Simões Calvo.

Coorientador: Prof. Dr. Marcio Pascoal Cassandre.

Tese (doutorado) - Universidade Estadual de Maringá, Centro de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes, Departamento de Letras Modernas, Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras, 2026.

1. Internacionalização inclusiva - Ensino superior - Brasil. 2. Intercâmbio virtual. 3. Internacionalização em casa. 4. Teoria da Atividade Histórico-Cultural. 5. Laboratório de mudança. I. Calvo, Luciana Cabrini Simões, orient. II. Cassandre, Marcio Pascoal, coorient. III. Universidade Estadual de Maringá. Centro de Ciências Humanas, Letras e Artes. Departamento de Letras Modernas. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras. IV. Título.

CDD 23.ed. 407

MILENA PAULA DE OLIVEIRA ALONSO

Internationalization at home and virtual exchange under the interventionist perspective of the change laboratory: the collaborative construction of a local understanding.

Tese apresentada ao Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras Doutorado, da Universidade Estadual de Maringá, como requisito parcial para obtenção do grau de Doutor em Letras, área de concentração: **Estudos Linguísticos.**

Aprovada em Maringá, **17 de Junho de 2026**

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To my husband, Diego, for his unconditional support;
to my children, Sarah and Joaquim, for the many moments I
was absent, and for the affection and comfort they offered in the most
challenging times.

THIS WORK IS DEDICATED TO YOU.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Perhaps this is one of the sections that requires the most reflection, and not without reason, it has been left for last. Reaching this point has not been easy, but it has certainly not been impossible. Many people, in different ways, have contributed to this journey, offering their support directly or indirectly, from the early stages of this research to its final writing. What may have seemed like small gestures along the way made it possible for me to dedicate myself to this work. Although writing is often a solitary task, I was never truly alone — my interlocutors were present throughout this entire process.

First and foremost, I give thanks to God. This is not a mere formality, but a deeply personal acknowledgment of His constant presence throughout this journey. In the most challenging moments, when I felt overwhelmed, it was through faith that I found strength, direction, and the courage to keep going. I truly believe that without His guidance and grace, I would not have reached this point. For all that was seen and unseen along this path, I am profoundly grateful.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Luciana Cabrini Simões Calvo, for her guidance, trust, and continuous support throughout this journey. I am especially grateful for the opportunity to continue developing my academic path under her supervision, as well as for her encouragement and generosity in sharing knowledge. Working together has been both a privilege and a meaningful partnership.

I am also sincerely grateful to my co-supervisor, Professor Marcio Pascoal Cassandre, for his invaluable guidance and for deepening my engagement with the Cultural-Historical Activity Theory and the Change Laboratory. His insights and teachings were fundamental to the development of this research. I am especially thankful for his encouragement to engage more directly with the CHAT community, including opportunities such as participating in the online summer course within Trollhatten University in Sweden and the Summer University in Moscow, which significantly expanded my academic perspective and experience.

Similarly, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all the participants who kindly accepted the invitation to take part in this research. I am deeply thankful to both internal and external participants who dedicated their time and shared their experiences, perspectives, and reflections. Their willingness to engage with this study was essential not only for the development of this work, but also, in many ways, for contributing to ongoing reflections within the institution. Without their openness and collaboration, this research would not have been possible.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the International Cooperation Office (ECI), which played a fundamental role in the development of this research. It was through my experience there that the first ideas for this study emerged. Being part of that context, and having the opportunity to follow and support the early Virtual Exchange initiatives at UEM, was essential in shaping both the focus and direction of this work. Beyond the professional dimension, I am deeply thankful for the friendships, camaraderie, and everyday presence that made this journey lighter. In many moments, it was not about formal support, but about being there — listening, encouraging, and sharing the challenges and uncertainties that come with academic work. I am especially grateful to Marcio, Renato, Luciana, Fernando, Lilian, Fabiano, Karina, Beatriz, Laura, and others whose support — whether academic, emotional, or simply through their presence — was truly meaningful throughout this process, from the early stages of defining the research focus and preparing the doctoral application to the experiences that continued to shape this study.

I am grateful to my colleagues at the Language Institute (ILG) for their constant support throughout this journey. Their encouragement, understanding, and presence — especially during demanding moments — meant a great deal to me. I am also thankful for their support regarding additional commitments related to this research, including my participation in academic activities abroad, such as the trip to Russia.

I am grateful to my friends, near and far, who accompanied me along this journey. Their words of encouragement, support, and presence — even in small ways — helped sustain me during the most demanding phases of this work.

To my family, I express my deepest gratitude. They are the foundation of everything I am. Beyond their constant support, prayers, and encouragement, they made it possible for me to navigate the demands of this research while balancing my personal life. I am especially thankful for their understanding during my absences and for the love that sustained me throughout this journey.

Finally, to all those who may not have been mentioned here but who, in one way or another, contributed to this process, my sincere thanks. Your support was essential for the completion of this work.

ABSTRACT

This doctoral research investigates Virtual Exchange (VE) as a means to strengthen inclusive internationalization practices in a Brazilian public university, with the aim of collaboratively building a locally meaningful understanding of VE. VE refers to technology-enabled, task-based intercultural exchanges between groups of students in different countries, facilitated by educators and integrated into academic curricula (O'Dowd, 2021). Within the broader framework of Internationalization at Home (IaH) — understood as the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum for all students in domestic learning environments (Beelen; Jones, 2015) — VE has emerged as a promising strategy to democratize access to international experiences, particularly in contexts where physical mobility remains restricted to a minority. Despite its potential, VE in Latin America is still under development and largely dependent on individual initiatives. To address this gap, the study draws on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engeström, 1987; 2001), which conceptualizes human activity as historically situated, socially mediated, and constantly evolving through contradictions. The Change Laboratory (CL) methodology was adopted as a formative and interventionist approach to put CHAT into practice. Rather than imposing predefined solutions, the intervention sought to foster expansive learning among participants and to enable the modeling of future-oriented practices through cycles of questioning, analysis, and design. The study was conducted at the State University of Maringá (UEM), a regional higher education institution in Southern Brazil. Eleven online CL sessions were organized between September 2023 and April 2024, involving faculty members, staff from the International Cooperation Office (ECI), university staff involved in the internationalization process, a student, and two external stakeholders whose trajectory is connected to the internationalization of higher education. The online format, chosen due to participants' geographic dispersion and availability, required the adaptation of tools and practices, such as collaborative documents (Google Docs), visual boards (Jamboard), and video summaries (Canva, CapCut). Throughout the sessions, participants identified and analyzed contradictions affecting VE implementation at both macro (institutional) and micro (instructional) levels. Key challenges included: the absence of formal policies recognizing VE within curricula and teaching workload; bureaucratic obstacles; limited faculty training in active methodologies; language barriers; technological constraints; and lack of consistent institutional support. In addition, participants emphasized the need for clearer pathways to initiate VE partnerships and for greater visibility of existing initiatives. While the intervention concluded intentionally at the modeling stage of the expansive learning cycle, it fostered collaborative reflection and the co-construction of potential future actions, such as developing institutional guidelines for VE. The findings indicate that online CLs can function as productive spaces for institutional learning, collaborative reflection, and the collective modeling of future-oriented possibilities for VE within higher education. The study also highlights how contradictions related to institutional structures, pedagogical practices, language, and technology shaped participants' understanding of VE and the possibilities for its development within the local context. More broadly, this research contributes to discussions on how CHAT-based interventions can support internationalization processes by fostering collective agency and locally grounded approaches to institutional transformation.

Keywords: Virtual Exchange; Internationalization at Home; Cultural-Historical Activity Theory; Change Laboratory; Higher Education.

RESUMO

Esta pesquisa de doutorado investiga o Intercâmbio Virtual (IV) como forma de fortalecer práticas de internacionalização inclusiva em uma universidade pública brasileira, com o objetivo de construir colaborativamente uma compreensão localmente significativa sobre o IV. O IV refere-se a trocas interculturais, mediadas por tecnologia e organizadas em tarefas, entre grupos de estudantes de diferentes países, orientadas por professores e integradas ao currículo acadêmico (O'Dowd, 2021). Inserido no escopo da Internacionalização em Casa (IeC) — entendida como a integração intencional das dimensões internacional e intercultural no currículo formal e informal de todos os estudantes em ambientes de aprendizagem domésticos (Beelen; Jones, 2015) — o IV tem se consolidado como estratégia para democratizar o acesso a experiências internacionais, sobretudo em contextos em que a mobilidade física permanece restrita a poucos. Apesar de seu potencial, o IV na América Latina ainda se encontra em desenvolvimento e depende, em grande parte, de iniciativas individuais. Para enfrentar essa lacuna, a pesquisa fundamenta-se na Teoria da Atividade Histórico-Cultural (TAHC ou TA) (Engeström, 1987; 2001), que concebe a atividade humana como historicamente situada, socialmente mediada e constantemente transformada por contradições. A metodologia do Laboratório de Mudança (LM) foi adotada como abordagem formativa e intervencionista, a fim de colocar a TA em prática. O propósito não foi impor soluções previamente definidas, mas promover a aprendizagem expansiva entre os participantes e possibilitar a modelagem de práticas orientadas para o futuro por meio de ciclos de questionamento, análise e construção. O estudo foi realizado na Universidade Estadual de Maringá (UEM), instituição de ensino superior localizada no sul do Brasil. Foram conduzidas onze oficinas online do LM, entre setembro de 2023 e abril de 2024, com a participação de docentes, servidores da instituição e do Escritório de Cooperação Internacional (ECI), uma estudante e dois participantes externos, cujas trajetórias envolvem a internacionalização do ensino superior. O formato online, adotado em razão da dispersão geográfica e da disponibilidade dos participantes, exigiu adaptações de ferramentas e práticas, como documentos colaborativos (Google Docs), quadros visuais (Jamboard) e resumos em vídeo (Canva, CapCut). Ao longo das oficinas, foram identificadas e analisadas contradições que impactam a implementação do IV tanto em nível macro (institucional) quanto micro (instrucional). Entre os principais desafios, destacaram-se: ausência de políticas formais que reconheçam o IV no currículo e na carga docente; obstáculos burocráticos; formação docente limitada em metodologias ativas; barreiras linguísticas; restrições tecnológicas; e carência de apoio institucional consistente. Os participantes também ressaltaram a necessidade de caminhos mais claros para o estabelecimento de parcerias de IV e de maior visibilidade para as iniciativas já existentes. Embora a intervenção tenha sido encerrada intencionalmente na etapa de modelagem do ciclo de aprendizagem expansiva, ela favoreceu a reflexão colaborativa e a co-construção de possíveis ações futuras, como a proposta de elaboração de diretrizes institucionais para o IV. Os resultados indicam que os LMs online podem constituir espaços produtivos para a aprendizagem institucional, a reflexão colaborativa e a modelagem coletiva de possibilidades futuras para o IV no contexto do ensino superior. O estudo também evidencia como contradições relacionadas às estruturas institucionais, às práticas pedagógicas, à linguagem e à tecnologia influenciaram a compreensão dos participantes sobre o IV e as possibilidades para o seu desenvolvimento no contexto local. De forma mais ampla, esta pesquisa contribui para as discussões sobre como intervenções fundamentadas na TA podem apoiar processos de internacionalização ao favorecer a agência coletiva e abordagens localmente situadas para a transformação institucional.

Palavras-chave: Intercâmbio Virtual; Internacionalização em Casa; Teoria da Atividade Histórico-Cultural; Laboratório de Mudança; Ensino Superior.

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Before the Beginning

Starting a new academic project is always filled with great challenges — and a pinch of audacity. When this one came along, I was already involved in different life and professional projects which, somehow, intertwined with it and made perfect sense. What follows is a brief account of how I found myself here. At times I will use “I,” but more often than expected, “we” will appear — to acknowledge the incredible people who surrounded and supported me throughout this journey.

It all started in March 2018, when I began my Master’s degree in the Languages and Literature Graduate Program (Programa de Pós Graduação em Letras - PLE) at the State University of Maringá (Universidade Estadual de Maringá - UEM), Brazil. My research focused on the internationalization of higher education and English as a lingua franca. In my dissertation, titled *Internationalization of Higher Education and English: Participants’ Representations of “Paraná Speaks Languages-English” Program at a Brazilian Public Institution* (Alonso, 2020), I sought to understand the role of English — from the perspective of English as a lingua franca (ELF) — in academic internationalization. I did so by analyzing the representations of students, instructors, the institutional and pedagogical coordinators involved in the Paraná Speaks Languages-English (PFI¹) program, a state-level language policy that aims to prepare the academic community linguistically for international engagement.

Originally scheduled for defense on March 30, 2020, my Master’s dissertation was presented and examined only in June of that year, due to the suspension of academic activities caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Shortly after that, I was invited to join the team of the International Cooperation Office (Escritório de Cooperação Internacional – ECI) to help establish and develop a new sector focused on Internationalization at Home (IaH), working alongside Professor Luciana Cabrini Simões Calvo, also my advisor.

This transition to ECI became possible because I also work as an English language teacher at the university’s Languages Institute (Instituto de Línguas – ILG), and thus I am a staff member at the institution. Being invited to work at ECI — in the IaH board dedicated to supporting local language policy while also being a researcher in academic internationalization — was a privilege and felt like a natural continuation of my path.

From July 2020 to December 2022, I worked at ECI, where, together with the team, we began shaping and outlining the activities and responsibilities of this new sector. Several

¹ [Início | PFIUEM](#)

experiences were later documented and reflected upon in Calvo and Alonso (2025), in a paper titled *Internationalization at Home at the State University of Maringá: an experience report and suggestions for future pathways*, which emerged as a direct outcome of our period of engagement.

At the end of 2020, the call for applications for the Languages and Literature Graduate Program, doctoral level, was announced. I had recently completed a discipline in the program as a non-degree student, and that experience encouraged me to apply. I wrote a research proposal focused on IaH, and in May 2021, I received the news of my acceptance. That marked the beginning of my journey as a PhD student and the continuation of my academic path in the field of internationalization. During 2021, starting in June, alongside the disciplines I took within PLE, I also enrolled in one specifically focused on Virtual Exchange (VE) at São Paulo State University (Universidade do Estado de São Paulo - UNESP). Within the context of this discipline — *Language teaching and learning within Virtual Exchange* — I participated as a student in a VE project developed in partnership with the University of Grenoble, in France. Experiencing VE from the inside — as a student — was essential for me to understand how such initiatives work in practice.

While I was still working at ECI, we intensified our efforts to promote IaH at UEM through events and partnerships. One highlight was a two-day online seminar on VE, featuring Professor Ana Salomão (UNESP) and Professor Tiffany Macquire (Penn State University), who shared concrete examples and institutional support strategies. The seminar sparked a formal collaboration agreement between UEM and Penn State, which opened doors to a list of interested faculty members. Around the same time, ECI also began promoting VE opportunities more broadly and seeking partnerships through international networks, including UEM's entry into LatAmCOIL — a significant move for fostering VE across Latin America. Later that year, in collaboration with the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES), we co-organized a two-day event focused on Internationalization of the Curriculum.

This marked the beginning of an ongoing effort to raise awareness among faculty about the international nature of their teaching practices — many of which already reflected internationalization, even if not formally recognized as such. It was in this context that the first VE initiatives began to emerge at UEM. As part of the IaH Board, we provided support for these projects, offering guidance and clarifying the possibilities for developing VE activities. By early 2022, seven VE initiatives had already been carried out at the university².

²<http://old.eci.uem.br/newsletter/anos-antiores/2022/newsletter-do-eci-edicao-especial-intercambio-virtual>. Accessed on 21/07/2025.

Reflections on these experiences were first shared in Calvo et al. (2022) during a presentation, and later expanded in the book chapter by Calvo and Alonso (2024), titled *Virtual Exchange as a strategy for advancing Internationalization at Home: initiatives from the State University of Maringá*.

It was during one of our many conversations at ECI that the idea of conducting doctoral research focused on IaH — and more specifically, on VE — began to take shape. The idea emerged during a meeting with Professor Luciana Calvo (my advisor) and Professor Marcio Pascoal Cassandre, then coordinator of ECI and faculty member in the Department of Administration. Professor Marcio had conducted a Change Laboratory (CL) intervention at ECI, which resulted in the reorganization of the Office into new boards — the reason for which I was invited to join. Since VE was not (and still is not) a formally regulated or institutionalized activity at UEM, we decided to develop a research project that could explore this practice and contribute to the university's understanding of it. That's how the idea of this study came to life: not from a desk or a call for proposals, but from lived experience, daily practice, and the desire to contribute to something still in the making. Then the work titled *Internationalization at Home and Virtual Exchange from the interventionist perspective of the Change Laboratory: the collaborative construction of a local understanding* was proposed — with Professor Marcio joining the study as co-advisor and from there, the path began to take form.

The following years — 2023 and 2024 — were devoted to developing the research, grounded in the theoretical and methodological principles of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), with the CL serving as the main methodological tool. While I was officially on professional leave during this period, my primary focus was on conducting the CL sessions. Despite not being formally present at the university, I remained connected to VE-related initiatives through my advisors and ongoing collaborations. One particularly meaningful experience was contributing to the design and delivery of a VE training course for faculty — a joint initiative between UEM and UNESP — aimed at supporting professors in understanding and developing their own VE projects. I was also invited by the ECI to speak about VE at an event organized by the General Superintendence of Science, Technology and Higher Education (Secretaria de Estado da Ciência, Tecnologia e Ensino Superior - SETI), which brought together faculty from public universities across the state of Paraná. In parallel, I prepared and recorded a training module and accompanying materials for university staff as part of the ECI's continuing efforts to foster VE at home. As a participant myself, I had the opportunity to attend the Cultural Dimensions of Online Learning course — a VE project for

academic staff development facilitated by educators from seven international partner universities. This experience was deeply enriching and sparked important reflections, particularly around the ethical dimensions of online collaborations and learning.

As for CHAT, I must admit it was not a piece of cake. Coming from the field of Applied Linguistics, particularly from the area of foreign language teaching and learning, along with my passion for and my experience in teaching English — all quite distant from CHAT, despite its foundation in the educational field — getting acquainted with CHAT and the CL methodology has been, with no shadow of a doubt, the most challenging part so far. Yet, it has also been delightful and one of the most rewarding experiences. This path presented me with the opportunity to participate in the *Summer School on Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in Practice* hosted by the University West in Sweden, where I could virtually engage with some of the prominent figures you will learn more about later throughout this thesis. That was definitely the moment I truly realised the depth of this theoretical scope and reality set in. Later, the chance to attend the *ISCAR Summer University* in person organized by the Moscow State University of Psychology and Education (MSUPE) was beyond words.

These experiences — filled with uncertainty, growth, and meaningful encounters — helped me realize not only the complexity of the theoretical path I had chosen, but also how deeply it connected with my own story as a teacher and researcher. Also, during the writing process, my supervisors suggested that the thesis be written in English for several reasons — among them, the fact that I was already writing academic papers in English for publication, as well as the broader reach and accessibility that the language could provide to the thesis and its findings. This suggestion felt natural to me, given my academic background and professional trajectory, and I decided to embrace it. Finally, as you move on to the next hundred pages or so, you shall keep this in mind: this is where I come from — and now, this is where the formal academic journey officially begins.

1 INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the internationalization of higher education has emerged as one of the strategic pillars of global education. Once considered a marginal practice, it has crossed institutional and geographical boundaries to become a central axis in the strategic agendas of universities, national policies, and global declarations, such as those of UNESCO (2015). As Knight and De Wit (2018) argue, this shift has transformed internationalization from a peripheral component into a global force for integration, innovation, and collaboration. Regional frameworks and agreements, along with a growing body of academic research, reinforce its position as an indispensable element in the contemporary scenario of higher education.

A widely accepted definition is provided by Knight (2003), who describes internationalization as *“the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education.”* Hudzik (2011) expands on this definition by characterizing internationalization as a comprehensive institutional commitment that permeates teaching, research, and outreach, involving all levels and actors within higher education institutions. According to him:

Comprehensive internationalization is a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives through the teaching, research and service missions of higher education. It shapes institutional ethos and values and touches the entire higher education enterprise. It is essential that it be embraced by institutional leadership, governance, faculty, students and all academic service and support units. It is an institutional imperative, not just a desired possibility.

In practical terms, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have adopted a range of strategies to advance internationalization. Among these are international projects and cooperation agreements, institutional partnerships and networks, inbound and outbound mobility of faculty, students, and staff, as well as the incorporation of international and intercultural dimensions into curricula, research, and teaching and learning processes (Baumvol; Sarmiento, 2016). The latter strategy is closely associated with Internationalization at Home (IaH).

Guimarães et al. (2019) suggest that IaH represents a promising alternative for promoting more inclusive internationalization initiatives — a perspective that has gained

increasing global visibility. Along the same lines, Wächter (2013) notes that researchers and practitioners have shifted their attention toward enhancing the international and intercultural experiences of students and staff within the university campus itself — that is, in the local context. In Brazil — and especially in the context under investigation — IaH took on an even more prominent role after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, when outbound mobility was suspended for health and safety reasons. According to Guimarães (2020), IaH represents a viable alternative for the post-COVID world, as it enables the integration of international, intercultural, and multilingual elements into local university environments. One of the key contemporary challenges, therefore, is to build a truly international environment within the institutions themselves.

According to De Wit et al. (2020), this movement must be anchored in an ethical and socially responsible approach to internationalization, with a focus on inclusion, sustainability, and equity. In this context, IaH emerges as a solid pathway to democratize access to international experiences — especially within institutions that have been historically marginalized in global processes of academic cooperation.

Among the strategies that comprise IaH, Virtual Exchange (VE) has emerged as an innovative and transformative practice. Defined by O'Dowd (2018) as the engagement of student groups in technology-mediated intercultural interactions, VE fosters the development of intercultural, linguistic, and collaborative competences. When integrated into academic programs, this strategy has the potential to transform local experiences into global learning opportunities. At the State University of Maringá (Universidade Estadual de Maringá - UEM), the context of this study, VE became more prominent during the period of emergency remote teaching, establishing itself as a key strategy for strengthening IaH.

While VE has gained ground as a meaningful practice within institutions like UEM, recent studies have emphasized the importance of considering the distinct profiles and contextual needs of the Global South, particularly in regions such as Latin America. Ramírez (2022) highlights that VE practices in the region often face challenges related to limited resources, the lack of consolidated institutional policies, and linguistic and technological inequalities. Still, VE has been adopted as a more inclusive and economically viable strategy to expand access to internationalization, particularly within public institutions. Understanding these practices and the conditions that shape them is essential for developing VE models that are aligned with local realities and for challenging homogeneous approaches based on privileged contexts.

These broader regional discussions become particularly meaningful when examined within concrete institutional settings. One such setting is the State University of Maringá (UEM). The choice of UEM as the focus of this study is justified by the opportunity to explore a regional and local context, thus broadening the understanding of VE as a catalyst for IaH. Moreover, this research builds on the studies developed during my Master's degree, which examined the relationship between academic internationalization and the use of English as a *lingua franca* (Alonso, 2020). The present study advances this line of inquiry by investigating VE as a strategic tool for IaH, with a particular emphasis on its practical implementation at UEM. This choice is further informed by a direct and sustained engagement with the institution's internationalization processes, as outlined below.

The relevance of this study is also derived from my professional engagement with the institutional internationalization process. My work at the International Cooperation Office (Escritório de Cooperação Internacional - ECI) at UEM between 2020 and 2022, specifically within the IaH Board, allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of institutional practices and the challenges involved in implementing IaH strategies. This involvement was itself shaped by a broader institutional turning point: UEM's participation in the Internationalization Laboratory (IntLab), a program developed in partnership with the American Council on Education (ACE) and supported by the Brazilian Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior - CAPES) and the Fulbright Commission Brazil between 2019 and 2021. The IntLab represented a moment of institutional openness toward a more comprehensive and strategically oriented approach to internationalization, introducing concepts, frameworks, and consultancy processes that directly influenced the restructuring of the ECI and the creation of the IaH Board itself. Having worked within this context — and having witnessed firsthand the institutional transformations that followed — positioned me not only as a practitioner but as someone deeply embedded in the very processes this research seeks to examine.

This professional and institutional trajectory also connects to my broader field of academic training — Applied Linguistics — through which these practices acquire further significance. As Salomão (2020) argues, VE activities highlight the need for a new role of language professionals, not merely as language instructors, but as mediators of internationalization processes who can support interdisciplinary faculty in designing pedagogical strategies for effective communication and intercultural learning. In this sense, although this study does not directly address foreign language teaching and learning, it aligns with current discussions in Applied Linguistics on the expanding role of language

professionals in digitally mediated, intercultural educational contexts, as language, culture, and methodologies are central aspects of the studies/work conducted by professionals from the Languages context.

When considering VE initiatives, the reflections and challenges experienced in the local context resonate with broader discussions on equity and inclusion in internationalization. Satar (2021), for example, in discussing the role of VE in fostering more inclusive internationalization processes, emphasizes that digital equity and equitable access shall be placed at the core of pedagogical practices and institutional policies. Such considerations highlight the importance of localized and participatory strategies that allow VE to be adapted to specific institutional and regional realities.

Yet, despite the growing recognition of VE as a meaningful IaH strategy, important issues remain regarding how it is understood, organized, and sustained in different institutional contexts. In many Brazilian public universities, VE initiatives appear to have developed in ways that are tied to individual faculty engagement and shaped by institutional conditions that vary considerably across settings. While some institutions have made known advances in consolidating VE practices — as is the case of São Paulo State University (Universidade do Estado de São Paulo - UNESP), for instance — the experience of the BRaVE-UNESP Program illustrates how such consolidation may involve the gradual development of institutional structures for coordination, faculty support and training, partnership building, project monitoring and evaluation, as well as efforts toward institutional regulation (Salomão; Freire Junior, 2020). Indeed, the experience documented in the volume underscores the importance of an institutional implementation strategy if VE is to move beyond a set of isolated faculty initiatives and become a sustainable strategy for IaH.

Despite these advances, the broader landscape suggests that the collective understanding and formalization of VE remains an ongoing and context-sensitive process. Existing studies have made valuable contributions by documenting VE initiatives, examining their pedagogical outcomes, and proposing frameworks for implementation (e.g., O'Dowd, 2018; Dooly; O'Dowd, 2018; Salomão, 2020; Guimarães; Finardi, 2021). Less attention, however, has been paid to how the conditions that shape VE are collectively understood, negotiated, and potentially reconfigured by those who enact them within specific institutional contexts. This seems particularly relevant in settings marked by structural inequalities, limited institutional regulation, and the need for locally driven conceptualizations of the practice. In such contexts, a theoretical perspective capable of treating VE not as a fixed pedagogical procedure, but as a historically situated, collectively constructed, and contradictory activity

may offer productive analytical and interventionist possibilities — ones that foreground the active engagement of institutional participants in understanding and transforming their own practices. It is this orientation that informs the theoretical and methodological choices of this study.

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) offers precisely such a lens. By conceptualizing learning and change as collective processes shaped by tools, rules, and community relations (Engeström, 1987, 2015), CHAT provides the theoretical foundation for examining VE as a socially mediated and historically situated activity. Within this tradition, the Change Laboratory (CL) emerges as a methodological approach that creates collaborative spaces where participants can analyze and reconceptualize, and transform their own practices through collective reflection (Engeström, 2007; Sannino; Engeström, 2018). Instead of prescribing solutions, the CL enables participants to identify tensions and contradictions, reflect collectively, and generate new ways of understanding and organizing their activity (Virkkunen; Newnham, 2013). Seen through this theoretical lens, VE can be approached not as a rigid or standardized practice, but as an evolving and transformative activity shaped by social mediation and collective engagement (Engeström; Sannino, 2010).

Grounded in these theoretical and methodological principles, this study approaches VE not as an isolated pedagogical practice, but as an activity shaped by social relations, institutional structures, and participants' collective engagement. In line with this understanding, the CL, informed by CHAT, provides the conditions for such collective reflection, enabling participants to analyze their practices and collaboratively construct new understandings of VE within their own context.

Thus, the general objective of this research is to collaboratively construct a localized and formalized understanding of VE that contributes to strengthening IaH at UEM. The specific objectives are: (a) to understand the current functioning and status of VE at the institution; (b) to reflect on the VE practices developed locally; and (c) to collaboratively design actions, together with key stakeholders, that support the advancement of IaH at UEM. Table 1 presents the general and specific objectives that guided the development of this study.

Table 1 – Research objectives

General Objective	To collaboratively construct a localized and formalized understanding of Virtual Exchange (VE) that contributes to strengthening Internationalization at Home (IaH) at UEM.
Specific Objectives	(a) to understand the current functioning and status of VE at the institution; (b) to reflect on the VE practices developed locally; (c) to collaboratively design actions, together with key stakeholders, that support the advancement of IaH at UEM

Source: Author (2025)

Guided by this theoretical and methodological orientation, the research design was structured to promote collaborative reflection and the collective analysis of tensions surrounding VE at UEM. Rooted in the works of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Engeström, CHAT provided the conceptual foundation for understanding learning and change as socially mediated, historically situated, and collectively constructed processes. The CL, in turn, functioned as the formative space in which participants engaged in joint analysis and reflection, allowing tensions and contradictions within the activity of VE to surface and be collaboratively examined.

Therefore, this study argues that VE can be meaningfully understood through collaborative and context-sensitive processes and that the use of the CL methodology enabled the local and collective construction of such understanding at UEM. Rather than simply analyzing existing practices, this approach created the conditions for shared reflection and the emergence of new perspectives on VE within the institutional setting.

In line with this theoretical and methodological foundation, the thesis is structured to reflect how these concepts guided the research process. Hence, it is organized into seven chapters following this Introduction. Chapter Two presents the theoretical framework, exploring the conceptual foundations of internationalization, IaH, and VE. Chapter Three introduces the theoretical-methodological foundations of CHAT and the CL, which not only served as essential tools in the collaborative construction of a local understanding of VE and IaH, but also dialogued with the pedagogical principles and foundations underlying VE itself. Chapter Four details the methodology, including a description of the research context, participants, the implementation of the CL, and data collection procedures. Chapter Five presents the descriptive analysis of the results, focusing on the contradictions and tensions identified in activities related to VE, while also discussing the opportunities and transformations that emerged through the collective process of reflection and intervention. Chapter Six advances this analysis by articulating the results with broader theoretical

discussions, examining their implications for VE and the use of the CL as a formative intervention methodology. Finally, the concluding section, chapter seven, synthesizes the main findings of the study and outlines their implications. In doing so, this study contributes not only to strengthen VE practices at UEM, but also to the development of a broader and more situated understanding of the role of IaH in the internationalization of Brazilian higher education.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK - INTERNATIONALIZATION, IA H, AND VE

This section presents a theoretical framework for understanding internationalization as a process and phenomenon, IaH and its developments as a branch of internationalization, and VE as one of its practical strategies.

To reach such intent, we begin by addressing the internationalization of higher education, contextualizing its conceptual evolution, motivations, critiques, and global challenges, with emphasis on contributions that challenge hegemonic perspectives and promote a more situated and critical understanding, particularly in the Latin American context.

Next, we discuss IaH, addressing its definitions, common misconceptions, practical dimensions, and context-sensitive critical guidelines, as well as its contributions to a more inclusive and democratic approach to internationalization.

To conclude the chapter, we explore VE as a strategic initiative of IaH, examining its conceptual and historical milestones, theoretical foundations, and pedagogical potential. Particular attention is given to its articulation with the development of linguistic, intercultural, and professional competences within higher education. We also highlight critical perspectives proposed under the lens of Critical Virtual Exchange. Finally, future projections are presented, pointing to the potential of VE as a sustainable and transformative practice within the scope of IaH.

2.1 The Internationalization of Higher Education

In recent decades, the internationalization of higher education has become consolidated as a strategic dimension of university policies on a global scale. Various institutions, governments, and multilateral organizations have emphasized its importance, whether as a means of academic integration, international projection, or the development of global competencies. Although the term has gained popularity, its meaning remains contested and varies according to the political, historical, and institutional context in which it is used.

As presented in the Introduction, one of the most widely accepted definitions is that of Knight (2003, p. 2), who understands internationalization as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education.” The use of the terms “process” and “integration” indicates that internationalization is not limited to isolated actions or one-off projects, but rather involves a

structural and lasting transformation in institutional practices. In line with this definition, authors such as De Wit (2013) emphasize that internationalization should be understood as a systemic phenomenon that encompasses teaching, research, outreach, administration, and institutional relations. For this scholar, it is not merely about expanding the international presence of universities, but about transforming their curricula, pedagogical approaches, and social commitments in a contextualized manner.

This systemic understanding also helps explain the multiple motivations that have historically driven internationalization, which include, but are not limited to, the time period, country, and type of institution. De Wit (1999, 2011) suggests that these motivations can be grouped into five categories: political, economic, academic, social, and cultural. In many contexts, such as in Europe, economic motivation has stood out, driven by the need to attract external funding and to improve positions in international rankings. In countries like Brazil, particularly within public institutions, there is a tendency to value academic motivations, such as scientific cooperation and networks, more balanced outbound and inbound mobility, and equal access to international practices (Finardi; Rojo, 2015; Baumvol; Sarmiento, 2016).

Yet, despite the growing enthusiasm surrounding internationalization, several authors warn of myths, misconceptions, and risks associated with the process. Knight (2011) and De Wit (2011) emphasize that internationalization does not necessarily mean student mobility or an increase in international agreements. An instrumentalized interpretation of internationalization may lead to superficial or merely promotional approaches, disconnected from meaningful institutional transformation. Similarly, Azevedo (2017), in an interview with the National Association of Graduate Studies and Research in Education (ANPED), warns against assuming that internationalization simply means adopting international programs or themes. According to him, it is necessary to value local research topics while not losing sight of their articulation with broader scales. Nilsson (2003) corroborates this view by stating that institutions should seek ways to bring the world to the campus and take the campus to the world.

These observations also resonate with discussions on the unequal positioning of countries within the global higher education system. Lima and Maranhão (2009) distinguish between active and passive internationalization, arguing that active internationalization is typically associated with countries that implement state policies to attract international students, export educational services, and expand their academic influence internationally, whereas passive internationalization characterizes countries whose participation relies primarily on sending students and researchers abroad while possessing more limited capacity

to internationalize their own higher education systems. According to their study, this asymmetry contributes to the reproduction of hegemonic forms of internationalization.

Castro-Gómez (2007), Andreotti et al. (2015), and Vavrus; Pekol (2015) point to the colonial implications of knowledge production and circulation in higher education, calling attention to imbalances in the formation of partnerships, the legitimation of knowledge, and access to resources. These criticisms have fueled perspectives that advocate for a reorientation of internationalization, so that it is based on principles of equity, reciprocity, and recognition of local context. Authors such as Finardi (2019), Martinez (2017), and Streck; Abba (2018) argue that it is urgent to consider alternative ways of internationalizing — ones that take into account challenges related to access, funding, language, and diverse epistemologies, especially in Latin America.

Given these tensions, there is a growing understanding that internationalization must be reconfigured based on respect for the local context, which Knight (2012) identifies as an ethical foundation of the process. According to the author, internationalization can only be considered authentic if it recognizes local policies, priorities, and practices as equally important as the international dimension, grounded in the institutional and regional realities of each university. Knight (2012) further stresses that the process should not be homogeneous or hegemonic, but rather adapted to local needs and circumstances.

It is within this context that the proposal of IaH is strongly understood as a more inclusive, critical, and sustainable strategy for expanding international experiences in academic settings. By integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the daily life of universities, without relying exclusively on physical mobility, IaH broadens access while also redefining internationalization in accordance with institutional priorities. In doing so, this approach enables a redefinition of the concept of internationalization based on institutional priorities, promoting civic education, respect for diversity, and the appreciation of local knowledge. This turning point sets the stage for the next section, which examines in greater depth the practices of IaH and VE as one of its main strategies.

2.2 The Internationalization at Home

The concept of IaH emerged as a response to the need to broaden access to international experiences in higher education, going beyond the physical mobility of students and faculty. The pioneering definition, proposed by Crowther et al. (2001, p. 8), defines IaH as “any internationally related activity with the exception of outbound student and staff

mobility.” However, Beelen and Jones (2015) argue that this initial definition is negative and limited, as it does not explain what IaH is, but rather what it is not, and it overlooks the intercultural dimension that is essential to the process. Building on this critique, the authors propose a more comprehensive and intentional definition: “the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments”(Beelen; Jones, 2015, p. 69). understanding emphasizes that IaH is not limited to the addition of international content as an isolated subject, but rather requires structural transformations in both curriculum design and pedagogical practice.

Wächter (2013) complements this perspective by highlighting two fundamental pillars for understanding IaH: the idea that internationalization goes beyond physical mobility, and the emphasis on teaching and learning in culturally diverse contexts. Beelen (2019, p. 33) also reminds us that the primary purpose of IaH is “to extend the opportunities and benefits of internationalization to all students, not only the mobile minority.” Based on this understanding, IaH emerges as a strategy for expanding access to internationalization, particularly for those who lack the financial means to participate in study-abroad programs, but who nonetheless need to be prepared to engage as global citizens.

In addition, Knight (2004) stresses the importance of creating an institutional culture that is favorable to internationalization, fostering an intercultural climate on campus. This understanding aligns with the perspective of Beelen and Jones (2015), who emphasize the need to make the university environment supportive of meaningful cultural exchange.

Beyond these definitions, the literature also highlights a number of myths and misconceptions that hinder the meaningful implementation of IaH. Knight (2011), for example, challenges the assumption that the mere presence of international students on campus would automatically internationalize the curriculum or institutional culture. In reality, many of these students face social and academic marginalization, and their presence alone does not guarantee enriching intercultural experiences, or creating a global environment (De Wit, 2011).

Similarly, De Wit (2011) points to other common misconceptions in both internationalization and IaH, such as the belief that offering courses in English is equivalent to internationalization (and by extension at home). According to the author, this reductionist view can lead to the neglect of other languages and compromise the quality of teaching, especially when faculty and students are not proficient in the target language. Beelen (2019) adds that the curriculum can be internationalized even without changing the language of

instruction, through the selection of sources, themes, and international approaches. Such observations help to reflect on more coherent and effective practices in the context of IaH.

In light of these challenges, the practical dimensions of IaH become especially relevant. Guimarães et al. (2019) emphasize that IaH takes shape through actions carried out in the classroom, within the academic community, and across the campus as a whole. Formal activities include interdisciplinary approaches, the integration of international content into the curriculum, and articulation with institutional projects, while informal or extracurricular initiatives range from cultural events and exhibitions to thematic debates and communities of practice, as exemplified by Gonçalves (2009).

For IaH to be effective, however, Agnew and Kahn (2014) stress the need for collaborative engagement between faculty and staff in designing learning spaces that are truly international, intercultural, and global. The authors caution that large-scale initiatives can generate tensions within existing institutional structures and norms and that divergent understandings of the concept of IaH often hinder its implementation. Therefore, investing in faculty and staff development is crucial for the success of organizational change.

Extending this debate into more critical perspectives, scholars emphasize the importance of context-sensitive approaches to IaH. Beelen and Jones (2015) acknowledge that IaH can take different forms depending on the institutional and cultural settings, and that each reality should guide the construction of guidelines consistent with its objectives and local needs. Knight (2012) argues that authentic and meaningful internationalization depends on the recognition of local institutional policies, priorities, and practices. Thus, according to the author, there is no generic model; rather, it must respect the individuality of each institution.

Among the studies that deepen the critical dimension of IaH, Clemente and Morosini (2021) propose the articulation between internationalization and interculturality from a Latin American critical perspective. The authors argue that IaH should be understood as a means for developing an “interculturality at home,” guided by principles of social justice and the recognition of local knowledge. Drawing on Walsh (2009), they call for critical interculturality as a guiding horizon, moving beyond functional and relational perspectives.

Furthermore, Leal and Moraes (2017), when discussing one of the strategies of IaH — curricular internationalization — draw on the concepts of sociological reduction and epistemologies of the South. The authors criticize the importation of models from the Global North and advocate for a reconfiguration of internationalization practices that values local knowledge and experiences. This approach aligns with the principles of IaH by proposing an emancipatory, situated, and contextually tailored internationalization.

Looking ahead, these critical perspectives connect directly with debates about the future of IaH. Leask, Beelen, and Kaunda (2013), for instance, emphasize that the future of internationalization requires a paradigmatic shift away from a mobility-dominated model toward approaches that are sustainable over time, inclusive, and ethically oriented. In this reconfiguration, IaH and the internationalization of the curriculum (IoC) stand out as central pillars, enabling universities to prepare students for global citizenship while respecting local knowledge and addressing epistemic inequalities. According to the authors, positioning IaH and IoC as core strategies also aligns internationalization efforts with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reinforcing their role in promoting social responsibility and intercultural understanding in higher education.

Building on this broader vision, De Wit and Altbach (2020) recommend fostering inclusive global learning with particular attention to the internationalization of the curriculum (as part of IaH), COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), the internationalization of teacher education, and foreign language education. They also emphasize promoting education for intercultural competence and global citizenship; integrating global, regional, national, and local dimensions; and pursuing a more comprehensive approach that brings together the different facets of internationalization. In this sense, the integration of IaH — through initiatives such as IoC and VE — with foreign language education, linking the global and the local, represents both a challenge and an opportunity for the future of internationalization, as suggested by De Wit and Altbach (2020).

In this context, IaH functions as a viable and strategic option to promote inclusion and equity in access to international experiences. Its articulation with VE, one of the IaH strategies, for instance, has been deemed effective in fostering linguistic, intercultural, and pedagogical competences. Thus, VE initiatives gain relevance for their potential alignment with the principles of IaH and for broadening internationalization opportunities for more students. In the following section, this practice will be discussed in greater depth, with attention to its theoretical foundations, challenges, and contributions.

2.3 Virtual Exchange

The rapid emergence of technological and digital innovations has exponentially expanded the possibilities for learning. Graham (2006) notes that technological innovation is broadening the range of solutions available for teaching and learning. He argues that blended learning can integrate pedagogical practices and interactions from both face-to-face and

distance education. With its growing emphasis on facilitating human interaction through computer-mediated collaboration, virtual communities, and related environments, blended learning is seen as particularly well suited to higher education, given its flexibility and accessibility (in terms of time, space, and reach), cost-effectiveness, and innovative potential (Graham, 2006).

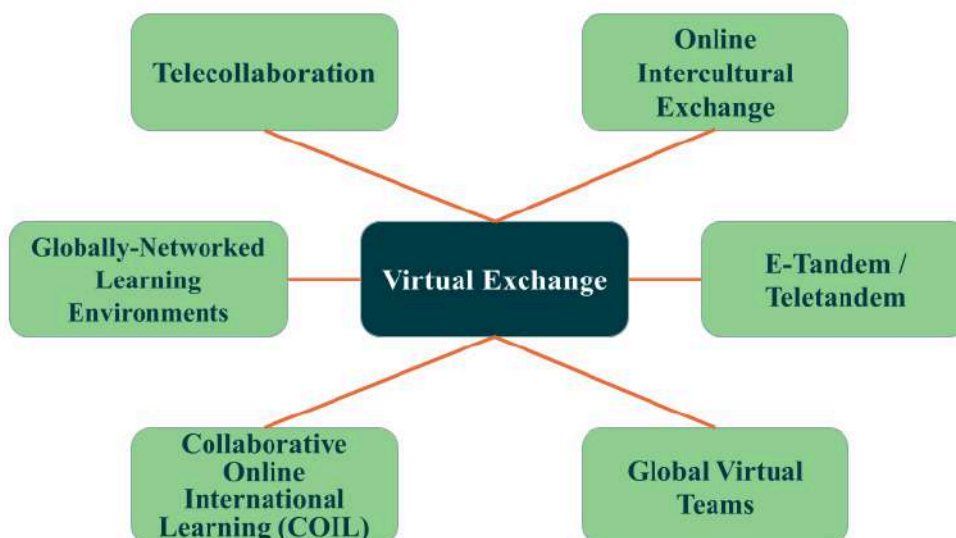
Within this expanding landscape of technology-mediated education, VE stands out as a practice that combines collaborative learning with international and intercultural dimensions. Initially rooted in language education under the label of telecollaboration, VE has evolved into a broader approach integrated into multiple academic contexts.

VE exemplifies blended learning as an educational practice in which groups of students engage in sustained online intercultural interaction and collaboration — typically over a period of five to six weeks — with peers from different cultural contexts or geographical locations. Although VE is most commonly associated with international partnerships, these exchanges may also occur between institutions within the same country when meaningful cultural differences and intercultural learning opportunities are present. These exchanges are embedded within academic programs or courses and take place under the guidance of educators or facilitators (Lewis; O'Dowd, 2016; O'Dowd, 2018; Garcés; O'Dowd, 2020). VE is also rooted in collaborative, student-centered approaches to learning, in which intercultural knowledge and understanding are developed through interaction and negotiation among participants (Garcés; O'Dowd, 2020).

However, in a state-of-the-art study on VE, O'Dowd (2018) points out that the practice has been described using a variety of names and terminologies, depending on the educational context and the pedagogical orientation of its practitioners. Examples include *telecollaboration*, *online intercultural exchange*, *virtual exchange*, *COIL*, *internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education*, *global networked learning environments*, and *e-tandem* or *teletandem*. According to O'Dowd (2018), the use of different terminologies for the same activity has both positive and negative aspects. On the one hand, it demonstrates that the practice has been applied in diverse ways and has proven adaptable to different pedagogical goals and learning contexts. On the other hand, the coexistence of multiple approaches and terminologies has made it more difficult to build a coherent research field and to promote and disseminate the practice among educators and decision-makers who are not familiar with the concept (O'Dowd, 2018). Hence, the author argues that adopting the term *Virtual Exchange* (VE) as an umbrella concept is essential for unifying a range of educational practices that share similar goals and pedagogical foundations but have developed under

different names. To illustrate the multiplicity of terms used to describe these practices, Figure 1 presents O'Dowd's (2018) overview of the different terminologies as he positions VE as a compromise umbrella term.

Figure 1 – Overview of the main terminology used in VE and its positioning as a compromise umbrella term



Source: Reproduced from O'Dowd (2018, p. 4).

The historical trajectory of VE also reveals its close ties to language education. As O'Dowd (2016) explains, *telecollaboration* initially emerged within foreign language teaching and learning, where students from different countries collaborated online to practice and reflect on language and culture. More recently, however, the use of such exchanges as pedagogical tools in other disciplinary areas has expanded significantly. In these newer contexts— often referred to as VE — educators aim to integrate collaborative and international components into their courses, providing students with opportunities to engage in online intercultural teamwork. According to O'Dowd (2016), VE also allows students to use foreign languages as a means of communication within disciplinary collaboration, rather than as an end goal, distinguishing it from language-focused telecollaborative projects.

In Brazil, this trajectory followed a similar initial path, with early initiatives emerging predominantly within the field of language education. One of the most influential projects in this context is Teletandem Brasil, created in 2006 by João A. Telles with support from FAPESP. Aranha and Cavalari (2014) provide a historical overview of the project, describing

it as both a pedagogical and research initiative built upon the principles of European tandem learning (Brammerts, 1996), adapted to contemporary digital environments. Initially conceived as a non-integrated institutional modality, Teletandem Brasil promoted voluntary online interactions between speakers of different languages through platforms such as Skype and MSN, emphasizing autonomy, reciprocity, and language separation. Over time, and in response to the demands of international partner institutions, the initiative evolved into an integrated institutional modality, incorporating teletandem activities into foreign language courses with official recognition and curricular inclusion (Aranha; Cavalari, 2014). This transition marked an important step toward institutional embedding, aligning Brazilian experiences with broader international discussions on the curricular integration of VE.

Building on the trajectory traced by Aranha; Cavalari (2014), Rampazzo (2025) presents the consolidation of *Teletandem Brasil* as a well-established form of VE widely disseminated across Brazil. According to the author, after nearly two decades of continuous implementation, the project has become the most prominent VE model in the country, currently present in all five Brazilian regions and supported by numerous institutional adaptations. The study highlights the initiative's capacity to adapt to diverse technological and institutional conditions while maintaining its pedagogical and intercultural essence, confirming *Teletandem Brasil* as a mature and influential reference for the development of VE practices in higher education (Rampazzo, 2025).

While Teletandem Brasil represented a language-centered model, subsequent initiatives in Brazil have sought to expand VE beyond foreign language education. Within this scenario of VE initiatives in Brazil, the Brazilian Association for International Education (FAUBAI) launched the BRaVE (Brazilian Virtual Exchange) program as a national initiative aimed at fostering structured virtual academic collaboration among affiliated higher education institutions.

According to information provided on FAUBAI's official website, BRaVE encourages the implementation of VE projects through partnerships between Brazilian universities and international institutions, promoting cooperative and multicultural online activities embedded within academic courses. From an academic perspective, Salomão (2020) describes BRaVE as a model of collaborative online learning designed to facilitate intercultural dialogue and the exchange of ideas between Brazilian undergraduate and graduate students and their peers abroad. According to the author, unlike Teletandem Brasil, the program is not primarily focused on language learning, but rather on fostering IaH by offering a cost-effective and scalable strategy for universities to internationalize their curricula and create global learning

networks. Institutions may apply for the FAUBAI-BRaVE Seal, which is granted to universities that demonstrate sustained VE implementation, maintain institutional coordination structures, and offer courses involving online international collaboration. By the end of 2025, ten higher education institutions had been awarded the seal, signaling a growing movement toward structured recognition of VE initiatives at the national level.

The Brazilian experience thus mirrors the diversity of models and terminologies that characterize the field internationally, ranging from language-based exchanges to curriculum-integrated collaborative models. In summary, the term VE serves as an overarching framework that includes other terminologies and approaches such as language-based initiatives (e.g., e-tandem and telecollaboration) and curriculum-based approaches such as COIL. The latter connects two or more courses or disciplines in different countries, whose instructors jointly design collaborative tasks that require communication, problem-solving, and co-construction of knowledge among students. For the purposes of this study, the term Virtual Exchange (VE) is used preferentially; however, COIL may also appear as a synonymous term at certain instances during the analysis, since participants themselves often employ both terms interchangeably.

A recent mapping of Brazilian studies on VE conducted by Calvo and Finardi (2025) provides an overview of how it has been discussed and implemented in the national context. The authors analyzed publications from different databases, examining aspects such as institutional settings, areas of knowledge, pedagogical approaches, research methods, and reported results. The study shows that most Brazilian research on VE has been developed in the fields of language education and teacher education, with a predominance of qualitative case studies and experience reports. It also identifies recurring topics in the literature, including institutional organization, linguistic mediation, teacher preparation, technological conditions, and the relationship between VE initiatives and broader internationalization strategies.

In addition to understanding how VE has been studied and implemented in Brazil, it is equally important to examine how the literature has framed its pedagogical and developmental contributions. Beyond its terminological scope, VE has been widely recognized for its pedagogical and developmental benefits. As Lewis and O'Dowd (2016) emphasize, VE fosters the acquisition of intercultural, linguistic, and digital competences, while also promoting learner autonomy through student-led interaction and collaboration. By engaging in authentic, task-based communication with peers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, students develop linguistic accuracy and fluency as well as intercultural

awareness and communicative sensitivity. Moreover, the authors argue that the process of negotiating meaning and co-constructing knowledge in online environments enhances learners' critical thinking, collaborative problem-solving, and ability to navigate complex intercultural situations (Lewis; O'Dowd, 2016).

In the same line, De Wit (2016) highlights that VE has demonstrated great potential for developing students' linguistic, intercultural, and digital competences and aligns with current international education policies aimed at expanding global learning opportunities for students who are not physically mobile.

Brazilian studies mapped by Calvo and Finardi (2025) report similar contributions, highlighting gains related to global competence, intercultural and language development, as well as experiences with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). The review also points to advances in technological development and digital literacies, as well as increased access to international experiences for non-mobile students and pedagogical innovation within formal curricula. In addition, VE is presented as a means of strengthening collaborative practices among faculty and expanding opportunities for IaH across different institutional contexts. These combined dimensions position VE as a powerful tool for advancing internationalization and global learning within higher education, transforming language learning and disciplinary exchange into meaningful social action across cultures.

Although VE has demonstrated great potential to become an integral part of universities' IaH policies — since online intercultural collaborative projects within formal learning contexts are ideal for incorporating global and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum (Garcés; O'Dowd, 2020) — its implementation poses considerable challenges. As O'Dowd (2015) points out, organizing a course based on online interaction and collaboration between students from different countries is a complex task that requires specific expertise. Educators must know how to design telecollaborative activities, set up and facilitate digital platforms for student interaction, guide episodes of online intercultural communication, effectively combine online and offline stages, and integrate the exchange coherently into the course syllabus.

In addition, one of the persistent obstacles to the wider development of VE lies in the limited recognition of its educational value by institutional leaders and funding bodies (O'Dowd, 2018). Beyond this lack of institutional awareness, a range of operational and structural barriers also constrain its implementation. Among them are students' unequal access to technological resources, the need for teachers to develop the organizational, pedagogical, and digital competences required for VE, and the challenges of coordinating exchanges across

different institutional contexts. Furthermore, the successful implementation of VE depends on greater institutional recognition and support, including its integration into curricula and broader educational practices (O'Dowd, 2013).

In the Brazilian context, the challenges identified in the literature largely converge with those discussed internationally, while also reflecting specific institutional conditions. The mapping conducted by Calvo and Finardi (2025) points to recurrent issues such as limited institutional support, the absence of formal policies for VE integration, teacher workload, and uneven technological infrastructure across institutions. The review also highlights difficulties related to linguistic mediation — particularly when English functions as a *Lingua Franca* — as well as the need for more systematic teacher preparation to design and manage online intercultural collaboration. Additionally, several studies underline the persistence of fragmented initiatives that depend primarily on individual faculty engagement rather than coordinated institutional strategies (Calvo; Finardi, 2025). These findings indicate that, in Brazil, the sustainability and consolidation of VE similarly rely on structural and policy-related conditions that go beyond individual pedagogical commitment.

Collectively, these limitations reveal that the successful implementation of VE does not depend solely on individual motivation or pedagogical innovation, but also on institutional readiness, digital infrastructure, and policy frameworks that can support and legitimize these initiatives. In this sense, in order to evolve from an isolated initiative mainly dependent on individual practitioners, O'Dowd (2016) argues that VE needs to be embedded within broader educational strategies and supported by policies at both the institutional and governmental levels.

2.3.1 The past and future directions of VE

Understanding the evolution of VE is essential for situating current practices and envisioning future directions for its development. Tracing its historical roots reveals that the idea of connecting learners across distance for intercultural collaboration long predates the digital era. As Dooly and O'Dowd (2018) note, practices resembling VE can be traced back to early initiatives such as *pen pal exchanges* and the *Modern School Movement* led by Célestin Freinet in the 1920s. These early experiments in educational correspondence sought to foster intercultural understanding and communication between geographically distant classrooms, laying the foundations for what would later evolve into structured online intercultural collaboration. Over the following decades, several initiatives continued to explore mediated

communication for educational purposes — from Mario Lodi’s classroom exchange projects in Italy during the 1960s to the first large-scale computer-based learning networks in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the PLATO system in the United States. Although these early experiences lacked the technological sophistication of current practices, they already reflected a commitment to connecting learners across borders to share knowledge, perspectives, and experiences — an idea that would become central to the philosophy of VE (Dooly; O’Dowd, 2018).

With the advent of personal computers and the expansion of the Internet in the early 1990s, opportunities for computer-mediated communication began to transform the landscape of educational collaboration. As O’Dowd (2018) recounts, the first online classroom partnerships began to appear, with Tella (1991) connecting Finnish secondary-school students through email exchanges. Around the same period, Warschauer (1995) published *Virtual Connections: Online Activities and Projects for Networking Language Learners*, documenting cross-cultural projects where foreign-language learners engaged in authentic online communication. To facilitate such exchanges, platforms like the Intercultural Email Classroom Connections (IECC) network and e-tandem were launched to match teachers and students across borders. As Dooly and O’Dowd (2018) observe, this period marked the consolidation of *telecollaboration* as a pedagogical practice — a term popularized by Warschauer (1996) and further developed by Kern, Brammerts, and Johnson, whose work laid the groundwork for technology-mediated intercultural communication in education. More detailed accounts of these early initiatives and their pedagogical development can be found in Dooly and O’Dowd (2018) as well as O’Dowd (2018), which provide comprehensive overviews of the evolution of telecollaboration and its transition to VE.

As previously discussed in the Brazilian trajectory of VE, initiatives such as Teletandem Brasil and the FAUBAI-BRaVE program exemplify different moments and orientations within the national development of virtual collaboration in Brazil. The growing recognition of such initiatives illustrates how VE has moved from experimental projects to more structured, policy-supported practices within Brazilian higher education, while simultaneously fostering a sustained body of research led by Brazilian scholars dedicated to investigating its pedagogical, technological, and intercultural dimensions. These institutional and research developments reflect a broader international movement toward diversifying the means of academic collaboration and expanding access to global learning opportunities. Beyond national initiatives, similar discussions have emerged worldwide regarding the role of VE in promoting more inclusive and sustainable forms of internationalization. While previous

discussions have emphasized that physical mobility alone cannot ensure equitable access to internationalization — see the myths identified by Knight (2011) and the misconceptions discussed by De Wit (2011) — recent scholarship highlights that VE has gained recognition as a strategic response to these limitations. Mobility does not necessarily guarantee the development of intercultural competence — one of the central objectives of internationalization (Garcés; O’Dowd, 2020). Moreover, it is often seen as an elitist and exclusive activity, beyond the reach of many students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, due to its high financial costs. VE, therefore, is increasingly viewed as a fairer and more democratic alternative that enables the majority of non-mobile students to experience the international skills demanded in a globalized world (Garcés; O’Dowd, 2020).

Building on this rationale, O’Dowd (2021) stresses that VE should be regarded not as a competitor to physical mobility programs, but as a complementary practice that broadens the range of international learning opportunities available to students. Importantly, VE must not be reduced to an emergency tool activated only in times of crisis, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting restrictions on international travel. Instead, for him, there is growing evidence of its long-term value for developing intercultural, digital, interpersonal, and foreign language skills. For this reason, VE should be considered an integral component of IaH strategies.

Looking ahead, O’Dowd (2021) emphasizes that the sustainable future of VE will require institutional commitment and collaboration at three distinct levels. First, program coordinators must provide support for establishing international VE partnerships and networks among faculty. Second, university leadership will need to introduce innovative institutional policies that facilitate the integration of VE into curricula and internationalization strategies. Finally, at the pedagogical level, faculty members must explore new teaching practices and classroom methodologies that incorporate VE projects. These combined efforts will determine whether VE can consolidate its role as a sustainable and transformative element of higher education internationalization.

In light of these considerations this chapter set out to discuss Internationalization, IaH, and VE not as isolated or competing concepts, but as interrelated dimensions within a broader institutional and pedagogical landscape. By revisiting key discussions in the field, the chapter has shown that Internationalization extends beyond physical mobility and outward-oriented strategies, encompassing a wide range of practices that aim to integrate international and intercultural dimensions into the core functions of higher education.

In higher education settings, IaH constitutes a central approach for expanding access to internationalization, particularly in contexts marked by structural, economic, and geopolitical constraints. Rather than functioning as a secondary or compensatory alternative to physical mobility, IaH is understood here as a strategic and pedagogically driven dimension of Internationalization, capable of fostering meaningful international and intercultural learning opportunities for a wider and more diverse student population.

VE, in turn, has been discussed as one of the prominent and operational expressions of IaH. As a pedagogical practice, VE materializes the principles of IaH by enabling structured, technology-mediated interaction and collaboration across institutional and national boundaries, embedded within formal curricula. At the same time, VE does not operate in isolation: its design, implementation, and sustainability are deeply influenced by institutional policies, curricular structures, pedagogical choices, and broader internationalization strategies.

Figure 2 synthesizes this conceptual articulation by visually representing VE as situated within IaH, which itself is embedded within the wider field of Internationalization. This nested relationship highlights that VE is neither an end in itself nor a stand-alone initiative, but part of a layered process through which internationalization is interpreted, enacted, and negotiated at the local level. Such a representation is particularly relevant for understanding how VE can be shaped by institutional contexts and how, in turn, it may contribute to reconfiguring local understandings and practices of IaH.

Figure 2 – Matryoshka-style representation of Internationalization, IaH, and VE, highlighting the nested and interdependent nature of these dimensions



Source: Generated by the author using ChatGPT and DALL·E (OpenAI), January, 2026.

After establishing this conceptual grounding, the next chapter shifts the focus from the *what* and *where* of Internationalization, IaH, and VE to the *how* of analyzing their development as social and institutional practices. To this end, Chapter Three introduces the CHAT and the CL methodology, which inform the analytical lens adopted in this study and support the examination of VE as a collectively constructed and evolving activity within the institution.

3 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS: CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY AND THE CHANGE LABORATORY

This chapter presents the theoretical and methodological foundations that guided the research, focusing on the epistemological and interventionist principles underpinning CHAT, the CL, and its adaptation to online environments. In addition, it situates the study within the existing academic landscape through a state-of-the-art review that maps how VE and CHAT have been taken up in Brazilian graduate research.

The chapter begins by outlining the origins and conceptual development of CHAT, rooted in the work of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Engeström. We highlight the foundational principles that characterize the theory — such as double stimulation, contradictions, the zone of proximal development and ascending from the abstract to the concrete — emphasizing its relevance for analyzing development as a historically situated, socially mediated, and collective process.

Next, the CL is discussed as an interventionist methodology derived from CHAT. This section discusses its key features, including the use of double stimulation, the analytical role of contradiction, and the collective process of envisioning and implementing transformative change. The chapter also addresses how these principles have been reconfigured in digitally mediated contexts by examining the online CL as an emerging methodological development.

Finally, the chapter presents a state-of-the-art review focused on the intersection between VE and CHAT. This review synthesizes trends and emphases in Brazilian *stricto sensu* research and identifies gaps that are directly relevant to the present study.

3.1 Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

CHAT constitutes the main conceptual framework of this study, offering a robust analytical lens to understand learning and transformation processes within specific sociocultural contexts. Developed from the seminal contributions of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Engeström, CHAT investigates the dialectical relationship between subjects, objects, and mediating artifacts within activity systems, emphasizing the central role of contradictions as drivers of change and development (Engeström, 1987). Grounded in the philosophical and methodological principles of Marxist dialectics, CHAT is particularly concerned with understanding the historical development and transformation of human practices (Sannino;

Engeström, 2018). In this research, CHAT informs the analysis of VE as a complex phenomenon embedded in historically constructed and constantly evolving activity systems. Moreover, it serves as the theoretical and methodological basis for the application of the CL, a participatory intervention designed to identify and address challenges in the development of VE at the studied institution.

Building upon this foundation, CHAT— also referred to simply as Activity Theory (AT) — offers an approach to human development situated within concrete social practices. It is within these activities that individuals build their skills, shape their personalities, and develop consciousness. Through engagement in socially situated activities, we not only transform ourselves but also modify the surrounding social conditions — confronting contradictions, generating new cultural artifacts, and creating new forms of life and self (Sannino; Daniels; Gutiérrez, 2009).

Situated within the field of Organizational Learning, AT is recognized as a theoretical and methodological alternative for studying and fostering learning in organizational settings (Querol; Cassandre; Bulgacov, 2014). The concept of activity has its roots in the philosophy of Hegel, who emphasized the role of material productive activity and tools of labor in the development of knowledge (Engeström, 1987). As noted by Querol, Cassandre, and Bulgacov (2014), AT approaches the individual and the collective from a dialectical perspective. That is, understanding a collective activity requires consideration of individual actions, while understanding an individual action demands attention to the “object being socially constructed, the instruments that are socially and historically shaped as mediating tools, the rules, and the division of labor that structure relationships among members of the community” Bulgacov (2014, p. 409).

The origins of CHAT can be traced back to the social and political transformations that marked the early 20th century, particularly the 1917 Russian Revolution. This period, described by Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009) as a moment of *creative ferment* in the country’s cultural, artistic, and scientific life, paved the way for intellectual projects committed to the construction of a new society. In the field of psychology, this revolutionary spirit inspired the development of new approaches that rejected both introspectionism and behaviorism — the dominant paradigms at the time — and instead sought a dialectical and historical understanding of human development.

It was within this context that the contributions of Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria, and Alexei Leontiev emerged. These three scholars formed part of a collective of researchers committed to developing a psychology aligned with the principles of historical materialism.

The foundations of the socio-historical perspective are closely associated with their names (Sirgado, 1990). As Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009, p. 8) note, for many intellectuals of the time, *the Revolution represented a unique opportunity to build a new society*. According to an account by his son, A. N. Leontiev decided to study psychology after experiencing the Revolution firsthand and recognizing the need to philosophically understand the societal transformations underway. This political and philosophical orientation contributed to the conception of psychology as an active tool in both shaping human subjectivity and transforming concrete social conditions (Sannino; Daniels; Gutiérrez, 2009).

The articulation between science and social transformation was present from the earliest writings of the group, which regarded human activity as the privileged unit of analysis for understanding psychological development. According to Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009), the Revolution acted as a catalyst that brought these scientists together to collectively formulate AT. Their collaboration was strongly driven by the ideal of overcoming the classical dichotomies of psychology — mind and body, subject and object, individual and social — through an approach centered on mediated and practical activity. It is worth noting that the chapter by Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009) provides a valuable overview of this historical and intellectual context, offering further details on the emergence of AT and its foundational figures.

Having established the historical roots and foundational premises of CHAT, it is important to recognize that the theory did not remain static. Instead, it has undergone significant theoretical elaboration over time, giving rise to different conceptual emphases and analytical frameworks while maintaining its core dialectical orientation.

Beyond its theoretical development in the Soviet and later international contexts, CHAT was also taken up in different national settings, where it was reinterpreted in response to local academic and social demands. In Brazil, the theory gained prominence particularly in the fields of Education and Psychology from the late 1970s onwards, as researchers sought new ways to analyze school performance and understand differences in students' learning outcomes (Freitas, 1994). This process led to the formation of research groups in major universities, such as PUC-SP and Unicamp, which played a key role in introducing and disseminating the works of Vygotsky and his collaborators. Subsequently, this network expanded to other institutions across São Paulo, Minas Gerais, and Rio de Janeiro, contributing to the consolidation of a national research tradition (Palongan, 2019).

Historical evidence also indicates that this process was closely tied to the translation and circulation of key texts from the late 1970s onwards, initially through works by Luria and

later through edited compilations of Vygotsky's writings, which, in some cases, presented partial or modified versions of the original texts (Prestes; Tunes; Beck, 2025). In parallel, these developments contributed to the consolidation of a broad research tradition in Brazil, particularly in the field of Education, where the majority of research groups engaging with cultural-historical theory are currently concentrated. Recent survey data further indicate the scale and institutional consolidation of this field, with over one hundred research groups identified across the country, most of them located in public universities (Prestes; Tunes; Beck, 2025). CHAT has been critically appropriated and re-signified by Brazilian scholars, contributing to its expansion as a framework for analyzing situated practices. This process underscores the need to consider its theoretical development together with its circulation and transformation across contexts.

These trajectories are commonly discussed in terms of successive generations of AT, which reflect both continuity and transformation in how activity, mediation, and contradictions have been theorized. The following subsection outlines this development, tracing how CHAT has evolved over time.

3.1.2 CHAT throughout time

This trajectory can be systematized through Engeström's account of the historical development of AT. In this account, Yrjö Engeström (1987, 2001, 2009, 2015) delineates successive generations of CHAT to explain its development since the foundational work of Vygotsky. This classification traces the expansion of the theory from an initial focus on individual mediated action to a complex, multi-layered approach that addresses collective activity, institutional structures, and inter-organizational dynamics. The first generation, stemming from Vygotsky's psychological theory, emphasized the mediated nature of individual action, especially through culturally produced signs and tools. Key concepts introduced during this stage include mediation, the zone of proximal development (ZPD), and internalization — laying the foundation for a socio-historically informed understanding of human development. However, the first generation remained largely centered on the individual level, which would later be seen as a limitation. The second generation, led by Leontiev, sought to address this limitation by expanding the unit of analysis to the level of collective activity. Leontiev systematized the structure of activity by distinguishing between activity, action, and operation, and by introducing the idea of object-orientedness and motive as central to understanding human behavior in social contexts. The third generation,

developed by Engeström himself, conceptualized activity systems as complex, historically evolving formations composed of multiple elements — including subject, tools, object, community, rules, and division of labor — and introduced the idea of multi-voicedness and contradictions as intrinsic to developmental processes. This model allowed for the analysis of interacting activity systems and has been widely used in both educational and organizational contexts. More recently, a fourth generation has been proposed, characterized by growing attention to boundary crossing, dialogue between activity systems, and the challenges of expansive learning across institutional and national contexts. Russian scholar Vitaly Rubtsov has emerged as a central figure in this latest development, which aims to further extend the transformative and interventionist potential of CHAT (Sannino; Engeström, 2018).

To understand the foundations of the first generation of CHAT, it is essential to return to Vygotsky's Cultural-Historical Psychology, where the theoretical principles that shaped the early conceptualization of mediated action and human development were first articulated. Cultural-Historical Psychology, developed by Vygotsky in collaboration with Luria and Leontiev, is grounded in the principle that the human psyche is constituted through social and historical relations. In contrast to approaches that prioritized biological determinants or associationist models of behavior, Vygotsky argued that higher psychological functions — such as thinking, voluntary memory, and inner speech — emerge from socially mediated activity through the use of culturally produced signs and tools. In this perspective, human development is not shaped solely by internal or external factors but results from the dynamic integration of biological, social, and historical dimensions. As Vygotsky (1991) emphasizes, cultural development does not replace organic development; rather, it builds upon and transforms it.

The notion of mediation holds a central place in understanding psychological functioning. According to Vygotsky, human beings do not interact with the world directly, but through instruments and signs that serve as mediators of action and thought. Although different in their nature and function, both signs and instruments share a key characteristic: “the mediating function that defines them” (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 40). The use of artificial means — that is, the transition to mediated activity — fundamentally alters all psychological operations (Vygotsky, 1991). Through mediation, individuals not only adapt to the world but also transform it — and in doing so, they transform themselves.

Mediation, therefore, is not a secondary element, but the very condition for the constitution of human consciousness and for meaning-oriented activity. In this sense, the introduction of semiotic mediation into the psychological model makes it possible, as noted

by Sirgado (1990), to overcome longstanding dualisms that have marked the history of psychology and to explain persistent paradoxes in our understanding of human development.

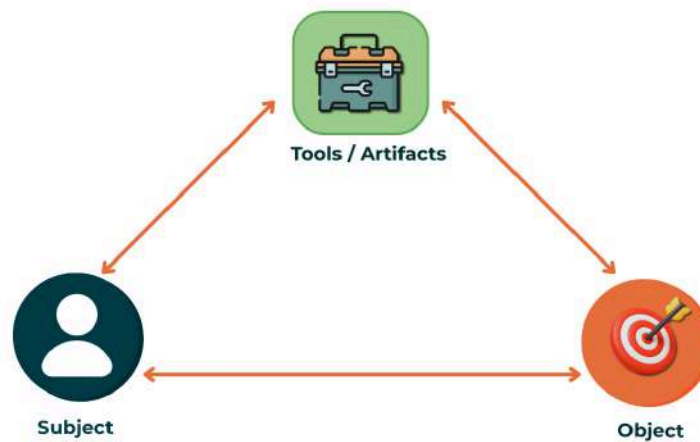
Furthermore, language, as the primary system of signs, plays a decisive role in organizing experience and shaping consciousness. Through the process of internalization, interactions that are initially social begin to structure higher psychological functions. Vygotsky (1991) explains that in the cultural development of the child, every function appears first on the social plane (interpsychological) — in interactions between people — and is later internalized and reorganized on the individual plane (intrapsychological).

This conception breaks away from individualistic and naturalizing explanations found in classical psychology by asserting that development is not a process of isolated maturation, but rather an active and mediated appropriation of historically constructed cultural forms. Cultural-Historical Psychology can thus be understood as “an application of historical and dialectical materialism relevant to psychology,” as highlighted in the introduction to the Brazilian edition of *Mind in Society* (Vygotsky, 1991, p. 10).

Although Vygotsky did not explicitly systematize the concept of activity as a theoretical unit centered on object-oriented actions, his formulations laid the groundwork for future developments. Leontiev, recognized as the central figure of the second generation of AT, expanded the theoretical scope by redefining the object and the basic unit of the activity system. He introduced the notion of collective activity, distinguishing it from individual actions and clarifying the structural relations between subject, object, and mediating tools (Cassandre, 2012).

The Figure below represents the model of mediated activity initially proposed by Vygotsky and later systematized by Leontiev. The relationship between subject and object is mediated by instruments/artifacts (tools or signs), forming the fundamental triad of activity.

Figure 3 – The model of mediation as proposed by Vygotsky



Source: Adapted from Engeström (1987, p. 59).

The original model of mediated action developed by Vygotsky laid the foundation for understanding human cognition as historically and culturally situated. However, this model was primarily focused on individual action and did not offer a systematic account of the social or collective dimensions of human activity. In this regard, the limitations of the first generation are evident — while powerful in introducing mediation and sign tools, it remained centered on the individual as the unit of analysis (Engeström, 2001; Klen-Alves, 2021). These limitations became the departure point for further theoretical development by Vygotsky's collaborators, particularly Leontiev, who expanded the scope of analysis to encompass collective and socially organized human activity.

While preserving the epistemological foundations of historical and dialectical materialism, Leontiev proposed a significant reformulation of the unit of analysis in psychology: instead of focusing on the isolated individual, he centered his analysis on practical activity — oriented by motives and socially mediated — as the core of psychological development, that is, the notion of the activity system. This shift in focus marked the emergence of what would later be identified as the second generation of AT (Engeström, 1987, 2009). Human activity, in this sense, is inherently collective and historically situated, always oriented toward concrete objects and shaped by material and cultural conditions.

As pointed out by Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009, p. 2), this formulation consolidated the second generation of AT by “emphasizing object-oriented collective activity”. The expansion of the analytical scale — from the individual subject to systems of

collective practice — inaugurated a new way of approaching educational, formative, and professional phenomena. This shift also introduced the fundamental distinction between *action* and *activity*, a key contribution by Leontiev that became central to the second generation. As Sannino (2011) explains, Leontiev illustrated this distinction through the example of a primeval collective hunt: while each member of a tribe may carry out individual actions with specific goals — such as scaring animals or using weapons — these actions only acquire full meaning when seen in relation to the broader motive that guides the collective activity: survival through obtaining food and clothing.

The dialectical relationship between action and activity was further conceptualized by Ilyenkov (1982), who emphasized that new, transformative actions often emerge first as exceptions to existing norms before eventually becoming universal. As Sannino (2011) notes, this transition marks a critical stage wherein collectives become aware of contradictions embedded in current activities and begin to develop future-oriented practices. In this process, innovative actions — once adopted and recognized by others — have the potential to transform the activity itself.

Leontiev's contribution marked a decisive shift in the development of CHAT, expanding the unit of analysis from individual, tool-mediated action to collective, object-oriented activity. As highlighted by Engeström (1987), Leontiev proposed a hierarchical model composed of three levels: activity, oriented by a motive; action, driven by a goal; and operation, shaped by the conditions of the environment. This framework allowed for a more nuanced understanding of human behavior by articulating intentionality, practice, and the objective material conditions in which actions are embedded. Rather than viewing individuals as isolated agents, Leontiev emphasized that actions derive their meaning from the broader activity systems they are part of — a formulation that laid the theoretical groundwork for later systemic models of activity. As further discussed by Sannino (2011), this transition from action to activity is dialectical and generative, involving transformations at both levels, especially when collective contradictions become apparent and spark innovation.

Building on this triadic structure, the concept of activity takes on a foundational role within the framework — not merely as a behavioral sequence, but as a historically and socially situated form of practice. The concept of activity occupies a central and structuring role in this theoretical approach, drawing inspiration from Marx and Engels' notion of labor (Sirgado, 1990).

The theoretical reformulation proposed by Leontiev marked a decisive advancement in the consolidation of AT. By shifting the unit of analysis to socially mediated, motive-driven

practical activity, Leontiev offered a broader and more systemic explanation of human psychology — one that moved beyond the psychologism and individualism of earlier approaches. His contribution was fundamental in showing how labor, culture, and social practice shape and constitute the subject (Sannino, 2011; Sannino; Daniels; Gutiérrez, 2009).

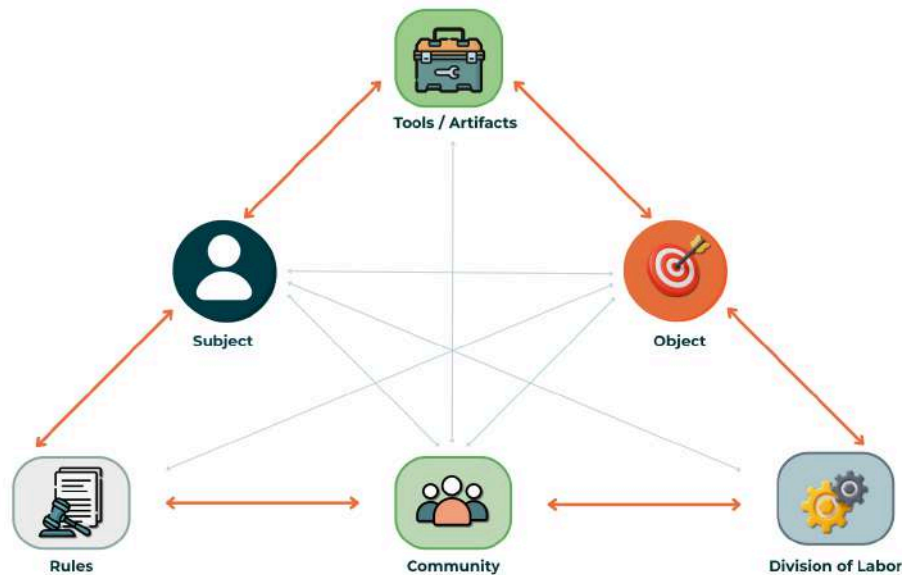
However, contemporary authors have identified important limitations in Leontiev's formulation. Engeström (1987) argues that, although structurally precise, the theory did not graphically expand Vygotsky's original model into a representation of a collective activity system. Similarly, Sannino et al. (2009, p. 3,4) observe that "Leontiev's model remained functionally descriptive, without explaining the dynamics of development". Engeström (1987) acknowledges that the theoretical line from Vygotsky to Leontiev introduced a conception of activity rooted in material production, mediated by technical and psychological tools as well as by social relations. This lineage emphasizes the central role of mediations in shaping human activity and lays the foundation for analyzing the psyche in constant interaction with concrete social practices. By affirming his theoretical alignment with this tradition, Engeström (1987) emphasizes the conceptual continuity between these foundational authors while simultaneously underscoring the need to expand this legacy into new contexts of research and intervention — a move that gave rise to the third generation of AT.

The third generation of AT emerged in the work of Yrjö Engeström as a response to the limitations identified in earlier formulations, particularly the descriptive nature of Leontiev's model and its insufficient attention to systemic contradictions and development dynamics. Building upon the foundational principles of Vygotsky and Leontiev, Engeström (1987, 2015) proposed a new conceptual and graphical model that redefined activity as a collective, object-oriented, and culturally mediated system. This expanded model incorporated additional components — rules, community, and division of labor — alongside the subject, object, and tools, forming the now widely recognized triangular representation of an activity system. By doing so, Engeström (1987, 2015) emphasized that individual actions can only be fully understood when situated within the broader, socially organized systems of activity in which they are embedded.

In response to this reconceptualization of activity, Engeström (1987, 2001, 2015) proposed a systemic model to represent the structural complexity of collective human activity. The model is graphically depicted as a triangle composed of six interconnected components: subject, object, mediating artifacts (tools), rules, community, and division of labor. This expanded structure highlights the mediated and socially embedded nature of human actions,

allowing for a more dynamic and comprehensive analysis of activity systems. The triangular representation, shown below, has become a central analytical tool in AT.

Figure 4 – The proposed structure for the activity system



Source: Adapted from Engeström (2015, p. 63).

This comprehensive and dynamic representation of activity systems enables a deeper analysis of human practices in their social, historical, and cultural dimensions and lays the groundwork for understanding how these systems evolve over time. It is precisely in this context of systemic transformation that Engeström (1987, 2001) introduces one of the most significant theoretical developments of the third generation: the theory of expansive learning.

Expansive learning theory aims to explain how people learn new forms of collective activity that do not yet exist — activities that are literally learned as they are being created. In such transformative processes, there is no expert or predetermined path to follow; learners themselves must construct a new object and develop the concept for their collective activity (Engeström, 2001). Traditional learning theories, according to Engeström (2001), offer limited insight into these phenomena, as they are typically focused on the acquisition of existing knowledge or skills. In contrast, expansive learning produces culturally new activity patterns and emergent forms of labor, which often require the creation of new tools, rules, and division of labor (Querol; Cassandre; Bulgacov, 2014).

As expansive learning processes unfold, they reveal the complexity and transformative potential of collective activity. To further conceptualize this dynamic, Engeström (2001) articulated five core principles that characterize the contemporary formulation of AT. These principles consolidate decades of theoretical development and provide a structured framework for analyzing activity systems in diverse contexts.

The first principle affirms that the collective, artifact-mediated activity system is the primary unit of analysis, rather than isolated individual actions. Second, activity systems are inherently multi-voiced, comprising diverse perspectives, traditions, and interests — a principle that underscores the internal diversity and tensions among participants. The third principle emphasizes historicity, recognizing that activity systems evolve over extended periods and can only be understood through the analysis of their historical development. The fourth principle stresses the central role of contradictions as sources of change and development. These contradictions, as Engeström (2001) explains, are not mere conflicts or problems but historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems. Finally, the fifth principle posits the possibility of expansive transformations, whereby activity systems undergo qualitative shifts as participants collaboratively reconceptualize their object and create new forms of practice.

Building on the theory of expansive learning, Engeström (1987) proposed a learning cycle model that represents the sequence of actions involved in the learning process. According to Querol, Cassandre, and Bulgacov (2014), the emergence of a new and expanded object begins within an already established activity, usually triggered by the appearance of problems. Supporting this view, Cassandre (2012) explains that, in addition to the collective creation of a new object and motive for the activity, the expansive learning process also involves the development of new tools and new forms of social organization to address the contradictions that put the activity into crisis. Figure 5 illustrates the cycle originally proposed by Engeström (1987, 2015).

Figure 5 – The Expansive Learning Cycle as proposed by Engeström



Source: Adapted from Engeström (2015) and generated by the author using DALL·E (OpenAI), April 2026.

The expansive learning cycle, as outlined by Engeström (2001), consists of a sequence of strategic actions through which participants collectively construct a new form of activity. The process begins with questioning the existing practice, often triggered by unresolved problems or disturbances that highlight contradictions within the current system. This is followed by analysis, during which participants investigate the root causes of the issues, typically by identifying and articulating the underlying structural contradictions. Once the contradictions are better understood, the third phase — modeling — involves proposing a new solution or an alternative model of activity. This model is then subjected to examination and testing, allowing for critique, refinement, and validation through collective discussion. If the new model is found viable, it leads to implementation in practice, where it encounters further contradictions and refinements. The final stages include reflection and consolidation, where the new activity is stabilized and embedded into the system, and its implications are critically evaluated. This cyclical and iterative process transforms the object of activity as well as expands the participants' agency and understanding, making the cycle both a practical and epistemological process of collective learning.

Taken together, the historical development of CHAT reveals a trajectory marked by both theoretical continuity and conceptual expansion. From Vygotsky's emphasis on mediated action, through Leontiev's formulation of collective, object-oriented activity, to Engeström's systemic and developmental reconceptualization of activity systems, each generation preserved the dialectical foundations of the theory while addressing limitations identified in earlier formulations. This developmental trajectory culminated in a framework capable of analyzing multivoiced, historically evolving activities and their transformative potential. Building on this theoretical evolution, the following subsection systematizes the core principles of CHAT that underpin its contemporary analytical and interventionist applications.

3.2 Core Principals of CHAT

The following subsections discuss key concepts that have become central to the development of CHAT and its interventionist applications. Although originally formulated within Vygotsky's cultural-historical psychology and later expanded by activity theorists, these concepts provide important analytical and methodological foundations for understanding learning, transformation, and collective agency in human activity. The discussion begins with the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), followed by Double Stimulation, Ascending from the Abstract to the Concrete, and Contradictions.

3.2.1 Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

The concept of the ZPD, first formulated by Vygotsky (1978) within the framework of cultural-historical psychology, marks a decisive shift in understanding learning and development. Vygotsky defines the ZPD as “the distance between the actual level of development determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 33). This concept distinguishes between two interrelated levels — the actual level, comprising internalized functions already performed autonomously, and the potential level, referring to abilities in formation that emerge through mediated interaction and social collaboration.

By introducing the ZPD, Vygotsky proposed a dynamic view of development, in which learning does not follow development but rather drives and reorganizes it (Vygotsky, 1991). Learning thus becomes a leading force in psychological growth, emphasizing the role

of mediation and social interaction in the constitution of higher mental functions. In pedagogical terms, this perspective challenges transmissive conceptions of education by situating teaching as an active intervention that fosters the emergence of new developmental possibilities through guided participation and shared problem-solving.

Although Vygotsky's formulation was initially applied to child development, Engeström (1987) reinterpreted the concept within collective activity systems, expanding its scope from individual to organizational and societal learning. In his reconceptualization, the ZPD represents "the distance between the present, everyday actions of individuals and the historically new form of societal activity that can be collectively generated as a solution to the double bind potentially embedded in everyday actions" (Engeström, 1987, p. 174). This extension preserves Vygotsky's dialectical logic while embedding it within the systemic and expansive framework of Activity Theory.

In this collective perspective, the ZPD no longer refers merely to an individual's potential with the aid of a more capable other but to the transformative potential of a community engaged in resolving contradictions within its shared activity. The focus shifts from the development of individual competence to the expansion of collective practice, where participants collaboratively construct new objects, tools, and social relations. As Cassandre (2012) notes, this redefinition situates the ZPD as a set of possible futures that may resolve existing contradictions, requiring advanced instruments, collective collaboration, and interaction across interconnected activity systems.

Thus, in both its classical and expanded formulations, the ZPD expresses the dialectical movement from the present toward the possible — from the known to the emergent — highlighting the generative power of social mediation in human and organizational development.

3.2.2 Double Stimulation

The cultural-historical theory formulated by Vygotsky goes beyond establishing explanatory principles about the constitution of higher psychological functions. It also inaugurates a distinct methodological approach aimed at analyzing developmental processes in concrete and transformative situations. Among the central procedures within this framework is the method of double stimulation, designed to investigate how individuals appropriate symbolic tools to reorganize their actions when facing challenging problems.

This method involves presenting two simultaneous sets of stimuli: one represents the problem to be solved, and the other provides an auxiliary resource — usually symbolic — that can be voluntarily used as a mediator of action. Vygotsky (1978) describes that, in his experiments, children were confronted with a series of objects (the problem) and, simultaneously, with a series of signs (such as letters) that enabled them to reorganize the task and find new solutions. The focus of this method is not on the final performance but on the qualitative transformation of action through the introduction of culturally produced auxiliary stimuli.

When confronted with a challenge beyond their current capacities, individuals actively incorporate a previously neutral stimulus, attributing to it a new function — that of a mediating sign. As Vygotsky explains, “when difficulties arise, neutral stimuli assume the function of a sign, and from that point the operation's structure assumes an essentially different character” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 75). Through this experimental arrangement, it becomes possible to observe not only the resolution of the task but also the internal processes that organize behavior, revealing the mechanisms underlying the emergence of higher psychological functions — centered on the uniquely human ability to create meaning, form temporary associations, and reconfigure action in the face of problems.

From this, it can be understood that, from an epistemological standpoint, the method of double stimulation differs from the traditional experimental logic by enabling the observation of processes in motion, in which the subject actively engages in constructing new modes of action. By introducing a tension between the problem and the available symbolic resources, this procedure makes mediation visible as a central process in human development.

Although originally conceived within the context of experimental psychology with children, the method carries a dialectical logic that has remained alive in subsequent developments of AT. Sannino, Daniels, and Gutiérrez (2009) highlight that double stimulation played a crucial role in the development of interventionist methods aligned with AT, particularly in its third generation. Its emphasis on the transformation of actions, on the concrete conditions in which they occur, and on the active mediation of symbolic instruments has become a powerful foundation for methods such as the CL, which operate through contradiction and the reorganization of collective activity.

Building on Vygotsky's original formulation, Engeström (2007) emphasizes that the method of double stimulation represents a radical departure from traditional experimental approaches based on stimulus–response logic. Rather than seeking maximum control over subjects' responses, this methodology foregrounds the means through which individuals

organize their own behavior by constructing and appropriating mediating artifacts. According to him, in double stimulation, the subject is confronted with a problem that exceeds existing capabilities and, simultaneously, with the possibility of creating or adopting auxiliary means that reconfigure the structure of action. Importantly, Engeström highlights that the second stimulus is not necessarily provided in a ready-made form; instead, it may emerge through the subject's own initiative, allowing the researcher to trace the development of complex symbolic activity as it unfolds. This methodological stance shifts the experimental setting into a context designed to trigger, rather than produce, new forms of action, thereby bringing the subject's agency to the center of the analytical frame. Although Vygotsky's empirical examples often focused on individual actors, Engeström underscores that the same principle applies to collective contexts, insofar as higher psychological functions and intentional actions originate interpsychologically in collaborative activity before becoming internalized. In this sense, double stimulation functions as a methodological device for objectifying inner psychological processes while simultaneously revealing how agency is constructed through the deliberate creation and use of mediating artifacts in situations marked by difficulty, uncertainty, and the need for reorganization of action.

In this regard, Sannino (2015) shows that the principle of double stimulation can be understood not merely as an experimental procedure, but as a methodological principle for explaining the emergence of volitional action. From this perspective, double stimulation allows us to understand how individuals and collectives gain intentional control over their actions when confronted with situations of conflict, uncertainty, or double bind. Rather than offering ready-made solutions, the method foregrounds the process through which actors deliberately construct or appropriate mediating artifacts that enable them to reorganize problematic situations and move beyond constrained forms of action.

In this sense, Sannino (2015) highlights that the second stimulus is not defined by its material form nor necessarily introduced by the researcher; instead, it becomes a mediating sign through its functional role in organizing action. This observation demonstrates how agency is constructed through mediation, as participants actively generate the means through which they reorganize and transform their activity. Double stimulation thus provides a methodological lens for examining the dialectical relationship between contradiction, mediation, and agency, offering insight into how transformative action becomes possible in practice. This understanding is central to interventionist approaches derived from CHAT, such as the CL, in which double stimulation supports collective learning processes oriented toward the transformation of activity.

3.2.3 Ascending from the abstract to the concrete

Within the tradition of CHAT, the principle of ascending from the abstract to the concrete constitutes a central epistemological and methodological foundation for understanding concept formation, learning, and transformation. Rooted in the Marxist dialectical tradition and further elaborated by Ilyenkov and Davydov, this principle challenges empiricist approaches to knowledge production by rejecting the idea that learning proceeds from concrete observations toward abstract generalizations. Instead, it proposes that theoretical development begins with the construction of an abstraction that captures the genetic and explanatory core of a phenomenon and is subsequently developed into increasingly rich and concrete forms (Sannino, 2011; Engeström; Sannino, 2010).

A key distinction emphasized in this tradition is that between empirical abstraction and theoretical abstraction. Empirical abstractions are derived from the classification and comparison of surface features of phenomena, resulting in generalizations that remain descriptive and context-bound. Theoretical abstraction, by contrast, seeks to identify the internal relations and contradictions that generate and sustain a complex whole over time. This form of abstraction does not simplify reality but condenses its essential dynamics into a minimal conceptual unit capable of explaining diverse manifestations of the phenomenon (Sannino, 2011; Engeström; Sannino, 2010).

In CHAT, this theoretical abstraction takes the form of a germ cell: a simple yet internally contradictory conceptual relation that expresses the core dynamic of the object under investigation. The germ cell is not an empirical starting point nor a representation of the phenomenon as it appears in practice. Rather, it is a theoretical construct that enables the reconstruction of the object in thought and action, serving as the basis for the development of new concepts and practices. The germ cell is productive precisely because it is contradictory, allowing for the generation of multiple concrete forms as it is developed and transformed (Sannino, 2011; Sannino; Engeström, 2017).

The movement of ascending from the abstract to the concrete unfolds as a dialectical process in which the germ cell is progressively elaborated through analysis, experimentation, and modeling. In this process, the abstract does not disappear but is enriched and specified through its realization in concrete activity. The concrete that emerges at the end of this movement is therefore not a return to the initial empirical situation, but a historically new and conceptually mediated form of practice that integrates multiple determinations and

perspectives. This transformed concrete represents an expanded object of activity, shaped by theoretical understanding and collective agency (Engeström; Sannino, 2010; Sannino, 2011).

Importantly, Sannino and Engeström emphasize that this principle is inherently interventionist and cannot be reduced to a purely analytical procedure. The construction and development of theoretical abstractions require engagement with real contradictions in practice and are made possible through deliberate intervention. In this sense, the principle of ascending from the abstract to the concrete is intrinsically linked to formative interventions, in which participants collectively analyze their activity, identify its underlying contradictions, and construct new conceptual models that guide transformative action (Sannino, 2011; Sannino; Engeström, 2017).

Within the CL methodology, this principle operates in close articulation with the principle of double stimulation. While double stimulation supports participants' agency by enabling them to gain control over problematic situations through the use of mediating artifacts, the principle of ascending from the abstract to the concrete provides the logic for developing theoretical understanding and transforming the object of activity. Together, these principles underpin the expansive learning process, orienting it toward the collective production of new concepts and the qualitative transformation of practice rather than the adaptation to existing conditions (Engeström; Sannino, 2010; Sannino; Engeström, 2017).

3.2.4 Contradictions

The concept of contradictions holds a central place in CHAT, not as mere inconsistencies or interpersonal tensions, but as historically rooted structural tensions that drive change and development within activity systems. Drawing on Marx's analysis of labor, exchange, and alienation — as cited in Engeström (2015) — contradictions are understood as systemic features of social practices shaped by broader economic and political structures. For example, Marx observed that in capitalist societies, individuals become socially connected not through direct human relations, but through the impersonal mediation of exchange value. In this process, human activity and its products are transformed into commodities, and the social bond between people becomes a relation between things. This inversion leads to alienation: personal capacities are reduced to market value, and individuals become subordinated to structures that appear objective and external, though socially constructed. According to Engeström (2015), these forms of contradiction are not only relevant for economic analysis

but also for understanding how contradictions manifest within everyday work and learning practices.

These contradictions, however, are not directly observable or reducible to surface-level problems. As Engeström and Sannino (2011) emphasize, contradictions are not the same as interpersonal conflicts or minor disturbances; rather, they are historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems, serving as the motive force of transformation in AT. Their presence may become evident and shall be approached through their discursive manifestations — such as dilemmas, conflicts, critical conflicts, and double binds — which offer windows into the deeper systemic tensions shaping collective activity.

Engeström (1987, 2015) proposed a layered model to conceptualize how contradictions emerge within activity systems. Primary contradictions are internal to each component of the system and often express fundamental tensions, such as the clash between use value and exchange value — for example, when an educational tool is valued more for its market appeal than for its pedagogical function. Secondary contradictions arise between components of the system — such as between new tools and outdated rules, or between the object of the activity and the division of labor — when the development of different elements occurs unevenly. Tertiary contradictions appear when a culturally more advanced form of the activity is introduced, challenging the existing dominant form — as when a new pedagogical approach is implemented in a setting still governed by traditional teaching models. Lastly, quaternary contradictions occur between the central activity and its neighboring activity systems — such as conflicts between an educational program and administrative regulations, or between pedagogical goals and the technological infrastructure available. Recognizing and working through these different layers of contradiction is essential to triggering expansive learning and initiating systemic change.

The significance of identifying and engaging with contradictions lies in their capacity to reveal both the limitations and the transformative potential of an activity system. Rather than being treated as disruptions to be eliminated, contradictions should be seen as analytical entry points to understand the structural configuration of an activity and its developmental possibilities. As Virtaluoto, Sannino, and Engeström (2016) demonstrate in their empirical study on outsourced technical communication work, contradictions — especially in the form of double binds — can mobilize participants to articulate the invisible tensions in their work and collectively envision new models of practice. In this sense, the surfacing of contradictions plays a formative role in expansive learning processes, fostering agency and enabling

participants to move beyond adaptive responses toward transformative actions. Thus, understanding contradictions does not merely serve an explanatory function within CHAT but operates as a practical method for initiating and supporting change from within the activity itself.

Building on this understanding of contradictions as both analytical and transformative forces, the core principles discussed in this section — the ZDP, double stimulation, the principle of ascending from the abstract to the concrete, and the concept of contradictions — articulate a coherent theoretical framework for understanding learning and development as historically situated, mediated, and transformative processes. These principles do not operate in isolation; rather, they are deeply interconnected and mutually reinforcing. The ZPD foregrounds the orientation toward future possibilities, double stimulation explicates the mechanisms through which agency and mediation are mobilized, ascending from the abstract to the concrete provides the epistemological logic of concept formation and transformation, and contradictions function as the driving force of change within and across activity systems. Together, they establish the conceptual foundations for interventionist approaches rooted in CHAT, in which learning is generated through collective analysis and the deliberate transformation of practice. Building on this integrated theoretical framework, the following section introduces the CL as a methodological instantiation of these principles, showing how they are operationalized in formative interventions aimed at expansive learning and systemic change.

3.3 The Change Laboratory

Within this interventionist theoretical framework, the CL constitutes a methodological approach designed to operationalize the core principles of CHAT in concrete formative interventions. CHAT has a long-standing interventionist tradition, grounded in the understanding that theory is not only a tool for explaining social reality but also a means for transforming practices (Sannino, 2011). As Sannino argues, CHAT is inherently activist, conceiving development as something that must be generated in practice rather than observed from a distance. It is within this epistemological orientation that the CL was developed, providing a structured framework through which collective analysis, agency, and the transformation of activity can be deliberately fostered.

A central methodological principle underlying this interventionist orientation is Vygotsky's concept of double stimulation, discussed in the previous subsection. Double

stimulation provides the epistemological foundation for what Engeström; Sannino (2010) conceptualizes as formative interventions, which stand in contrast to linear, pre-designed experimental approaches. In formative interventions, participants are not treated as implementers of externally defined solutions. Instead, they are confronted with a problematic and contradictory object of activity (first stimulus) and supported through the introduction of conceptual and material tools (second stimulus) that enable them to analyze, re-conceptualize, and transform their own activity (Engeström; Sannino, 2010).

Engeström (2011) condensed the differences between linear and formative interventions into four points. Rather than beginning with predefined contents and objectives established by researchers (1), formative interventions start from practitioners' lived experiences of problematic and contradictory activity objects, whose future form cannot be fully anticipated in advance. Likewise, the intervention process does not follow a linear or prescriptive trajectory (2). Its course and contents are continuously negotiated and shaped through participants' interpretations, tensions, and even resistance, which are treated as productive moments within the process as opposed to design failures. The outcome (3) sought is not a standardized solution transferable as a fixed model, but the emergence of new concepts that operate as locally meaningful frames for designing context-sensitive solutions in other settings. Within this process, agency becomes both a central mechanism and a key outcome, as participants progressively take responsibility for analyzing and transforming their activity. Correspondingly, the role of the researcher (4) is reconfigured: rather than controlling variables, the researcher seeks to provoke, sustain, and support an expansive transformation process that is led and owned by the practitioners themselves.

It was in this context that the CL was developed as an intervention toolkit conceptualized within CHAT. In the mid-1990s, researchers at the Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research (CRADLE) at the University of Helsinki created this new intervention methodology as a response to the need for an interventionist framework capable of supporting developmental work research within organizations (Engeström, 2004). The CL was subsequently consolidated in the literature as a distinct intervention format associated with studies of expansive learning (Engeström; Sannino, 2010). Furthermore, Engeström and Sannino (2016) situate the CL as a specific methodological instantiation of formative intervention within the CHAT tradition.

In practical terms, the CL can be understood as a set of methodological concepts and principles that are collaboratively mobilized by researchers and practitioners to promote either deep or incremental transformations in work activities (Cassandre, 2012). In contrast to

management tools based on general corrective models, in which solutions are typically imposed from the top down or introduced from outside the organization — such as through consultancy practices (Querol; Cassandre; Bulgacov, 2014) — the CL takes into account historical and social conditions, collective development, and the specific needs of each field of work (Cassandre, 2012). From an activity-theoretical perspective, it is the subjects themselves who examine the contradictions inherent in their own activity and elaborate a new model for it, with the support of the interventionist-researcher and the use of locally generated resources (Querol; Cassandre; Bulgacov, 2014). The CL can thus be understood as a means of triggering, supporting, and carrying out expansive learning processes in which activity systems are qualitatively transformed and new potentials for the activity are discovered (Engeström; Sannino, 2016).

At this point, the CL can be understood not merely as a participatory method, but as a concrete operationalization of the core principles of CHAT, in which expansive learning is generated through collective analysis of contradictions and the deliberate transformation of activity systems. According to Virkkunen and Newnham (2013), the intervention through the CL can be organized into three phases, depending on the specific characteristics of each case. The first phase begins with the establishment of a dialogue around the object of intervention with the relevant stakeholders, with the aim of negotiating the intervention process itself (the negotiation phase).

The second phase concerns the intervention process itself, which unfolds through a series of sessions or periodic meetings. During this phase, the identification of tensions and contradictions surrounding the activity also begins. This phase can be further divided into two stages or tasks: first, the collection of data necessary for the further planning of the intervention and for creating a mirror of the activity for the CL participants; and second, the planning and scheduling of the sequence of CL sessions, including follow-up, support, and the further development of the new solutions created (Virkkunen; Newnham, 2013).

According to the authors, the number, duration, and timing of the CL sessions provide the contextual conditions for planning individual sessions. This planning involves preparing tasks that encourage participants to engage in expansive learning actions during each session, as well as preparing the session agendas. Moreover, the purpose of the session sequence is to collaboratively carry out a cycle of expansive learning actions and to advance the activity beyond its current phase (Virkkunen; Newnham, 2013).

Following the completion of the sessions or meetings that constitute the intervention process, and after the collaborative construction of a new model or idea capable of

satisfactorily addressing the problems identified during the collective reflections, the third phase of the CL involves monitoring the implementation of the proposed new model. This phase focuses on reflecting on the process through an evaluation of the proposed expansion of the activity. Such monitoring takes place in the form of follow-up sessions, which may occur periodically and at longer intervals over time. The CL intervention often takes place as a series of six to twelve weekly meetings of a pilot unit of an organization, plus one or two follow-up meetings several months later (Engeström; Sannino, 2010).

However, the specific analytical focus of CL interventions lies in the examination of activity systems, their shared objects, and the contradictions and conflicts manifested in practice (Engeström, 2015). In this sense, the systemic understanding sought in CLs is not limited to identifying isolated problems or proposing immediate solutions, but involves producing an explanatory account of why and how conflicts emerge within and between activity systems.

Guided by the principle of ascending from the abstract to the concrete, CL interventions aim at producing a systemic explanation of conflicts and contradictions as they emerge within and across activity systems. The analytical focus is not on isolated problems or immediate solutions, but on understanding why and how conflicts arise in practice and how they are related to the historical organization of one or multiple activity systems. This form of analysis provides the conceptual basis for subsequent developmental actions oriented toward the transformation of the activity (Engeström, 2015).

Together, double stimulation and the principle of ascending from the abstract to the concrete orient the intervention toward the production of a systemic understanding of contradictions, which serves as the basis for developing concrete, developmental solutions in practice (Engeström, 2015). This movement from explanation to practical transformation is supported by structured discussions that enable multivoiced articulation and confrontation of conflicts among participants occupying different positions within the activity system (Virkkunen; Newnham, 2013). Within the CL, the researcher's role is therefore to facilitate and sustain such multivoiced forms of discussion, rather than to provide ready-made interpretations or solutions.

While the CL was originally developed and implemented in face-to-face organizational settings, its core principles and foundations — formative intervention, double stimulation, multivoiced dialogue, and systemic analysis of activity — are not bound to physical co-presence. In response to the increasing mediation of work and learning by digital technologies, these principles have been adapted to online environments, giving rise to what

has been described as the Online CL. The following subsection examines how the CL methodology has been reconfigured for digitally mediated contexts, highlighting both the continuities with the original model and the specific challenges and possibilities introduced by online interaction.

3.3.1 The online Change Laboratory

As the CL has begun to be mobilized in contexts mediated by digital technologies, researchers have explored how its interventionist logic can be implemented in online environments. These developments have given rise to what has been referred to as the online CL or digital CL, which adapts the original methodology to digitally mediated interaction while preserving its core theoretical and methodological foundations.

According to Spante et al. (2023), the online CL constitutes an interventionist research methodology conducted through digital platforms, oriented toward the identification and collective examination of concrete problems or challenges in practice. This format preserves the fundamental principles of the traditional CL, including double stimulation and the movement from abstract conceptualization toward concrete transformation. In this sense, the central aim of the online CL is to promote participants' expansive learning and to support the development of transformative agency, enabling participants to collaboratively analyze and redesign problematic activities within a shared digital workspace (Spante et al., 2023). In a similar vein, Karanasios et al. (2021) argue that online CLs represent an adaptation of the traditional methodology to digital platforms, maintaining its core principles — particularly double stimulation — while using technological resources to support remote collaboration.

This intervention format thus follows the same general logic and stages as face-to-face CLs, including those described in the Expansive Learning Cycle, while reconfiguring their enactment through online interaction rather than physical co-presence. From a CHAT perspective, however, online CLs should not be equated with other common forms of online research or educational activities. They are not equivalent to focus groups, design projects, or MOOCs, for example, which are typically oriented toward discussing, designing, or transmitting already established knowledge. Instead, as in on-site CLs, knowledge is generated through processes of expansion, involving the creation of new concepts and solutions or creating knowledge that is not yet there (Engeström, 2001; 2015).

Recent contributions have argued that the digital or online CL should not be understood merely as a logistical adaptation of face-to-face interventions to online platforms,

but as a methodological development within the CL tradition itself. Siljebo (2022) characterizes the digital CL as a methodological development rooted in CHAT, responding to the increasing digital mediation of educational and work practices. From this perspective, the digital CL preserves the core principles of formative intervention, while expanding the methodological repertoire available for conducting collaborative, participatory research in digitally mediated environments.

A central implication of this development concerns the reconfiguration of time, space, and interaction in CL interventions. According to Siljebo (2022), digital CLs enable collaborative engagement to cross traditional temporal and spatial boundaries, allowing for both synchronous and asynchronous forms of interaction. This challenges assumptions that CL work must rely exclusively on co-present, time-bound discussions, and opens possibilities for distributed learning actions unfolding over extended periods. At the same time, the author highlights that digital mediation places particular demands on the design of the intervention, especially regarding the use of shared digital surfaces and interactional tools. These elements are not neutral, as they shape participants' possibilities for agency, multivoiced engagement, and joint analysis of activity systems. Consequently, careful attention to how interaction is mediated becomes essential to sustaining the formative and expansive character of CL interventions in online contexts (Siljebo, 2022).

While the digital CL represents a methodological development within the tradition, this development remains reliant upon the adaptability of the CL framework, which allows its core principles to be enacted across different material settings. In this sense, online CLs retain their potential to address systemic issues in practice, even as the conditions of mediation are reconfigured in virtual environments. This reconfiguration does not diminish the intervention's transformative orientation; online CLs can foster participant engagement and collaborative problem-solving in ways comparable to in-person interventions, particularly in contexts where physical meetings are impractical or unfeasible, such as when participants are geographically dispersed or face constraints related to overlapping and demanding work schedules. In addition, Karanasios et al. (2021) highlight that online CLs offer rich possibilities for the documentation and analysis of interaction, given the digital traces generated through online collaboration.

Extending this argument, empirical studies have demonstrated that the core principles of the CL — particularly double stimulation and the development of transformative agency — can be effectively enacted in online environments. Drawing on a research-intervention conducted through synchronous online workshops, Moffitt and Bligh (2021) show how

carefully designed tasks based on the principle of double stimulation can provoke participants to confront problematic conditions in their own activity and to engage in collective, future-oriented change. In this perspective, agency is not understood as compliance with instructional intent, but as the capacity to question, resist, and reconfigure existing practices, even when this involves diverging from the researchers' original plans.

A key contribution of this work lies in highlighting the role of digital artefacts as mediational means in online CL interventions. According to Moffitt and Bligh (2021), constellations of artefacts — such as video materials and shared digital surfaces — can function as first stimuli, second stimuli, and mirror data, supporting participants in articulating conflicts, exposing systemic failures, and envisioning alternatives. Instead of seeking consensus or smooth participation, the intervention legitimized conflictual and antagonistic engagement as a productive force for expansive learning. These findings reinforce the view that online CL interventions, when anchored in double stimulation and supported by appropriate artefacts and interactional tools, are capable of sustaining multivoiced dialogue and enabling transformative agency in digitally mediated contexts.

Despite its potential, the online CL also presents a set of methodological challenges that require careful consideration. As Spante et al. (2023) argue, conducting CL interventions online can make it more difficult to foster a sense of camaraderie, sustain intersubjectivity, and manage misunderstandings among participants. Interaction is mediated by digital technologies, which may limit spontaneity and complicate the use of multiple analytical surfaces and forms of mirror data, particularly when these are closely tied to physical settings. In addition, variations in participants' access to technology, internet connectivity, digital confidence, and competing commitments may affect equitable participation and continuity of engagement. These challenges place increased demands on the researcher-interventionist, whose role in facilitating multivoiced dialogue, sustaining focus, and supporting expansive learning becomes even more critical in digitally mediated settings. Acknowledging these limitations does not diminish the value of the online CL; rather, it underscores the need for deliberate methodological design and reflexive facilitation when formative interventions are conducted at a distance (Spante et al., 2023).

Taken together, the literature discussed here indicates that the online CL constitutes a viable and theoretically grounded form of formative intervention, capable of sustaining core principles of CHAT while responding to the conditions of digitally mediated practice. At the same time, existing studies make clear that its implementation involves specific methodological challenges that demand careful design and reflexive facilitation. Rather than

presenting a stabilized or fully consolidated methodological model, current research portrays the online CL as an emerging and evolving field of practice, characterized by experimentation, adaptation, and ongoing conceptual refinement. In this context, examining how CL principles have been mobilized in different empirical studies becomes essential for understanding both the possibilities and the limitations of online formative interventions. The following section therefore turns to a state-of-the-art review, mapping how the CL and related activity-theoretical approaches have been taken up in graduate research, with particular attention to the intersections and gaps relevant to the present study.

3.4 State of the Art: Virtual Exchange and Cultural-Historical Activity Theory

Having established the theoretical foundations of VE and the interventionist framework of CHAT and the CL, the following section examines how these bodies of literature have been articulated in Brazilian graduate research. This state-of-the-art review aims to identify dominant themes, areas of application, and research gaps, particularly with regard to the intersection between VE and CHAT. To this end, the section analyzes *stricto sensu* theses and dissertations retrieved from the CAPES Sucupira Platform, grouped thematically, based on targeted keyword searches related to both VE and CL. The review, conducted through the analysis of abstracts and respective keywords, encompasses a range of educational and institutional contexts and allows for the identification of areas of application and underexplored issues that help contextualize and substantiate the present study. All searches were limited to works published within the ten-year period preceding the date of the first search (July, 2024), that is, between 2014 and 2024; studies published prior to this period were not considered. The discussion begins with studies on VE and subsequently turns to the literature on the CL.

With regard to VE within the framework of IaH, an initial search was conducted on the CAPES Sucupira Platform on July 12, 2024, using the keywords “virtual exchange,” “COIL,” and “virtual exchange; higher education” in Portuguese. Based on a thematic analysis of the abstracts, 14 *stricto sensu* studies were selected. To update the review and avoid temporal obsolescence, a second search was carried out on January 13, 2026, using the same keywords, which resulted in the identification of two additional relevant studies subsequently incorporated into this review. Overall, while the studies analyzed reveal a diversity of approaches and contexts related to VE, their thematic emphases and research perspectives differ from those of the present study, as do some of the empirical settings,

which, contrary to initial expectations, are not exclusively restricted to higher education, the primary focus of this research.

Chernhak's (2023) study on IaH, for instance, examined how VE can be implemented in basic education to promote internationalization without the need for physical mobility. The study highlighted accessibility as one of the main benefits of VE, enabling a larger number of students to participate in internationalization activities. At the same time, the challenges identified included the need for adequate technological infrastructure and for teacher training to ensure the effective implementation of such initiatives.

In a secondary education context, Izuibejeres (2015) investigated intercomprehension among Romance languages in Spanish classes within a VE carried out between a school in Córdoba, Argentina, and another in Natal, Brazil. The study examined both the advantages and challenges of intercomprehension, emphasizing how this approach can enrich language learning and facilitate intercultural communication. The results also indicated an increase in students' motivation to learn Spanish, while reflections on Argentinian culture contributed to the deconstruction of pre-existing cultural representations. In other educational contexts, Fernandes (2023) situated her study within the constitutional and educational policy frameworks that shape the teaching of Spanish in Brazilian technical secondary education, focusing specifically on schools within the Centro Paula Souza network. Based on this framework, the research proposed the implementation of a VE inspired by the teletandem model as a pedagogical strategy to promote multicultural and multilingual development. Conducted as an action-research project, the study found that participation in the VE significantly contributed to students' sociocultural identity formation and intercultural awareness, reinforcing the role of Spanish as a tool for cultural integration and social engagement.

Moving to higher education contexts, two *stricto sensu* studies broaden perspectives on VE by emphasizing collaborative processes and communicative negotiation in different settings. Reno (2024) examined the contributions of collective mediation practices in a Portuguese–Spanish teletandem model with students from Federal Institutes, highlighting how pre-interaction, interaction, and post-interaction mediation sessions can create reflective spaces and enhance linguistic and cultural development in telecollaborative contexts. Silva (2024), in turn, investigated negotiations of meaning in English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) within the 3 Continents Intercultural Telecollaboration project (3CIT/BRaVE-UNESP), showing how participants mobilize communicative strategies to negotiate and ensure mutual intelligibility in a multilingual and intercultural environment.

Within this broader higher education context, Pereira's (2023) study focused on virtual academic mobility within the framework of COIL, with particular emphasis on hospitality and the experience of synchronous classes. The study suggested that hospitality — understood as the creation of a welcoming and inclusive environment — is crucial to the success of COIL initiatives. Pereira also identified good practices that can be adopted to address common challenges, such as time-zone differences and linguistic barriers. With specific regard to the first synchronous meeting, Rampazzo's (2021) study analyzed discursive genres and politeness in the context of VE. The research highlighted the importance of effective communication and the construction of interpersonal relationships in VE environments, offering a detailed analysis of the linguistic aspects involved.

With regard to linguistic aspects, Zaneratto's (2023) study investigated foreign language communication within the context of the BRaVE-UNESP program, focusing on participants' perspectives. The investigation provided insights into students' experiences in VE programs, highlighting the linguistic and cultural challenges they faced as well as the strategies employed to address them, including intercomprehension and computer-mediated support, particularly through online translation tools and chat functions. Sanchez (2023) examined students' linguistic-communicative preparation for participating in VE in English. The study identified the competencies required and the most effective teaching strategies for preparing students for intercultural communication in virtual contexts.

Succi Junior's (2017) study analyzed two VE initiatives between higher education institutions in Brazil and the United States, focusing on interactions between teachers and students in the context of business management. The study aimed to contribute to English language teaching across different fields by highlighting the importance of discussing and deconstructing cultural stereotypes. Drawing on Multiliteracies and Case Study approaches, the research revealed the presence of stereotypes and preconceived ideas in the exchanges, underscoring the need for pedagogical moments to address these issues.

Freschi's (2023) study examined formative assessment in the context of a teletandem VE program in which Brazilian and international university students learn each other's languages. The study aimed to characterize the formative feedback provided by the teacher through learning journals and mediation sessions. The findings highlighted the central role of the teacher-mediator in the teaching-learning process within telecollaborative contexts, particularly for collaborative learning and linguistic development.

Beyond linguistic issues, other aspects related to VE have also been investigated. The affordances of COIL — understood as the opportunities and possibilities this approach offers

for learning and collaboration among students from different cultural and geographical contexts through online platforms — have been a particular focus of research. Hildeblando Junior's (2019) study analyzed a VE experience between the Federal University of Espírito Santo (UFES) and the Universidad de Alcalá (UAH), examining such affordances. The study highlighted the opportunities provided by COIL to promote IaH, such as expanded access to international experiences and the development of intercultural and linguistic competences. However, it also identified limitations, including the need for robust technological infrastructure and adequate preparation of participants for virtual interactions.

Within the same thematic scope, Có (2021) examined the affordances of COIL in the context of English teacher education through a partnership between UFES and the University of Coventry. The study showed that COIL can serve as an effective tool for teacher education by providing practical teaching experiences in an international context. It further suggested that participation in COIL programs enables prospective English teachers to develop not only linguistic competences but also pedagogical and intercultural skills that are essential for teaching in globalized environments.

Additionally, Canto's (2021) study evaluated an online collaborative experience between the Federal University of Technology – Paraná (UTFPR) and the Polytechnic Institute of Bragança (IPB). The study highlighted the importance of collaboration between institutions from different countries in enriching students' educational experiences. The best practices identified included curricular integration, the use of interactive technologies, and continuous support for participants. The study also indicated that online collaborative learning can foster the development of students' intercultural and technological skills. From a different perspective on VE and its various modalities, Barbosa's (2020) study investigated how WhatsApp can be used to foster learning communities within the context of VE. The study demonstrated the potential of mobile technologies to facilitate communication and collaboration among VE participants, emphasizing the development of a sense of community.

Lopes (2023) investigated, designed, and analyzed pedagogical activities that mobilized the experiential repertoires of students enrolled in technological higher education at a public institution in the state of São Paulo within an English-medium VE program anchored in Engaged Multiliteracies. The pedagogical proposal fostered student engagement and social transformation by valuing participants' experiential resources. The findings suggested alternative pathways for internationalization through a critical and creative orientation to language practices aligned with students' experiential repertoires.

The *stricto sensu* studies reviewed on VE highlight its potential to promote internationalization across different educational levels, extending beyond higher education by offering more accessible and inclusive alternatives to traditional academic mobility programs. Overall, the studies analyzed indicate that the effective implementation of VE initiatives depends on specific institutional and pedagogical conditions, such as adequate technological infrastructure, teacher education, and the creation of welcoming environments for participants. In addition, online collaborative learning and the affordances of COIL emerge as central dimensions in these investigations, contributing to the development of linguistic, intercultural, pedagogical, and technological competences, while simultaneously expanding opportunities for internationalization to more diverse audiences.

With regard to the CL, the survey of *stricto sensu* studies indicated the consolidation of this interventionist methodology across different areas, including public and collective health, education, organizational settings, and community contexts. The search was conducted on the CAPES Sucupira Platform on July 12, 2024, using the keywords “change laboratory” and “change laboratory; virtual exchange,” and included exclusively studies that explicitly adopted the CL as a methodological approach. In order to update the mapping and incorporate more recent publications, a second search was carried out on January 13, 2026, using the keyword “change laboratory,” which resulted in the inclusion of two additional *stricto sensu* studies, bringing the total number of analyzed works to 17. Across both searches, no studies were identified using the combinations “change laboratory; higher education,” “change laboratory; virtual exchange,” “online change laboratory,” or those associating CL with CHAT and VE.

In the context of public and collective health, the studies by Hurtado (2020) and Vendrameto (2019) employed the CL as both a theoretical and methodological foundation to address interventions in occupational health and rehabilitation. Hurtado (2020) focused on the analysis and prevention of workplace accidents, proposing a model centered on expansive learning that incorporates systemic dimensions and transformative agency. Vendrameto (2019), in turn, investigated professional rehabilitation within the Brazilian National Social Security Institute (INSS), identifying historical and systemic contradictions in the process and proposing a reconfiguration of the system aimed at improving the social inclusion of rehabilitated workers. Both studies emphasized the need to integrate approaches that go beyond individual actions by considering mediating elements such as rules, community, and the division of labor in order to achieve effective and sustainable transformation in contexts related to workers’ health and professional rehabilitation.

More recently, two *stricto sensu* studies expanded the application of the CL in the field of public health, with a focus on workers' health in public security institutions. Zanolli (2024) employed the CL as a formative methodology to investigate mental distress in police work, emphasizing the creation of collective spaces for expansive learning oriented toward reflection on psychological distress, working conditions, and police officers' agency. Schuler (2024), in turn, applied the CL within the Military Police of Santa Catarina, focusing on mapping and addressing historical contradictions in police activity and their manifestations in work settings, thereby fostering the collective elaboration of proposals for transforming the activity. In both studies, the intervention relied on procedures such as observations, interviews, ethnographic research, and CL sessions guided by the expansive learning cycle, reinforcing the potential of this methodology to promote processes of critical reflection and transformative agency in complex organizational contexts sensitive to workers' health.

The studies by Morgado (2018, 2023) addressed the challenges of public policies aimed at the reintegration of adolescents in conflict with the law in Brazil, focusing on the development and implementation of socio-educational practices within Fundação CASA. In 2018, Morgado analyzed the historical trajectory of custodial institutions and the contradictions within the activity system that hinder the effectiveness of socio-educational projects. Drawing on ethnographic data and concepts from CHAT, the study revealed a transition from disciplinary practices toward a socio-educational model, although containment practices continued to generate disturbances. In 2023, Morgado deepened the investigation by applying the CL to foster expansive learning and reconfigure the activity system in a service center of Fundação CASA. The study validated the contradiction between containment instruments and socio-education and demonstrated the emergence of a new shared activity model. Taken together, both studies indicate that formative intervention is effective in promoting health, safety, and transformation in the workplace, while also suggesting the dissemination of the results to other Fundação CASA centers and highlighting the need to foster learning and transformative agency among managers and workers.

Still focusing on socio-educational measures, Borbarelli (2023) investigated the practices of the Juvenile Justice Prosecutor's Offices of the Public Prosecutor's Office in São Paulo and Campinas in the implementation of socio-educational measures, using the CL method. The qualitative study identified primary and secondary contradictions within the activities of the Public Prosecutor's Office. The intervention promoted transformations in work practices and the formulation of new concepts aimed at improving public policies,

highlighting the need for institutional engagement by the Public Prosecutor's Office to address structural problems.

The studies by Avellar (2017), Betty (2023), and Oliveira (2020) applied the CL method in Brazilian educational contexts. Avellar (2017) used the CL to diagnose and implement changes in a public school, reframing the initial focus on sickness-related absenteeism to address teacher burnout and work-life balance. As a result, the Specialized Services in Occupational Health and Safety (Serviço Especializado em Engenharia de Segurança e em Medicina do Trabalho - SESMT) acquired new knowledge regarding teachers' health and proposed improvements in the organization of school work. Betty (2023) examined transformations in the teaching activity system during the COVID-19 pandemic, identifying the strengthening of collective work networks alongside challenges related to work overload and emergency remote teaching.

Oliveira (2020), in turn, analyzed language teachers' routine actions during planning periods, demonstrating the potential of intervention workshops to promote collective change and expansive learning, thereby optimizing the use of planning time and teachers' professional development, with positive impacts on teaching quality. Overall, these three studies illustrate how the CL can address complex issues in education by fostering critical reflection and the transformation of teaching practices. Along similar lines, Cardoso (2023) analyzed the CL as a tool for the professional development of teachers in an integrated upper secondary education program. The study highlighted how this methodology can contribute to teachers' continuing education by promoting meaningful changes in their pedagogical practices.

The studies by Francisco Junior (2018), Paniza (2016), Donatelli (2019), and Bobadilha (2020) applied the CL method in different community contexts. Francisco Junior (2018) evaluated the CL as a developmental instrument among farmers from the Morretes Agroforestry and Ecological Association (Associação Morretes Agroflorestral Ecológica - AMAE) in the state of Paraná, finding that the intervention enabled participants to expand their freedoms and opportunities for action, although the full realization of development depended on the consolidation of the newly proposed activities. Paniza (2016) investigated the application of the CL in a public teaching hospital to improve waste management, revealing that workers, through the expansive learning cycle, proposed a new management model which, despite facing resistance, promoted greater awareness of the responsibilities involved in waste handling.

Donatelli (2019) employed the CL to examine collective expansive learning within the semi-jewelry and costume jewelry production chain in Limeira (Brazil), with the aim of eradicating child and adolescent labor. The intervention increased the level of transformative agency among participants of the Municipal Commission for the Eradication of Child and Adolescent Labor (Comissão Municipal da Erradicação do Trabalho Infantil - COMETIL), fostering new collaborative actions between public and private institutions. In a different context, Bobadilha (2020) applied the CL among street sweepers in the interior of the state of São Paulo, focusing on the promotion of transformative agency and the public visibility of workers. The intervention resulted in innovations in sweeping activities and in the production of a documentary aimed at giving voice to the workers.

Still within organizational and societal contexts, Lopes (2016) analyzed workplace accidents during the construction of an airport using a systemic approach and the CL. The study revealed that the accidents resulted from multiple failures related to project management, logistics, and outsourcing. The CL contributed to identifying latent causes of the accidents and to developing preventive solutions, facilitating the emergence of agency among workers and the envisioning of solutions for future construction projects.

From a communicative perspective, Rahme (2020) investigated the role of appreciative communication in leadership practices within the company FESTVAL, drawing on concepts from Positive Psychology. The study demonstrated that the adoption of a development-oriented communication approach, when effectively enacted by leaders, can significantly improve professional performance. In the case of FESTVAL, this practice fostered relationships based on trust and value, optimizing the performance of both teams and the organizational network as a whole.

The *stricto sensu* study by Pontes (2022) was not retrieved in the searches conducted in the CAPES theses and dissertations database (Sucupira Platform), as the CL does not appear in the title, abstract, or keywords. Nevertheless, its inclusion is both necessary and relevant to the present study, given that it employs the online CL as an interventionist methodology. In this research, Pontes (2022) investigated learning processes within Social Movements (Movimentos Sociais - SM) in the field of Administration, focusing on the Collective of Women Researchers in Administration (Coletiva de Mulheres Pesquisadoras em Administração - COMPA), with the aim of understanding how SM organizations learn to structure themselves and operate. To this end, the researcher implemented an online CL conducted over six sessions. The study identified nine essential elements for COMPA's learning process, and the thematic analysis of the data demonstrated that these elements are

fundamental to organizational learning in SM, highlighting the importance of recognizing SM as legitimate organizations within Organizational Studies and proposing new perspectives for horizontal organizational structuring.

The studies reviewed to date demonstrate the versatility and effectiveness of the CL across different contexts, encompassing public and collective health, education, organizational management, and community development, including highly complex public institutions. Overall, the research indicates that the implementation of this methodology requires an in-depth understanding of specific contexts and participants' needs, while offering significant potential to foster processes of critical reflection, transformative agency, and organizational and professional change, with positive impacts on workers' health and well-being as well as on the sustainable development of communities.

Considering the body of studies reviewed throughout this state-of-the-art review, it can be observed that both VE and the CL exhibit transformative potential across different educational, organizational, and social contexts. However, despite the relevant contributions of these approaches, investigations that articulate them in an integrated manner remain scarce, particularly in the context of Brazilian public higher education. The absence of studies combining VE and the CL as a methodological strategy aimed at strengthening IaH reveals a gap that this study seeks to address. By proposing an approach that intertwines theory and practice within a collaborative, formative, and locally situated process, the present research contributes to the consolidation of more sustainable, inclusive, and contextualized pathways for the internationalization of higher education.

Taken together, the discussions developed in this chapter establish the theoretical and interventionist foundations that inform the research design of the present study. By articulating CHAT, the CL methodology, its adaptation to online contexts, and a state-of-the-art review at the intersection of VE and CHAT, the chapter clarifies both the conceptual lenses and the methodological orientation underpinning the investigation. These foundations provide the basis for understanding the research as a formative, collaborative, and historically grounded inquiry into practice. Building on this framework, the following chapter details the methodological design of the study, describing how these principles were operationalized in the empirical intervention.

4 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological path undertaken in this study. We begin by addressing the nature of the research, along with its ontological and epistemological underpinnings, and its methodological classification. Next, we describe the institutional context, with particular attention to the aspects related to the internationalization process at the university. The following section introduces the participants and explains the criteria used for their selection. We then detail the data generation procedures and the instruments employed, followed by an explanation of the analytical framework adopted. Finally, we conclude the chapter by outlining the ethical considerations that informed the study, in accordance with qualitative research principles and institutional research guidelines.

4.1 Research Design

In order to construct a locally situated understanding of VE, a qualitative research approach was adopted. As Creswell (2007) explains, qualitative research allows for the application of a theoretical lens and involves an interpretive and inductive process through which the researcher explores the research problem. Data are collected in the natural settings of participants, where meanings are deeply connected to people and context. This approach values participants' voices, the researcher's critical reflection, and the nuanced description and interpretation of the phenomenon under investigation. In the case of this study, the collaborative construction of knowledge about VE was considered essential, as it required listening to and interpreting the multiple voices and perspectives of those directly involved in shaping and experiencing VE at the institution.

The ontological foundation of this research is anchored in historical-dialectical materialism, which aligns with the philosophical assumptions of CHAT. Ontology refers to the researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality — in this case, reality is understood as socially constructed, dynamic, and historically situated. Rather than being fixed or independent of human perception, reality is seen as shaped by human activity, mediated by tools, culture, and social relations. From this perspective, the world is constantly in transformation, and human beings are active agents in its development. The contradictions inherent in human activity are not only acknowledged but embraced as essential drivers of change (Engeström, 2001). In line with this view, historical-dialectical materialism research aims to uncover the movement of transformation present in contradictions, recognizing them

as a fundamental means for understanding reality. It also seeks to reveal the mediations that exist within social activities and relationships, as well as the meanings constructed through these processes (Cassandre; Godoi, 2013). Such ontological stance also implies that the researcher is not external to the reality under study, but rather embedded within the social activity, contributing to and being shaped by it.

The epistemological orientation of this study is informed by interventionist epistemology, a perspective closely associated with CHAT and the CL methodology. In this approach, the researcher assumes an interventionist role, participating actively in the research process alongside participants to analyze, question, and transform the activity under investigation. This epistemological stance recognizes knowledge as something that is not merely discovered, but co-constructed through mediated social interaction and collective reflection. In line with this view, interpretivism is understood as aiming to grasp the actual production of meaning from multiple perspectives, different interpretations, and the various concepts used by social actors in the settings where they interact — acknowledging that social reality is concrete and emerges from both individual and shared experience (Cassandre; Godoi, 2013).

Building upon this orientation, a formative intervention is not simply a methodological choice — it becomes the very means through which transformation is pursued and analyzed. As Sannino and Engeström (2018) explain, research based on activity theory is not limited to describing existing practices; rather, it prioritizes transformative and generative processes. Formative interventions aim to go beyond the current state of affairs and support the collective construction of new, emancipatory forms of activity. In this sense, the research is not conducted on participants but with them, as they take an active role in identifying systemic contradictions and envisioning alternative possibilities collaboratively. In this line, Engeström (2001) highlights that the knowledge produced in CHAT research derives from cycles of dialogical engagement, contradiction analysis, and collaborative modeling of future-oriented solutions. In this view, the research process itself becomes a space of learning and development — for both the participants and the researcher.

Within this framework, the CL serves as a concrete and systematic method of formative intervention. As previously mentioned, it is designed to create conditions that encourage participants to engage in expansive learning actions and, ideally, to move through a complete cycle of expansive learning. According to Sannino and Engeström (2018), this process involves specific methodological steps that, while flexible and context-sensitive, are not merely improvised. The CL follows a structured yet dialogical sequence, typically

involving the presentation of mirror data, the identification of contradictions, the envisioning of new models, and the collaborative examination and potential implementation of changes. In this study, the CL methodology was employed to support a collective and reflective process aimed at analyzing and reconfiguring VE practices in a Brazilian public university, guided by the theoretical and practical principles of CHAT. The researcher's role was to facilitate and support the process by introducing theoretical and methodological tools, while remaining responsive to the emergent dynamics and meanings collaboratively constructed by the participants.

4.2 Context

This study was carried out at the State University of Maringá (Universidade Estadual de Maringá – UEM), a public university located in the state of Paraná, southern Brazil, maintained by the government of the state. As a state university, UEM offers tuition-free undergraduate education, as guaranteed by Brazilian law and reaffirmed in national education policy³. Like other public universities in the country, UEM is committed to the triad mission of teaching, research, and outreach, serving both academic and social development objectives. It operates under a democratic governance structure, in which major decisions are discussed and approved by deliberative bodies such as the University Council (Conselho Universitário - COU), the Administrative Council (Conselho Administrativo - CAD), and other academic and administrative committees⁴. These decisions are implemented through the Rectorate's Office and several Offices responsible for specific areas such as undergraduate and graduate studies, research, and outreach. The university is present across 109 municipalities through seven campuses, with its main campus based in the city of Maringá. The institution offers 70 undergraduate programs (including both teaching and bachelor's degrees) and over 120 graduate programs, which encompass specializations, master's degrees, and doctoral programs⁵.

One of the key structures supporting UEM's internationalization efforts is the International Cooperation Office (Escritório de Cooperação Internacional – ECI), originally established by Ordinance No. 2553/1997 – GRE⁶. With the mission of fostering internationalization opportunities across teaching, research, and outreach, exclusively for the

³ [Cobrança de Taxas — Ministério da Educação](#). Accessed on 05/11/25.

⁴ scs@uem. Accessed on 05/11/2025.

⁵ [Graduate Programs](#). Accessed on 08/09/2025.

⁶ <http://www.eci.uem.br/resolucoes>. Accessed on 06/05/2022.

university academic community⁷, the Office is tasked with developing and coordinating international partnerships and exchange programs, establishing relationships with international organizations, and serving as a liaison between the university's academic departments and foreign institutions. In addition, ECI is responsible for managing and facilitating both inbound and outbound student mobility, as well as promoting campus internationalization through the development of institutional policies, diagnostic assessments, and support for various initiatives. These include actions related to language policies and broader efforts to integrate internationalization into the university's academic environment.

Another relevant aspect to be highlighted is that the ECI itself took part in a formative intervention through a CL carried out between late 2019 and 2020. A total of 32 CL workshops and 3 follow-up sessions were conducted. As a result, the office's structure was collaboratively redesigned, leading to improved organization and optimization of internal routines, and serving as a foundation for the sector's strategic planning (Cassandre; Rego; Silva, 2024). One of the key outcomes of this process was the creation of a dedicated IaH Board, established to foster and support local internationalization demands within the university. Recent and novel VE initiatives have encompassed the strategies of the office to internationalize at home by taking part in international VE networks, publishing VE opportunities, and supporting faculty staff in developing such activities. Such initiatives resulted in the university being awarded the BRaVE Seal (Brazilian Virtual Exchange Program) by the Brazilian Association for International Education (Associação Brasileira de Educação Internacional - FAUBAI) in recognition of its commitment to promoting and implementing VE⁸.

Amongst this context, the Office administrative and structural changes were recognized and officialized in 2023, by the Resolution No. 021/2023 – COU⁹, which also formalized its role as a unit connected to the Rectorate's Office, reinforcing its institutional status and strategic importance.

Still within the broader context of the university's internationalization efforts, the institution was invited to take part in the Internationalization Laboratory (IntLab) of the American Council on Education (ACE) from 2019 to 2021, with financial support from CAPES and the Fulbright Commission Brazil. One of the main goals of the ACE within this program was to support the development of the university's internationalization plan and help

⁷ <http://www.eci.uem.br/administracao-2>. Accessed on 06/05/2022.

⁸ [UEM conquista selo de intercâmbio virtual do Programa FAUBAI-BRaVE](#). Accessed on 25/07/2025.

⁹ [Resolução 021/2023-COU](#). Accessed on 08/09/2025.

the institution achieve its international strategic objectives¹⁰. More comprehensive information and reflections on the IntLab experience at UEM can be found in the chapter *"The Internationalization Laboratory at the State University of Maringá (UEM-IntLab): a participatory process for comprehensive internationalization in higher education"* by Schiavi et al. (2024).

4.3 Research Participants and their roles

The participants in this study included four faculty members from the institution who were involved in VE initiatives, a student, and key stakeholders at the University, such as the coordinator and the director of the ECI, as well as a faculty member engaged in internationalization committees on campus at the time of the CL intervention. A student observer was also present in all sessions. He was a doctoral student conducting research on the CL methodology and other interventionist approaches. His role was limited to observation only, without actively participating in the discussions or influencing the process. Notably, three participants had dual roles, serving both as faculty members who developed VE initiatives and as stakeholders at the ECI, allowing them to share insights from multiple perspectives. Additionally, two external participants were invited, whose academic and professional trajectories also involve the internationalization process. In total, ten participants were involved in the CL sessions, including the interventionist. Table 2 below summarizes the participants (with their fictitious names) and their roles.

¹⁰ [ACE Internationalization Laboratory](#). Accessed on 08/05/2022.

Table 2 – Overview of participants, including the fictitious names used for confidentiality and the institutional roles they held during the CL intervention

Participants (fictitious names)	Role
Daniel	External participant
Gabriel	External participant
Rafael	Faculty and managerial
Ana	Faculty and managerial
Marcelo	Faculty and managerial
André	Managerial
Lucas	Managerial
Bruno	Faculty
Mari	Student
Not mentioned during analysis	Student observer

Source: Author (2025)

The participants invited for the CL intervention align with those described in Virkkunen and Newnham's (2013) framework, particularly in terms of being directly involved in the activities or affected by the contradictions being discussed. A key group of participants was from the ECI, individuals who are well-positioned to pass suggestions forward to the internationalization committee, as they are involved in both the office and the committee. However, it is important to highlight that at state institutions in Brazil, decision-making is decentralized and democratic. Unlike in some other organizational contexts, where a small group or a single person may have the authority to legislate for the entire organization, suggestions from various stakeholders at the institutional level are discussed, elaborated, and voted on by specific committees (such as the internationalization one) and broader institutional councils. This requires the involvement of participants who, while not sole decision-makers, are integral to the process of transmitting ideas to those committees.

In light of Virkkunen and Newnham's model, this structure reflects the complexity of decision-making in state institutions. Although the participants may not directly embody the traditional decision-making roles emphasized in the CL framework, their proximity to decision-making bodies like the internationalization committee ensures that the intervention could still influence institutional change through collective processes.

4.4 Data Generation Procedures

To prepare for the CL sessions, several preparatory steps were undertaken. Two exploratory conversations were conducted with former ECI coordinators, one via Google Meet and the other via WhatsApp. Rather than following a structured interview protocol, these exchanges were guided by a short set of open questions designed to trace the main internationalization initiatives carried out during each management period, to identify whether the term IaH was already in use, and to verify whether discussions or records of VE or COIL activities were present at the time. The purpose of these conversations was not to produce exhaustive narratives but to gather contextual data to complement other sources. Additionally, field notes were gathered by the researcher, who was actively involved in the IaH department at ECI and played a key role in fostering the first VE initiatives on campus. These preparatory activities were instrumental in shaping the CL sessions and constructing the Historical Timeline.

Eleven online sessions of the CL were conducted between September (2023) and April (2024), each lasting one hour. The decision to conduct the CL sessions online was influenced by several factors related to the study's participants. Given the geographically dispersed nature of the group, which included faculty members from different UEM campuses and external stakeholders, an online format was essential to facilitate participation. Moreover, the participants were busy professionals with demanding schedules, making it challenging to coordinate in-person meetings.

To facilitate the online CL sessions, a range of technological tools and platforms was employed to ensure smooth communication, collaboration, and documentation throughout the process. Google Meet was used as the primary video conferencing software for live sessions, allowing participants to connect from various locations. Google Drive served as a central storage hub, housing all session materials and resources. Presentations were created using Google Slides, while Google Docs was instrumental in session planning, capturing session minutes, and taking live notes that could be updated in real-time with participants' feedback. For video summaries of sessions, Canva was utilized to record and edit videos, while CapCut was used to create narrated video recaps. Mentimeter was employed in two sessions to generate keywords and capture key themes, while Jamboard acted as a digital sticky note tool, enabling participants to collaboratively express their impressions of the institution's internationalization (at home) efforts. Post-session, meeting minutes were shared via email, containing the session summary, relevant images (such as those from Jamboard), and links to upcoming sessions, which were also added to participants' calendars. Each session began with

an agenda displayed on the second slide of the presentation to keep participants aligned on the day's objectives.

Data collection during the CL sessions was carried out using a combination of recording and documentation methods to capture all relevant information and participant contributions. All sessions were recorded using Google Meet's built-in recording feature, which served as a resource for later analysis. In addition, field notes were taken by the researcher, capturing key observations, contextual details, and participant interactions that might not be fully evident in recordings. Also, sessions were transcribed using the *Notta* platform to support the analysis process accuracy and allowing for a more detailed examination of participants' contributions. The Table below summarizes the tools and platforms used throughout the online CL sessions.

Table 3 – Technological tools and resources used in the online CL sessions

Tool/Platform	Main Activities
Google Meet	Primary platform for live video conferencing and session recordings; Interaction with former ECI coordinator.
Google Drive	Centralized storage for session materials, resources, and collaborative documents.
Google Slides	Used to create and present agendas and session content in real time.
Google Docs	Enabled collaborative session planning, live note-taking, and shared session minutes.
Canva	Used to record and edit short video summaries of sessions.
CapCut	Used to produce narrated video recaps for participant review.
Mentimeter	Interactive tool used to collect keywords and highlight emergent themes in two sessions.
Jamboard	Digital whiteboard for collaborative note-taking and visual expression of impressions and ideas.
Email	Distributed session summaries, visual materials, and links to upcoming sessions.
Calendar invites	Used to ensure participants had access to session links and reminders.
WhatsApp	Used for and post discussions, planning, and organizing the sessions; used for interaction with a former ECI coordinator.
Notta	Transcription of session recordings to support detailed analysis of participants' contributions.

Source: Author (2025)

Throughout the planning and implementation of the CL sessions, support was provided by an experienced CL practitioner, which contributed to the adherence to the

methodology. Before each session, short meetings were held to establish a checklist of necessary resources, align expectations, and discuss the intended goals and key elements to be observed. These preparatory moments contributed to ensuring that each session was purposefully structured and contextually situated. Communication also took place through a dedicated WhatsApp group created with the advisers, which was used throughout the process to exchange information, share reflections, and coordinate pre- and post-session decisions. Likewise, following each session, the researcher engaged in debriefing discussions with both advisers to reflect on the dynamics and outcomes, identify emerging themes or tensions, and plan adjustments for subsequent meetings.

The workshops were structured around the Expansive Learning Cycle (Figure 5), with each session targeting specific actions within the expansive learning process, such as questioning, analyzing contradictions, and developing models for new practices. In practical terms, the sessions titled *Onboarding* and *First Things First* were dedicated to the questioning phase, where participants began to surface underlying tensions and raise initial questions about their VE practices. The subsequent sessions—*Perspectives Part 1*, *Perspectives Part 2*, *Perspectives Part 3*, along with *Confirmation and Assurance Part 1* and *Confirmation and Assurance Part 2* — focused on the analysis of contradictions, guiding participants through a deeper examination of the systemic issues affecting VE implementation. Finally, the sessions *And Now? Part 1*, *And Now? Part 2*, *And Now? Part 3*, and *Last but Not Least* represented the modeling phase, in which participants were confronted with the contradictions that emerged and collaboratively proposed possible solutions (or models) to address them. This structured approach allowed the group to gradually address challenges and propose solutions, aligned with the cycle's stages.

Table 4 below summarizes all the sessions, their main focus and corresponding phase in the Expansive Learning Cycle.

Table 4 – Summary of CL sessions in relation to the Expansive Learning Cycle

Change Lab Sessions	Main Focus	Related Phase of Expansive Learning Cycle
Onboarding	Presentation of the study, ethical procedures, and collective agreements.	Questioning phase
First things first	Introduction to the Expansive Learning Cycle and initial questioning of current VE practices through presentation of historical analysis	Questioning phase
Perspectives part 1	Managerial and faculty perspectives on the current state of VE and institutional internationalization.	Analysis and identification of contradictions
Perspectives part 2	Managerial and faculty perspectives and related pedagogical, linguistic, and operational challenges.	Analysis and identification of contradictions
Perspectives part 3	Student perspectives and identification of tensions across micro and macro levels.	Analysis and identification of contradictions
Confirmation and Assurance Part 1	Validation and refinement of managerial, faculty, and student perspectives.	Analysis and identification of contradictions
Confirmation and Assurance Part 2	Validation and refinement of managerial, faculty, and student perspectives.	Analysis and identification of contradictions
And Now? Part 1	Reflection on contradictions and modeling potential alternatives.	Modeling phase
And Now? Part 2	Reflection on contradictions and modeling potential alternatives.	Modeling phase
And Now? Part 3	Reflection on contradictions and modeling potential alternatives.	Modeling phase
Last But Not Least	Review of the overall CL process, consolidation of themes, and reflection on future directions	Modeling phase

Source: Author (2025)

To conclude this section, the following table provides a summary of the data generation methods employed in this study. It brings together the various sources and procedures previously described, highlighting their specific contributions to the research process and their role in supporting the objectives of the formative intervention.

Table 5 – Data Generation Methods

Procedure	Description	Purpose in the Study
Ethnographic Account	Researcher's reflective narrative based on active involvement in IaH and VE initiatives at the institution and observation of its ongoing initiatives.	To contextualize how the study emerged, how it was designed, and to describe the VE landscape at the moment the CL was launched.
Pre CL Interviews	Conducted with two former coordinators of the International Cooperation Office (ECI).	To reconstruct the historical development of internationalization, especially IaH and VE.
Field Notes	- Observations recorded as part of the ECI team and IaH Board; - Observations and reflections recorded before, during, and after the CL sessions, including informal conversations.	- To understand the context in which VE started; - To capture dynamics, interactions, and insights not fully reflected in recordings; to support interpretation and session planning
Change Lab Sessions	A series of structured, online, collaborative sessions involving key stakeholders.	To identify contradictions, analyze the activity system, and co-construct future directions for VE.

Source: Author (2025)

4.5 Data Analysis (post-intervention analytical phase)

After the conclusion of the CL sessions, a post-intervention analytical phase was carried out, aimed at systematically returning to the data produced throughout the intervention. This analytical phase was temporally distinct from the conduction of the CL and was carried out after an interval during which the researcher was engaged in other academic activities related to the doctoral program. The return to the data occurred at a later stage and involved a systematic and structured analytical engagement with the material generated during the intervention.

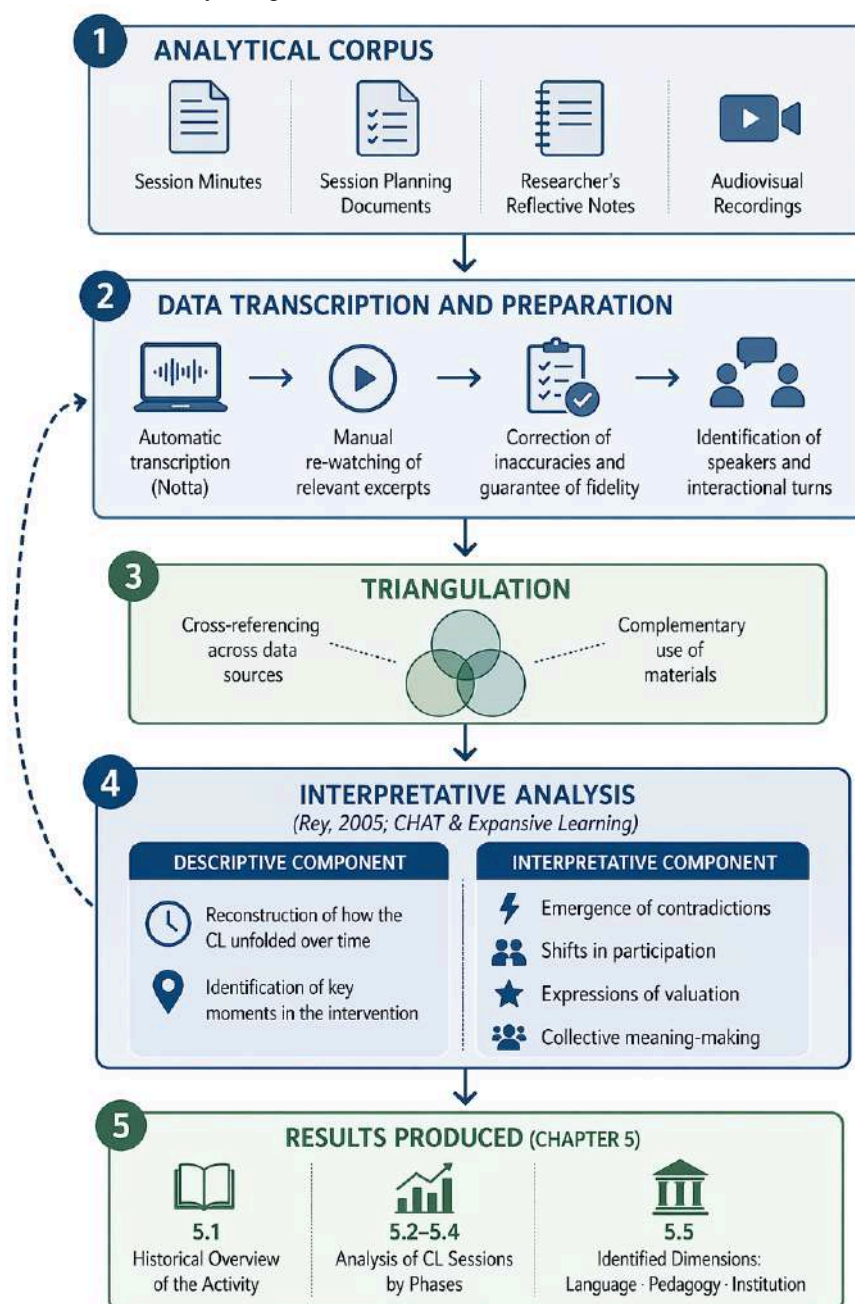
The analytical corpus was composed of multiple sources produced during the intervention, including the session minutes written and shared with participants, session planning documents, the researcher's reflective notes, and audiovisual recordings of the workshops. These materials were treated as complementary sources, allowing for triangulation and cross-referencing during analysis.

Video recordings of the CL sessions were transcribed using the Notta platform as a supporting tool for initial transcription. Relevant excerpts were re-watched and manually checked in order to correct inaccuracies and ensure fidelity to the original interactions, particularly in passages selected for analytical discussion. Following transcription, speakers

and interactional turns were identified, allowing for the reconstruction of dialogical dynamics among participants. This step was fundamental for examining moments of participant agency, peer-to-peer interaction without researcher intervention, and the emergence of new needs and collective decisions throughout the CL process.

Consistent with qualitative research perspectives that emphasize interpretation as a constructive process (Rey, 2005), data analysis in this study foregrounded the researcher's active role in producing theoretical meaning from the empirical material, without relying on a fixed sequence of analytical procedures. Accordingly, the analysis involved a descriptive reconstruction of the intervention process and an interpretative engagement with the data, informed by the conceptual lens and analytical principles of CHAT and expansive learning. Descriptively, the analysis sought to reconstruct how the CL unfolded over time, highlighting key moments in the development of the intervention. Interpretatively, it focused on understanding how the expansive learning cycle was enacted, including the emergence of contradictions, shifts in participation, expressions of valuation, and the collective construction of meanings related to the activity under transformation. The overall organization of this post-intervention analytical process is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6 – Post-intervention analytical process



Source: Created by the author using DALL·E (OpenAI), April 2026.

In addition to the analytical procedures described above, digital tools were also employed to support the development of the thesis. Generative artificial intelligence tools, including ChatGPT and DALL·E (OpenAI), as well as Claude (Anthropic), were used as auxiliary resources to support specific stages of the research and writing process. These tools assisted with language revision, translation support, formatting organization, reference checking, and the creation of illustrative materials. All analytical interpretations, theoretical

discussions, data selection, and final decisions regarding the content remained under the full responsibility of the author.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

In accordance with the principles that govern research involving human subjects, this study was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee of the State University of Maringá (COPEP/UEM) for review and was duly approved in compliance with institutional and national ethical standards. Also, among the ethical concerns that guide the qualitative research paradigm, Celani (2005) emphasizes the importance of knowledge production, understanding of meaning, and the quality of the data. In addition to these, responsibility, truthfulness, honesty, and respectability are considered fundamental values. According to the author, it is essential to avoid causing harm or disadvantage to participants, ensuring that they are not treated as mere objects or exposed inappropriately. For this reason, the identities of the participants in this study have been protected. When referring to them, we do so in general terms (participants) or by using fictitious names. Nevertheless, we acknowledge that complete anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed due to the contextual descriptions of the institution.

Additionally, the Brazilian regulatory framework highlights that participants must provide free and informed consent, be informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research, and have their data treated in a confidential and anonymous manner (BRASIL, 2012). Following these ethical guidelines, we provided participants with the Informed Consent Form via Google Forms, which included detailed information about the purpose and significance of the study, its objectives, how participation would occur, and any potential risks or discomforts they might face. Following these ethical guidelines, we provided participants with the Informed Consent Form via Google Forms, including relevant information about the research process such as the purpose and significance of the study, its objectives, how participation would take place, as well as any potential risks or discomforts to which participants might be exposed. We also made it clear that participation was entirely voluntary and that they were free to withdraw at any time. Furthermore, we took special care to protect participants' identities throughout the description of this study.

With these considerations in mind, the next section is dedicated to the analysis and discussion of the results obtained from a reflective examination of the CL sessions.

5 DATA ANALYSIS

The following subsections present the analytical description of the CL process in the chronological order in which the workshops were conducted. This organization makes it possible to follow the development of the discussions, the emergence of tensions and contradictions, and the collective construction of understandings throughout the intervention process.

5.1 Historical Overview of the Activity

The first step to prepare for the CL sessions consisted of reconstructing the historical trajectory of the internationalization activity at the institution, particularly regarding IaH and VE. This reconstruction was informed by two complementary sources of data: (a) exploratory conversations with two former coordinators of the ECI, and (b) the researcher's own notes and experiences while working at the Office. Together, these data formed the basis for the elaboration of a Historical Timeline of the activity, which was later presented to participants as mirror data and served as the first stimulus in the CL sessions - later discussed.

The first coordinator (2014–2018) consulted emphasized the optimization of limited financial and human resources, which led her to strategically adopt some IaH actions as a cost-effective internationalization pathway. Initiatives under her management included the expansion of English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses (a total of 40 by the end of her term), the Research Connect umbrella project under which research projects were underlined in order to attract funding, disciplines in English were encouraged, and partnerships with the university Languages Institute to support EMI practices were established. She also highlighted inclusion as a guiding principle, seeking to expand access to international experiences in a context where traditional mobility had almost halted after the end of the federal program Science Without Borders (*Ciência sem Fronteiras*). Although the coordinator mentioned VE and COIL, she occasionally seemed to equate these to general online course offerings, reflecting the possible emerging and somewhat ambiguous understanding of VE at that time.

It was under the management of the second coordinator (2018–2020) that a turning point in the development of IaH at the institution took place. As previously mentioned, during this period, the ECI participated in the *IntLab* (2019–2020), in partnership with CAPES and the American Council on Education (ACE), and also engaged in a CL, which was

implemented at the ECI to remodel the Office itself. These initiatives not only reinforced a broader and more systemic perspective of internationalization but also introduced a process of organizational change that highlighted the strategic importance of IaH. In this context, the term *Internationalization at Home* began to circulate more consistently within the institution, replacing earlier notions such as *Internationalization on Campus*, according to the coordinator.

A concrete outcome of this CL process was the creation of a dedicated board for IaH within the ECI — which was also in accordance with the coordinator's perception of the need to connect language policy and internationalization policy in a more structured way. The coordinator also recalled participating in studies and events where the term was already in use, including a 2019 visit to Washington that introduced the ACE model, later adapted to the local context, and IaH as part of one of the axes of the *IntLab* project at the institution. According to the coordinator, despite some initial resistance from the team when the term was first introduced, the establishment of IaH as both a term and a sector symbolized a decisive step toward the standardization and intensification of internationalization actions at the university, embedding IaH more consistently into the institutional agenda.

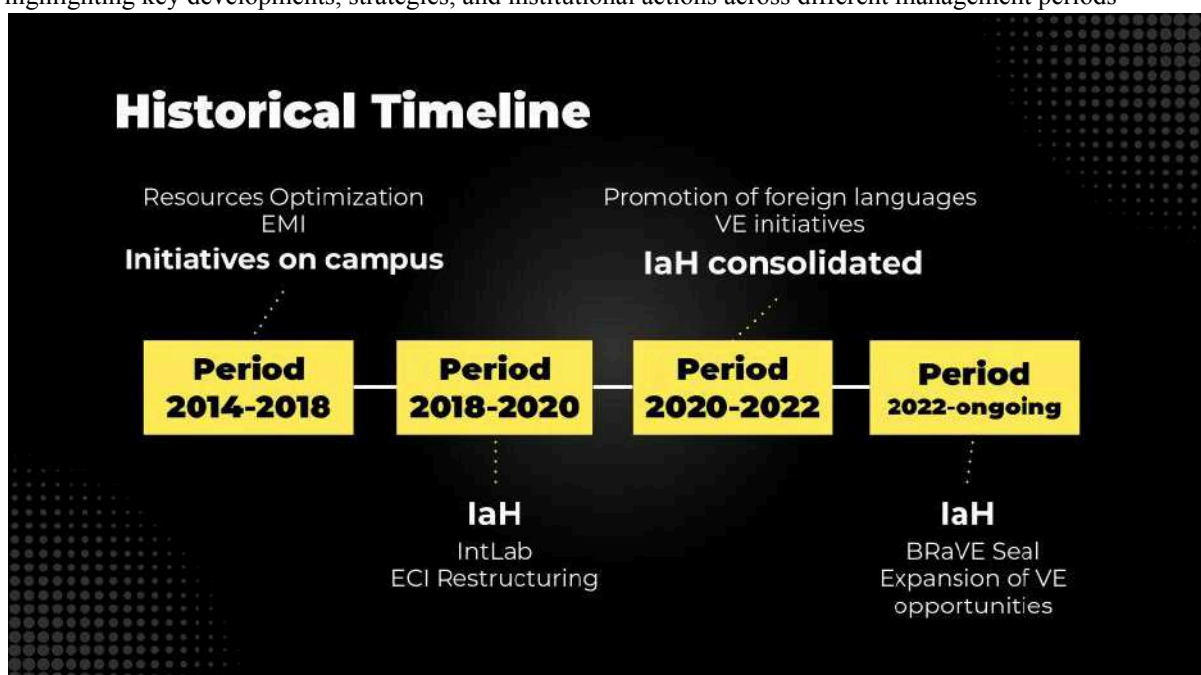
In addition to the talks with former ECI coordinators, the timeline also drew on our notes and direct involvement in the Office during 2020–2022. Some of these initiatives — such as online seminars, institutional partnerships, and the promotion of VE opportunities — have already been narrated in an earlier section of this thesis and further discussed in publications that emerged from this period. In the present analysis, however, these experiences are briefly revisited not as personal accounts, but as data points that were integrated into the historical reconstruction of the activity. By combining the coordinators' strategic perspectives with our observations, the timeline was able to capture both the institutional directions of IaH and their concrete manifestations in practice, providing a comprehensive image of the activity.

The timeline (Figure 7) synthesized the evolution of IaH and VE initiatives at UEM across four management periods (2014–2018, 2018–2020, 2020–2022, and 2022–2026¹¹). It is worth noting that these periods were not uniform four-year terms, as occasional changes in institutional management led to earlier transitions — for example, the 2018–2020 coordination period ended ahead of schedule when the ECI coordinator moved to the Office of Institutional Planning and Development. Each period was characterized by distinct priorities and initiatives, ranging from the optimization of resources and the first steps with

¹¹ The timeline for the 2022–2026 period includes only 2022–2023, when the first CL sessions were carried out.

EMI, to the creation of a dedicated IaH sector, the promotion of VE/COIL, and, more recently, the consolidation of institutional recognition through the BRaVE Seal. By juxtaposing these highlights, the timeline illustrated not only the growing institutionalization of IaH, but also the way VE gradually moved from being a peripheral practice to a recognized strategy for local internationalization.

Figure 7 – English version of the Historical Timeline synthesis on IaH and VE initiatives at UEM (2014–2023), highlighting key developments, strategies, and institutional actions across different management periods



Source: author (2025)

In addition, it captured the communication and dissemination efforts that supported the consolidation of IaH and VE. These included events, newsletters, and social media outreach, which signaled an increasing attempt to build awareness and engage faculty across the university. For instance, during the 2020–2022 management, COIL/VE initiatives began to be systematically publicized on ECI's official channels, and special editions of the ECI newsletter were dedicated to VE. These activities exemplified how internationalization was not only being carried out, but also narrated and shared with the academic community — an important factor in shaping collective perceptions of the activity.

Alongside institutional achievements, the timeline also reflected the start of standardization of practices within the ECI corroborated by our own field notes. Organization and standardization took shape by means of concrete procedures designed to track, support, and report on the growing number of VE initiatives and other IaH actions. From our perspective, this standardization was evident in the way the Office — through the IaH Board

— handled faculty interest in VE after publicity campaigns, for instance. Faculty members who read about opportunities and expressed interest were required to contact the IaH Board, which would then provide information about possible partnerships (including files with courses and professors from partner universities). If a match was established, faculty were asked to inform the Office so that the number of ongoing exchanges could be monitored. For those who needed additional support — whether due to language barriers or unfamiliarity with initiating contact with a partner — the Office provided direct assistance. At the same time, institutional communication was strengthened by the production of a booklet¹² outlining the sector's objectives and responsibilities, while regular reports on IaH activities were prepared and presented to the ECI coordination.

These practices illustrate how the process of internationalizing the campus was not merely about naming IaH as a Board, but about embedding it into the Office's routines through systematic flows, records, and monitoring mechanisms. These procedures provided greater institutional visibility to VE and IaH, and reinforced the idea that they were no longer isolated initiatives, but part of a coordinated and traceable strategy.

Taken together, the exploratory conversations and the researcher's notes revealed an evolving activity system in which IaH progressively shifted from fragmented initiatives toward a more structured and strategic orientation. As a whole, the timeline presented to participants served as a mirror of the activity system, making visible the development that had marked the trajectory of IaH at UEM.

5.2 The Change Laboratory Sessions

In the initial sessions, the design intention was to engage participants in questioning and analyzing existing contradictions in their VE practices. Although the pace at which these intentions were realized took longer than expected, requiring multiple sessions (e.g., 'Part 1,' 'Part 2'), the discussions were rich, and the key contradictions were identified. This extended time frame did not alter the content or intention but reflected the complexity of the challenges being addressed. The same applied to the later sessions, where additional workshops were incorporated to ensure the proposed goals were fully achieved. Hence, 11 sessions were required to reach the intent of going through the third stage of the Expanding Learning Cycle (Figure 5).

¹² Downloadable at: <http://www.eci.uem.br/br/iec/setor-iec>.

At the start of each session, the interventionist presented a video summarizing the previous session¹³, a practice that continued until the final session, for which a closing video with key memories was shared¹⁴. On some occasions, a brief recap of past sessions followed the videos to ensure that all participants were aligned. In terms of organization, each session was prepared in advance, with a written plan outlining its objectives, structure, and intended activities and shared with the advisors for orientation. For reference, the English version of the plan for Session 01 (First things first) is included as Appendix A, together with the session minutes of the same workshop (Appendix B), which correspond to the follow-up text that was systematically sent to participants via email after each meeting. These materials illustrate how the sessions were planned, conducted, and documented. This procedure was consistently applied across all workshops, ensuring coherence in their preparation, implementation, and record-keeping throughout the CL process.

The first session, titled *Onboarding*, — as were all the subsequent sessions — was conducted in Portuguese despite the overall naming of sessions in English, reflecting the researcher's enthusiasm with foreign languages. This initial meeting took place on August 18, 2023, and was attended by eight participants, including external stakeholders, faculty members, representatives in managerial positions, and one student involved in VE activities. It was numbered 00 and served to introduce the doctoral research project, outline its key objectives, and underscore the significance of participants' involvement, given their roles in internationalization and VE initiatives. The collaborative nature of the study was emphasized by presenting the foundational principles of CHAT and the CL methodology employed. The interventionist nature of the research was also explained, and agreements were established, including setting a regular meeting day and time with an initial 15-day interval between sessions to accommodate participants' schedules. Additional agreements were made regarding the flow of the sessions, such as turn-taking protocols, using the hand-raising feature on Google Meet, keeping cameras on, muting microphones when not speaking, and respecting the agreed start and finish times. Participants were also informed that session minutes and summaries would be sent after each meeting and were asked to sign the Informed Consent Form approved by the University's ethical committee.

With these agreements and procedures in place, the group moved from the introductory *Onboarding* session (00) to the first official session, *First Things First*, where the

¹³  Oficina Onboarding (2).mp4 - The link refers to the summary video of the Onboarding session, which was presented at the beginning of Session 1 (*First Things First*) as a brief recap of the previous workshop.

¹⁴  Retrospectiva Oficinas IV - Último encontro (1).mp4 - Retrospective video shown in the final session (*Last but not least*), summarizing all workshops.

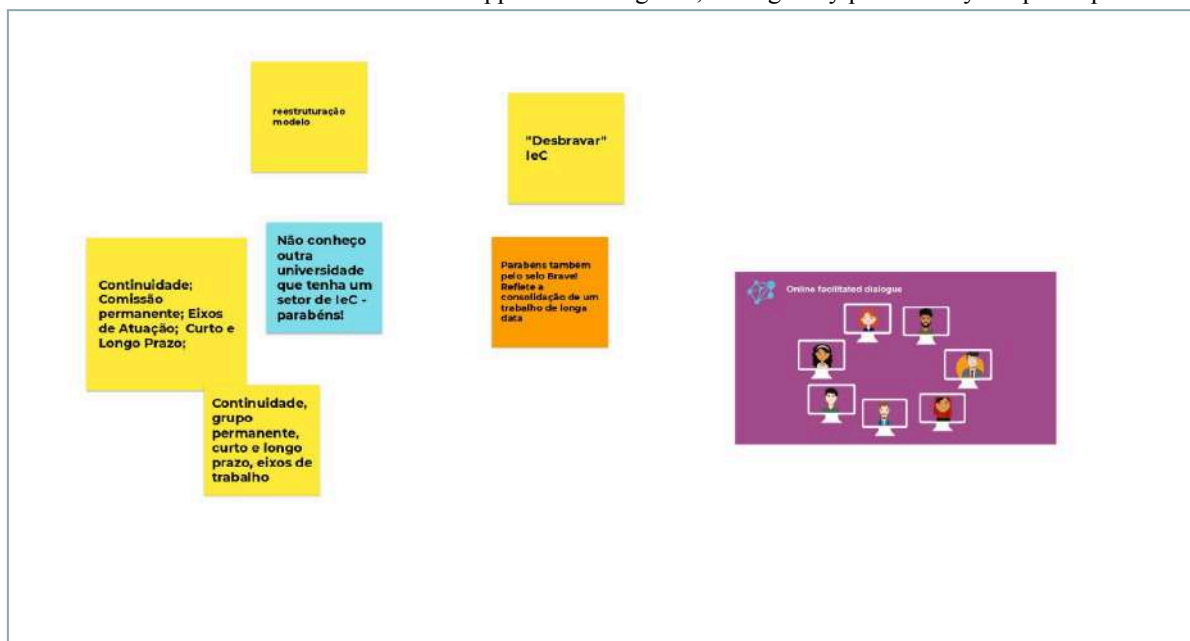
Historical Timeline of IaH and VE was presented as mirror data to trigger the questioning phase.

5.2.1 First Things First

The first CL official session, titled *First Things First* (September 1, 2023), was attended by eight participants representing all categories — external stakeholders, faculty members, managerial representatives, and one student involved in VE activities — as well as a student observer. This session introduced the Expansive Learning Cycle to the participants. At this point we emphasized that we were in the first stage of the cycle — Questioning, a phase oriented toward examining the present state of the activity — and that our goal was to progress to the third phase, Building a New Model in line with the CL methodology. To contextualize the situation and current state of VE initiatives, we presented a historical analysis to participants, based on the data collected from the exploratory conversations and our own observations, as previously mentioned. Functioning as a mirror, the Historical Timeline offered participants the first stimulus for reflection.

Following the presentation, participants were invited to react and contribute their own perspectives using collaborative tools. On Jamboard (Figure 8), which served as a digital post-it board to capture and later reflect on insights, they posted keywords, short statements, and even an image that represented their post-observations to the Historical Timeline. After contributing to the Jamboard, participants were encouraged to share and complement their thoughts orally. The contributions revolved around the pioneering character of IaH actions at UEM, the institutional recognition brought by the creation of a dedicated sector, and the importance of ensuring continuity beyond specific projects.

Figure 8 – Jamboard contributions from Session 1, capturing participants' post-observations on the Historical Timeline of IaH and VE at UEM. The terms appear in Portuguese, as originally provided by the participants



Source: author (2025)

Daniel, one of the external participants, emphasized the relevance of UEM having an IaH Board, a feature that, according to his knowledge, was not common in other universities. In his words, this organizational structure represented the institutionalization of the concept itself. He also highlighted the symbolic and practical value of the BRaVE Seal, which he saw as an external validation of the work carried out so far. As he stated¹⁵,

Excerpt 01

Daniel: *It is the institutionalization of the concept, right? And the fact that you have a sector dedicated to it helps a lot, both to disseminate the concept and to integrate those who are interested in it. [...] Although the topic of virtual exchange is relatively recent, right? The fact of obtaining the BRaVE Seal means, for those on the outside, that you had already been developing work in this area, and the seal kind of confirms that you have been doing a good job. So that's the impression we get.*

Lucas, an internal stakeholder, directly involved with the IntLab and internationalization initiatives, emphasized the importance of ensuring that the efforts initiated through the ACE-CAPES process would not be treated as a temporary action. His contribution pointed to the establishment of a permanent structure to sustain the work beyond the IntLab, highlighting the creation and later restructuring of the Permanent Internationalization Committee as evidence of this institutional commitment. This perspective

¹⁵All direct excerpts from participants' interventions were translated into English for analytical purposes. The original versions in Portuguese are provided in Appendix C.

reflects a concern with continuity and governance, framing internationalization not as a temporary project but as an ongoing agenda within the university.

Excerpt 02

Lucas: *So there was a working group created with the purpose of carrying out the IntLab with the support of the American Council on Education, but one of the proposals was that it should have continuity, right? A committee was created afterwards, and more recently another call restructured this committee, right? So it gave this idea of continuity, right? [...] So, permanent continuity in that sense.*

Additionally, a word cloud was generated using Mentimeter, which highlighted the key terms from this session. This “Word of the Day” activity (Figure 9) synthesized participants’ perceptions into a collective representation of the meaning attributed to the activity. Terms such as *recognition*, *institutionalization*, *continuity*, *consistency*, *evolution*, and *sustainability* stood out, suggesting that the process was not only perceived as pioneering but also as increasingly consolidated. This collective synthesis marked an initial movement from individual impressions toward a shared abstraction of the activity, revealing emerging meanings attributed to VE and IaH.

Figure 9 – Mentimeter word cloud from Session First Things First, showing participants’ perceptions of internationalization and VE at UEM. The terms appear in Portuguese, as originally provided by the participants



Source: author (2025).

5.2.2 Perspectives (Part 1, 2, and 3)

Sessions two, three, and four corresponded to the second step of the Expansive Learning Cycle — analyzing the current activity (Figure 5) — and focused on empirically

examining it from the participants' viewpoints. These sessions were titled *Perspectives Part 1*, *Perspectives Part 2*, and *Perspectives Part 3*, respectively, as they allowed participants to share their insights and brought forward multiple voices, including managerial, faculty, and student perspectives. The workshops were held on September 15, October 06, and 20, 2023, respectively. Given that not all participants attended every session, those absent were given the opportunity to contribute their viewpoints in subsequent sessions. Key points and information shared by participants were recorded on a Jamboard in real time, shared with participants in the last moments of the sessions, and later consolidated into a document.

5.2.2.1 *Perspectives Part 1*

Perspectives Part 1 was attended by nine participants, representing a range of roles within and beyond the institution, on September 15, 2023. Opened with a video recap of the past meeting, this session encompassed the views of diverse stakeholders, including contributions from two external stakeholders, an internal stakeholder engaged in the university's internationalization process as part of the IntLab project team, the former ECI coordinator, the current ECI coordinator — who also shared his experience as a VE practitioner — and two additional faculty members engaged in VE projects.

The discussion began with Daniel, an external stakeholder from a federal university, who provided a broad perspective on internationalization policies and practices while also sharing concrete initiatives from his own institution. He noted that the influence of *Science Without Borders* continues to shape decisions, despite the program having ended in 2017, and that CAPES Print remains limited in scope, reaching only a small number of universities and graduate programs nationwide. In his view, internationalization is still predominantly associated with traditional physical mobility — a perception that aligns with the myths and misconceptions identified by Knight (2011) and De Wit (2011). In his words,

Excerpt 03

Daniel: *There is still this idea of internationalization very much tied to traditional physical mobility. [...] There is the issue of language barriers, the low proficiency of many members of the community in other languages, the very issue of language policies, because many times you have a document, but sometimes it is not actually put into practice.*

Moreover, Daniel highlighted that low levels of language proficiency and the lack of effective language policy implementation remain significant institutional challenges, limiting

broader engagement in international initiatives. He described IaH as “still not very visible” but an “interesting” opportunity to reach wider segments of the academic community, particularly areas beyond STEM. He also emphasized the need to involve administrative staff beyond the International Office itself, underlining institutional engagement as essential for IaH — a point that resonates with O’Dowd’s (2021) argument on the importance of institutional involvement for the sustainable integration of VE within IaH practices. Daniel’s account foregrounded systemic tensions in the current activity: internationalization remains narrowly equated with mobility, while language policies and institutional documents often fail to materialize in practice.

Following Daniel’s account, Gabriel was invited to share his views. As an external stakeholder who served as an advisor to UEM during the IntLab project and within the ECI, he provided a strategic and institutional perspective on the emergence of IaH at the university. He recalled contributing to the formulation of the vision “*UEM in the world and the world at UEM*” and emphasized that the creation of a dedicated IaH Board in 2019–2020 represented an important institutional step. His account highlighted the regional dimension of IaH, noting the strong international migratory presence in Maringá and the surrounding area, and underscored the need to welcome and include diverse groups such as international students, migrants, and Indigenous populations.

Gabriel further connected IaH to the adoption of active methodologies and positioned VE as part of a broader inclusive model by characterizing the university’s approach as comprehensive, inclusive, and transcultural, framing it as part of a systemic strategy of internationalization. Reflecting on his own role, he described his contribution as “behind the scenes,” supporting strategic planning and helping to consolidate IaH by aligning existing initiatives such as mobility programs, cooperation agreements, and communication strategies.

He also argued that IaH should extend beyond higher education, reaching basic education as a means to motivate teachers to engage in professional development and international perspectives. Importantly, he emphasized that IaH cannot be reduced to a set of isolated activities but must be reflected in the curriculum to generate lasting impact:

Excerpt 04

Gabriel: [...] *the conception of internationalization in the construction of the UEM model, of an international UEM university, where this theme of Internationalization at Home becomes a need connected to the policy of inclusion of different subjects...[...]* We know that Internationalization at Home is not just about adding activities or combining them within an agenda, but it needs to have an impact on the curriculum, on curriculum development [...].

Gabriel's reflections thus illustrated both the achievements and the remaining challenges of UEM's institutional model. His emphasis on inclusion, curriculum flexibility, and systemic alignment reveals a conception of IaH as a transformative and integrative process, rather than a sum of activities, a perspective consistent with Beelen and Jones (2015), who define IaH as a process embedded in teaching and learning.

André, an internal stakeholder and former ECI coordinator, reflected on the institutional trajectory of internationalization at UEM in light of broader global developments. He emphasized that the proposals emerging after the IntLab served as a way of aligning the university with international understandings of the concept, noting that the mentorship received during the process provided closer access to consolidated terminologies and practices abroad. In his words,

Excerpt 05

Andre: [...] *the proposals that emerge after the internationalization laboratory, they really come in the sense of an alignment with the very understanding that is made abroad about internationalization. [...] even though we have tools, even though we have availability, being prepared for this, Internationalization at Home still has many barriers to break, many things to be developed.*

He highlighted efforts initiated since 2018 — particularly regulatory changes and the attempt to join CAPES Print — as preparatory steps for positioning the institution internationally. According to him, a key dimension of this alignment was the standardization of terms, such as the shift from referring to “intercâmbio” (exchange program) to “mobilidade” (mobility), which signaled greater proximity to global practices. At the same time, André acknowledged both progress and remaining challenges. He pointed out that engaging with new themes and resources helped expand the university's scope, yet IaH at UEM was still in an early stage of development.

André's reflections captured a sense of movement “in the making”: while much had been achieved in recent years, especially in aligning with international terminology and practices, the university had not yet reached the ideal vision of IaH. His perspective suggests the idea of internationalization as a historically situated and ongoing institutional learning process, echoing the notion of expansive learning (Engeström, 2015), in which collective understanding evolves through iterative cycles of reflection and adaptation.

Rafael, the ECI coordinator at the time of the workshops and also a faculty member who had conducted a VE activity, shared his views from both perspectives. From his position as coordinator of the ECI, Rafael added an institutional dimension, echoing Daniel's earlier

remarks that while physical mobility remains concentrated in the exact and technological sciences, VE initiatives have been more prevalent in the humanities. This trend, he argued, is evidenced by the demand for VE and COIL support received by the ECI.

Excerpt 06

Rafael: *And I think I wanted to reinforce what Daniel said before. We have noticed here in the Office that physical mobility is still very concentrated in the exact sciences, in technologies, whereas virtual exchange predominates in the human sciences.*

As a professor, he reflected on the challenges faced by his students during a joint activity with a Spanish partner and their classes, which also included Polish students on physical mobility at the Spanish institution. While many of his students were familiar with Spanish, he noted that the language remained a barrier, but even more significant was the students' inhibition. According to him, they felt "shy and intimidated," which negatively affected the quality of the interaction. Interestingly, he observed that the Polish students appeared more comfortable, possibly because they were already "immersed in the international world." He argued that greater preparation is needed to strengthen students' confidence prior to such activities, and stressed that curricular flexibility is essential to create room for VE. In his view, curricular flexibility, technological tools, and active methodologies are interdependent factors without which VE cannot be fully realized.

Excerpt 07

Rafael: *[...] I agree with what was said here, that there is still always the language barrier [...]. So, the language can be an obstacle, and maybe even more than the language itself, the inhibition on the part of the students. [...] I think this is an issue that needs to be worked on before the activity. [...] It is fundamental... a curriculum change. [...] we need to be more familiar with technological tools and with active methodologies. One thing depends on the other, and they complement each other.*

Rafael's reflections underscored how pedagogical challenges in implementing VE intersect with broader institutional patterns that distinguish it from physical mobility. While physical mobility tends to concentrate in STEM fields, VE has found fertile ground in the humanities, reflecting its inclusive and accessible nature. Yet, its sustainable expansion depends on systemic conditions — such as curricular flexibility, teacher preparation in active methodologies, and technological readiness. His account also points to a necessary shift from linguistic competence alone for success in interaction toward the development of intercultural awareness, illustrating how the CL provided space for participants to reconceptualize VE as both a pedagogical and institutional practice responsive to local realities.

Rafael's account suggests a tension between institutional assumptions that linguistic proficiency alone enables participation in virtual exchange and the lived experience of student inhibition, thereby expanding the understanding of VE to include communicative, relational, and pedagogical conditions for engagement.

After Rafael's contribution, Marcelo was invited to share his perspective. A faculty member who had developed several VE initiatives, he recounted his experience organizing collaborative courses with the University of Tübingen in Germany, starting in 2021. He explained that while the German partner institution benefited from considerable curricular flexibility through its *Global Awareness* program, in Brazil the activity had to be offered as an outreach course due to curricular constraints. The first collaborative course — focused on the BRICS countries — involved professors from Brazil, Russia, China, India, and South Africa. Although regarded as successful, its three-month duration proved excessive, leading to the development of a more concise seven-session format in 2022.

Marcelo described a range of logistical and pedagogical challenges. Aligning calendars with international partners, particularly in South Africa, was difficult, and despite the shared use of English, students from both Brazil and Germany faced linguistic and comprehension issues due to varied accents and fluency levels. Yet, he framed these obstacles as valuable learning opportunities, allowing students to experience the diversity of “Englishes” used in academic global contexts:

Excerpt 08

Marcelo: *We have the language difficulty, but this is a moment of practice, for the students to understand and to learn. The difficulty is not only for Brazilian students, some German students also have a lot of difficulty with English. It is not that common, but it does happen. [...] We also invite professors from abroad, from other countries. This is really nice too, because what ends up happening is that the English used is neither American English nor British English, right, so it is better, it is easier, but at the same time it also brings difficulties.*

Reflecting on student engagement, he acknowledged that participation and the quality of final outputs remained a challenge, with written assignments producing limited results; more recently, they have begun experimenting with participatory formats such as video-based projects instead of written assignments. According to him, the continuity of the initiative has enabled learning about the very process of conducting VE, with each new edition leading to refinements. As he pointed out,

Excerpt 09

Marcelo: *And I think that for me the best part is the continuity. So, as we keep going with this process, we keep learning more and more and developing. [...] But it was great, the experiences have been excellent. [...] So, this has been very cool.*

Marcelo also emphasized the importance of expansion, with three editions of the course already organized and plans to address the Sustainable Development Goals in future editions, offering long-term prospects for collaboration. Institutional support also strengthened the initiative, with the ECI approving a call that provided financial aid for the most recent edition. Hence, his testimony underscored how persistence, adaptation, and institutional support can gradually overcome structural challenges, transforming VE into an enriching practice. At the same time, it made visible how institutional rules and curricular arrangements shape the object of the activity, conditioning how VE can be organized and sustained, and expanded the understanding of VE as a pedagogical process whose scope and impact depend on its integration into formal curricular structures.

The next contribution came from Bruno, a faculty member who had conducted VE with the University of Lomé in Togo. The project, carried out with the partner professor, adopted Spanish as the lingua franca and engaged most first-year students, who organized themselves into mixed groups with their Togolese peers. Communication largely took place via WhatsApp, where students collaborated weekly on tasks and produced short projects, culminating in two synchronous sessions. Bruno noted that students spoke exclusively in Spanish, often helping one another overcome limitations, as he put it,

Excerpt 10

Bruno: *And they only spoke in Spanish, and that's what I found really interesting. Everyone made up for the gaps, you know? So, when someone didn't know something well, another colleague would help them, and that way they kept developing.*

He also described both the challenges and opportunities of the exchange. On the one hand, unstable internet connections in Togo, differences in academic calendars, and the variety of Spanish spoken by the Togolese students occasionally hindered communication. On the other hand, the activity generated meaningful intercultural exchanges and learning, as students presented on local cuisine, languages, and traditions, while also motivating continued engagement. One of his students later joined a virtual course with a Colombian university, and

incoming students expressed strong interest in participating after hearing about their peers' positive experiences. As Bruno concluded,

Excerpt 11

Bruno: So, it was very good, I believe it was a great contribution, and my students were happy.

His account illustrated both the logistical challenges of sustaining VE and the motivational impact such initiatives can have in fostering linguistic development and intercultural curiosity among students despite infrastructural limitations. In addition, it highlighted how mediation through communication tools and peer support reconfigured participation in the activity, thereby expanding the understanding of VE as a flexible and negotiated pedagogical practice shaped by local conditions.

As the session approached the one-hour limit previously agreed upon with participants, there was not enough time for everyone to share their perspectives. The researcher-interventionist explained that the remaining contributions would continue in the following meeting, which was subsequently designated as Part 2 of the *Perspectives* workshop. Before closing, she presented a Jamboard where she had been compiling short notes on post-its during the session, summarizing key aspects from the testimonies already shared. These notes reflected participants' initial concerns and observations regarding the current organization of VE, including aspects related to partnerships, communication, coordination of initiatives, and pedagogical practices. By visually mapping these contributions, the Jamboard (Figure 10) served as a preliminary synthesis and reference point for continuity in the next session.

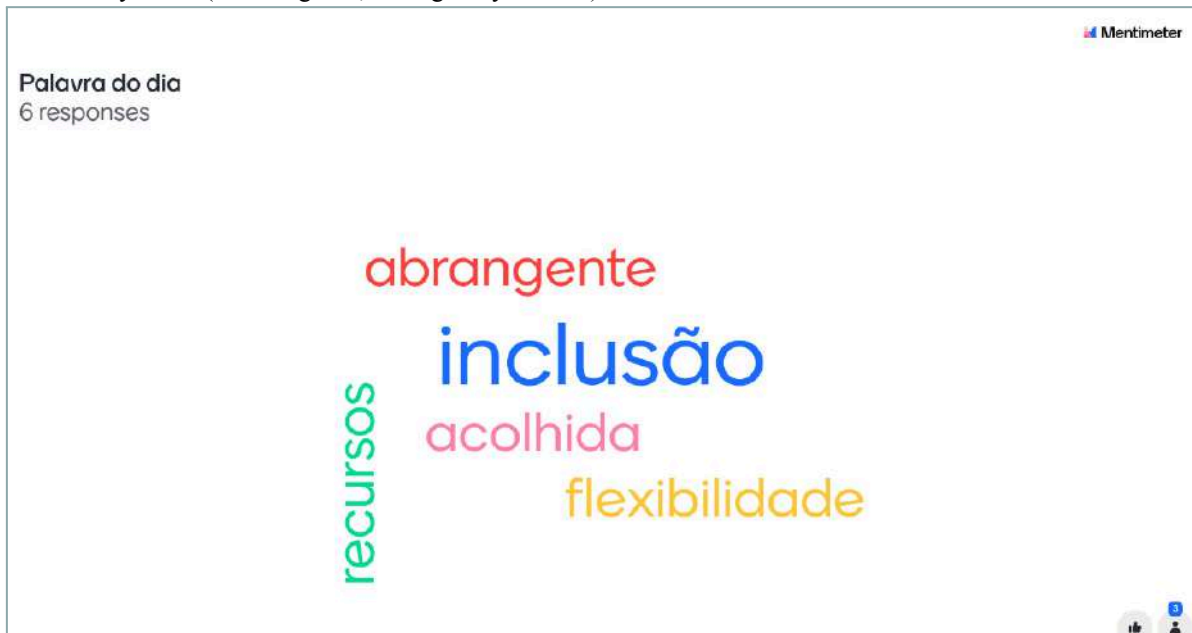
Figure 10 – Jamboard notes from *Perspectives Part 1*, summarizing key insights shared by participants on Internationalization, IaH, and VE (in Portuguese, as originally recorded)



Source: author (2025).

To conclude, participants were invited to select a *Word of the Day*, as a means of collectively capturing impressions. Although some technical issues interrupted the live word cloud, terms such as *flexibility*, *inclusion*, *welcoming*, *resources*, and *comprehensive* were recorded, and participants were given the opportunity to add further entries asynchronously. The researcher-interventionist confirmed that the word cloud would be presented again at the beginning of the next workshop, ensuring that the exercise carried forward into the ongoing cycle of reflection. The meeting then ended with logistical reminders, including the scheduling of the next session following a three-week interval due to local holidays.

Figure 11 – Word cloud generated at the end of *Perspectives Part 1*, capturing participants' impressions through selected keywords (in Portuguese, as originally entered)



Source: author (2025)

Beyond serving as a visual synthesis, the Jamboard and word cloud jointly captured the collective sense-making emerging in this phase. They revealed that participants were not only identifying institutional conditions but also beginning to reframe internationalization through more relational lenses. This collective vocabulary, co-constructed during the session, reflects an early sign of expansive learning — as participants' perspectives shifted from describing isolated practices toward envisioning IaH and VE as comprehensive and inclusive components of their institutional reality.

5.2.2.2 *Perspectives Part 2*

The second workshop in the *Perspectives* sequence (Part 2), held on October 6, 2023, brought together seven participants and opened with a short video recap of the previous session, before resuming the sharing of viewpoints that had begun in *Part 1*. Because not all participants had been able to contribute during Part 1, this meeting provided space for additional voices to be heard, including those of institutional stakeholders, faculty members, and external partners. The aim remained to document diverse experiences with internationalization, IaH, and VE, building on the historical mirror data previously discussed. Contributions were again registered on a Jamboard, which captured both opportunities and

challenges as perceived by the participants and set the ground for further consolidation in the following stages of the CL process.

The first participant invited to share was Ana, the head of the newly created IaH Board at ECI. She framed VE as one of the central activities for internationalizing the curriculum and advancing IaH. She also explained that the process began with studying and researching the concept, followed by consultations with key figures in the field, such as the coordinator of BRaVE in Brazil, which led to a series of institutional actions such as talks, training sessions, and a visibility campaign for VE. A key step in this direction was the creation of an official visual identity for COIL and VE on social media publications, which became a recognizable symbol of these initiatives at UEM:

Excerpt 12

Ana: *So, one of the points I wanted to bring up is to think of a visual representation at UEM to talk about COIL. [...] Every time COIL or Virtual Exchange is mentioned, that image would be there.*

She highlighted the Board's role in directly supporting faculty members, offering guidance on planning, platforms, and linguistic considerations. A significant innovation, according to her, was the inclusion of VE in a call for teaching grants, previously limited to courses in English — a step she viewed as institutional recognition of VE's pedagogical value. At the same time, Ana acknowledged that “we are still in the making,” indicating that while important steps had been taken, further development was still needed to consolidate VE at UEM. Ana's account contributed to framing VE as a pedagogical practice that gains legitimacy through institutional mediation, shifting it from isolated initiatives to a recognized component of curriculum internationalization.

Ana also reflected on her experience as a faculty member, emphasizing that her decision to implement a VE project was motivated by coherence with her institutional role. Conducted between 2021 and 2023, the partnership connected her teacher education course at UEM with a parallel course at Penn State, enabling students from both sides to compare educational policies and reflect on bilingualism through mixed-group collaboration. According to her, the project fostered linguistic and technological development, intercultural awareness, and autonomy among participants due to VE's collaborative and student-centered nature. However, while UEM students worked in a face-to-face format, Penn State students participated online, which created logistical challenges and required negotiating platforms for interaction.

Excerpt 13

Ana: *There is a very significant linguistic development on the part of those involved, but especially on the part of my students. [...] For the students over there, [...] they start to see language in a different way. [...]. There is also a very significant technological development. [...] The student takes on an active role, a leadership role, a role in group work, truly collaborative.*

At the same time, Ana identified important challenges. The most pressing was the demand on time, as weekly joint planning with her international partner was required, and many students had limited availability due to their workload. Differences in preferred digital tools also created negotiation needs, as Brazilian students commonly used WhatsApp while Penn State students did not. Despite these obstacles, Ana underscored that the benefits outweighed the difficulties, stressing that, unlike traditional mobility programs that involve only a few students, VE allowed her entire class to engage in collaborative activities with international peers. Furthermore, the project, initially designed as a teaching activity, evolved into a joint research initiative, formally approved by the ethics committees of both institutions and now generating publications and conference presentations.

Excerpt 14

Ana: *The potentialities end up standing out. And it is a more inclusive way for us to think about internationalization.*

Ana's account illustrated how institutional engagement and pedagogical experimentation can intersect to redefine the meaning of IaH. Her dual role — as both a decision-maker at the time and a practitioner — allowed her to move between levels of the activity, embodying the dialogic nature of expansive learning, where institutional structures and individual agency mutually inform one another. In this sense, her experience with VE demonstrates how internationalization, often discussed in abstract or policy terms, can acquire a tangible and context-sensitive form through practice. Ana's reflection framed VE not as a method, but as a mediating artifact through which new understandings of language, collaboration, and inclusion were collectively negotiated and grounded in concrete pedagogical action.

Following Ana's dual perspective as both head of the IaH Board and a VE practitioner, Lucas was invited to offer his insights. As an internal stakeholder who participated in the IntLab, he brought a perspective shaped by both his personal academic trajectory and his involvement in UEM's internationalization planning. Having completed a doctoral sandwich program in Portugal, he initially approached internationalization through the lens of research

collaboration and mobility. Within the IntLab, however, he gained what he described as a “new perspective” on the theme, particularly via the mentorship of the ACE consultants, which he valued highly. His role in the project included building an indicator panel, applying questionnaires, and contributing to a participatory plan with more than fifty people involved. From this experience, he noted that UEM’s internationalization agenda remained largely centered on graduate studies and research, while the notion of IaH was something he had “never heard of” before the Lab, but which he came to recognize as an emerging and expanding area.

In reflecting on the IaH/VE axis discussed in the IntLab, Lucas emphasized that it exposed structural gaps that hindered both physical and virtual mobility, especially the lack of basic infrastructure for welcoming visitors and the reliance on faculty-led initiatives.

Excerpt 15

Lucas: *So, like, you don't have a house for faculty, as you see in several other universities, where there is a place for visiting professors to stay, you didn't have a visitors' support center, you didn't have a common space, you didn't have signs on campus showing where things are.*

He acknowledged that the pandemic acted as an unexpected catalyst, pushing both faculty and students to adapt to digital platforms and thereby opening possibilities for virtual exchanges. Yet, he also pointed to the persistence of bureaucratic obstacles, noting that new regulations were often layered on top of existing ones without systemic alignment

Excerpt 16

Lucas: *Because one weak point is the issue of bureaucracy. So, when we establish new regulations, establish new means such as Internationalization at Home, COIL, you end up creating new rules that overlap the existing ones.*

In his assessment, the institutional trajectory of IaH and VE at UEM was driven “more by circumstances than by deliberate planning”, signaling both the fragility and the potential of the process at that stage. Taken together, Lucas’s contribution illuminates an important tension in UEM’s trajectory: while structural conditions remain fragile and often reactive, new perspectives introduced through the IntLab — and later reinforced in the CL — allowed participants to articulate a more systemic understanding of IaH and VE. His account highlights the ways institutional learning is uneven, situational, and contingent, thereby enriching the multi-voiced picture that emerges in the Perspectives workshops.

After Lucas's intervention, Ana briefly took the floor again to complement her earlier remarks as head of the IaH Board. She highlighted the attainment of the BRaVE seal in 2023, a national recognition granted to only a few Brazilian universities. In her words, this was an important achievement for both the IaH sector and the institution's Virtual Exchange activities, as it certified UEM's experience and coordination in the field.

Excerpt 17

Ana: *You know, I forgot to mention something that is really important [...]. It was an achievement, I think, for the Board and for the virtual exchange activities.*

Her remark added a symbolic dimension to the institutional trajectory being reconstructed during the workshop, showing how formal recognition mechanisms also shape participants' perceptions of value and progress. This point directly resonated with what Daniel, an external stakeholder, had emphasized in *First Things First*: that initiatives such as the BRaVE Seal generate visibility beyond the institution itself, signaling credibility and maturity to external partners who may not be familiar with the internal efforts behind IaH and VE. From this perspective, the seal does not merely acknowledge past achievements but also functions as an institutional marker that influences how UEM is perceived by the broader academic community.

Ana was invited to speak again shortly afterward when André posed a question about whether traces of IaH had already emerged in the field of Languages prior to its formal adoption at UEM. In her response, Ana situated the discussion within the development of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), recalling initiatives such as *Idiomas sem Fronteiras* (Languages without Borders) and *Paraná Fala Idiomas* (Paraná Speaks Languages), which introduced academic English and methodologies for teaching through English. These initiatives, she explained, created early opportunities to discuss internationalization in the classroom, even before the terminology of IaH was explicitly in use. She also highlighted how her courses incorporated topics like English as a lingua franca and translanguaging, thereby linking language practices with broader processes of internationalization. A decisive moment in this process, according to her, was a project on EMI funded by Fundação Araucária and the British Council, carried out jointly by UEM, UEL, and a university in London. She described this project as a turning point that broadened her perspective and deepened her understanding of how EMI and IaH were interconnected, especially from the perspective of language policy and curriculum internationalization.

Excerpt 18

Ana: *So, I think that was when my eyes were opened to all these issues involving internationalization, Internationalization at Home, language issues, and so on.*

Marcelo, who had already shared his experience in the previous session, briefly asked to contribute to Ana's account by situating the concept of IaH within a broader national trajectory. He recalled that Professor Fabiane Cortez Verdú (from UEM) had been working with the notion of IaH since 2015, both by supervising dissertations on the topic and by incorporating it into her course on Internationalization Strategy. According to him, this demonstrated that the idea of IaH had also been discussed earlier in other academic contexts such as enterprises in Brazil. This contribution helped to situate the use of the term IaH historically at UEM, showing how its local adoption resonated with earlier academic discussions.

As the session approached its conclusion, the researcher-interventionist shared the Jamboard (Figure 12) that had been compiled during participants' interventions. As in the previous session, post-its were once again used to visually organize the key points raised, with different colors representing contributions from distinct participants. For instance, Ana's inputs as both head of the IaH Board and as a faculty member were highlighted, including her emphasis on language policies, dissemination strategies, support to faculty, the BRaVE seal, and her VE project with Penn State. Lucas's contributions reflected his experience in the IntLab, particularly the centrality of graduate research, the emergent status of IaH, the role of the pandemic in fostering virtual mobility, and structural challenges such as insufficient infrastructure and excessive bureaucracy. Marcelo's reminder of Fabiani Verdú's earlier work on IaH and its presence in the graduate program (PPA) was also recorded, situating the term historically within broader academic discussions.

Figure 12 – Jamboard used during *Perspectives Part 2* to organize participants' contributions, with color-coded post-its representing different viewpoints (in Portuguese)



Source: author (2025)

Following this synthesis, the session concluded with organizational notes regarding the scheduling of future workshops.

5.2.2.3 Perspectives Part 3

The third session in the Perspectives series (Part 3), held on October 20, 2023, was shorter than the previous ones due to the reduced number of participants. Only three individuals were present besides the researcher-interventionist: one faculty member, one student, and one student-observer. Given these absences, the final planned moment for sharing the categorized information was postponed to the following session. Unlike the prior meetings, the retrospective at the beginning of this workshop was delivered orally rather than through a video. The session then moved forward with the continuation of participants' testimonies, beginning with a video-recorded account that illustrated the VE initiative co-organized between Bruno and an African partner university.

In the video, the partner professor described how meaningful the collaboration had been for her students, who viewed the project as both an enriching academic exchange and an opportunity to connect with Brazil. Her account highlighted not only the pedagogical benefits of the initiative but also its symbolic dimension — linking institutions and learners across continents. Importantly, she expressed the wish to continue the collaboration in future editions, reinforcing the sense of continuity and mutual appreciation that had already been noted in Bruno's remarks.

Following the international partner's video contribution, the session turned to the perspective of a student participant, Mari, who shared her experience of engaging in a VE project from the learner's point of view, thus expanding the multivocal picture. As a student participant in Ana's VE project with Penn State, Mari offered a valuable account that complemented the perspectives of faculty and international partners. She described how the exchange began with an optional introductory meeting, since UEM's semester was ongoing while the U.S. partner institution was not in session. Communication was facilitated by the use of English as a lingua franca, yet the adoption of unfamiliar platforms such as VoiceThread and Padlet initially created difficulties before becoming an opportunity for learning.

Excerpt 19

Mari: *It was something really interesting for me, because we used platforms — correct me if I'm wrong, professor — but it was a platform exclusive to their university, which was VoiceThread. So, at first, it really scared us, it took us a while to understand how the platform worked.*

Beyond classroom meetings, students also self-organized extra sessions to prepare their final joint presentation, which focused on comparing K–12 educational documents from both countries. The students' self-organization around joint tasks highlighted how VE may foster collaborative forms of participation that extend beyond formally scheduled activities. Also, to her surprise, the K–12 educational documents comparison revealed strong similarities rather than sharp differences, which she regarded as “extremely enriching”. Icebreaker activities, such as Padlet for personal introductions and the sharing of photos, created a sense of familiarity, allowing students to feel more comfortable interacting with their international peers.

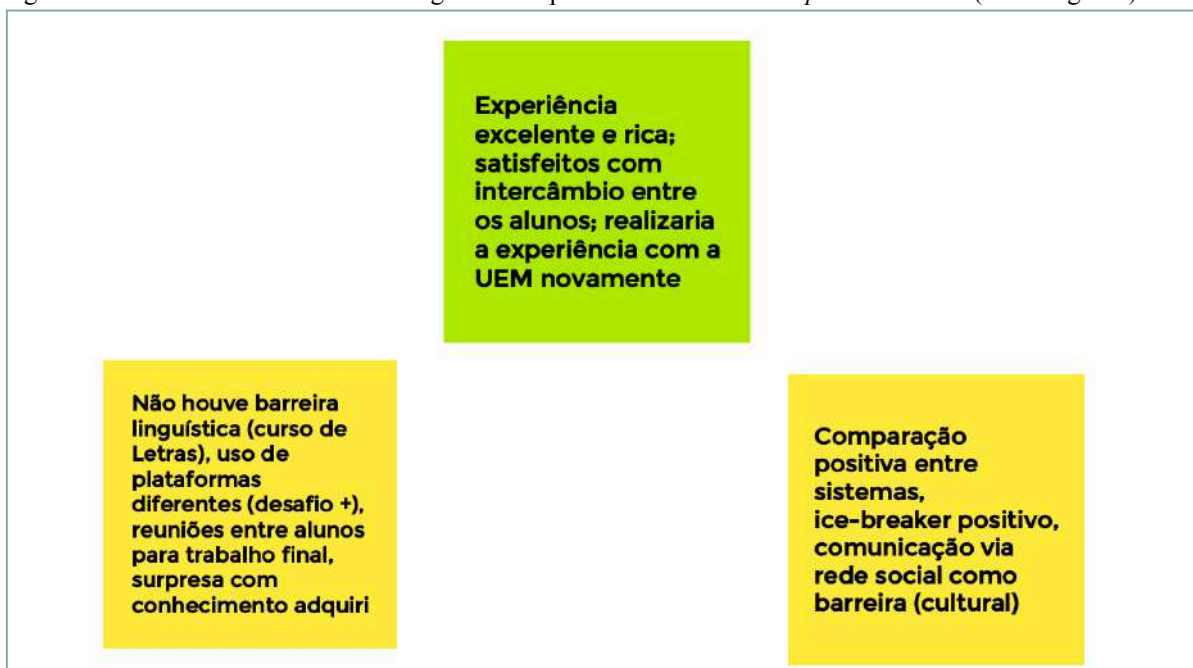
At the same time, Mari pointed to challenges that echoed those previously mentioned by Ana. Differences in communication preferences — particularly the contrast between Brazilian students' reliance on WhatsApp and American students' preference for email — created barriers that were not linguistic but cultural. Scheduling across modalities also demanded careful coordination, as UEM students met weekly in person, while their Penn State counterparts participated in a large asynchronous course distributed across multiple campuses, meaning that even the American students often did not know each other personally.

Excerpt 20

Mari: *But for me this was a communication barrier because it is precisely a cultural difference. [...]. So it was not such an easy task, and in fact we were not able to get in touch with one of the members of our group.*

Overall, her testimony underscored both the intercultural richness of the experience and the practical obstacles that students must navigate in order to make VE work effectively. The dialogue that followed between the researcher, Ana, and Mari added further layers to the student's testimony. Ana stressed that VE goes beyond linguistic competence, as it also requires negotiating cultural and organizational differences, such as time zones — a recurring source of confusion that demanded constant clarification: “Three o'clock. Three o'clock for whom?”. She also explained that curricular courses impose constraints not present in outreach activities, increasing the need for institutional support structures. From the student's perspective, however, the close guidance provided by Ana — through classroom-based support, the use of tools like Padlet, and group follow-up — facilitated meaningful interaction and product development, suggesting that sustained pedagogical mediation played a key role in enabling participation and collaboration within VE. Despite these obstacles, Mari underscored the transformative nature of the experience, noting that she had “never imagined having this interaction” and highlighting the learning opportunities afforded by both the collaboration and the challenges.

The workshop concluded with a Jamboard (Figure 13) synthesis of Mari's contributions, which were summarized into key categories: the absence of linguistic barriers among language students, the positive though challenging adoption of new platforms, the importance of icebreakers for fostering familiarity, and the cultural dimension of communication difficulties, particularly in the use of social media. Mari confirmed that these notes accurately reflected her experience, adding no further points. It was also agreed that a similar post-it summary would be produced for the international partner's video testimony, which had been brief and was therefore left for subsequent consolidation.

Figure 13 – Jamboard notes summarizing the main points discussed in *Perspectives Part 3* (in Portuguese)

Source: author (2025)

The session closed with practical arrangements regarding the scheduling of future workshops. Participants discussed possible conflicts with institutional commitment with alternative dates being considered. The meeting ended with a collective agreement to confirm the revised schedule in the following week, to ensure continuity of the CL process despite the reduced attendance.

Taken together with the *First things first* session and the construction of the Historical Timeline, the three *Perspectives* workshops fulfilled the first specific objective of this research — to understand the current functioning and status of VE at UEM. In this stage, participants were mainly invited to share accounts of their experiences and viewpoints — as external stakeholders, institutional representatives, faculty members, and a student — allowing the researcher to gather a situated picture of how VE and IaH are currently perceived at the institution. These accounts, visually synthesized through Jamboards, captured the key themes, challenges, and opportunities that structure VE in practice.

Beyond this descriptive layer, the *Perspectives* workshops revealed patterns of convergence and divergence that are analytically significant. While several challenges were identified — including bureaucracy, curricular rigidity, and linguistic barriers — participants consistently described VE and IaH using terms of positive valuation, such as *enriching*, *excellent*, *comprehensive*, *inclusive*, *transcultural*, *(very) good*, and *(really) nice*. This predominance of positive descriptors reveals that the possibilities were often perceived as

outweighing the difficulties, suggesting an overall disposition to view VE as both viable and meaningful within the local context. It also shows a collective willingness to engage with VE, even when institutional conditions are not fully aligned.

The data generated during the *Perspectives* phase also allowed for the identification of two interconnected levels in the activity system: the macro level, encompassing institutional processes such as bureaucracy, curricular integration, and recognition of VE; and the micro level, concerning, for instance, the practical dynamics of conducting VE projects, including partner matching, language barriers, time zones, and the use of active methodologies.

By surfacing these layers, the *Perspectives* workshops offered a diagnostic and somewhat reflective overview of VE at UEM that combined both institutional and practical dimensions, thereby setting the ground for the next stage of the *Confirmation and Assurance* workshops, in which participants engaged in a more dialogical and collaborative mode.

5.2.3 Confirmation and Assurance

The Confirmation and Assurance workshops — organized in two meetings (Part 1 and Part 2) — also corresponded to the second step of the Expansive Learning Cycle (Figure 5), analyzing the current activity. Sessions were held on November 24 and December 01, 2023 respectively. They returned the synthesized material from the Perspectives phase to the group for validation. Drawing on the prior discussions and mirror data, the notes were systematized into three sets: (i) Keywords on the Historical Timeline (elements specifically tied to the timeline presented earlier), and (ii) two cross-cutting categories identified from participants' accounts — possibilities and challenges — which were further organized according to the different perspectives shared (managerial, faculty, and student). The aim in these sessions was straightforward: to check whether the recorded information accurately reflected what participants had expressed, refine wording where needed, exclude information when deemed appropriate, and confirm consensus around the main ideas before advancing to the next stage of analysis. Changes to the document displayed on the screen occurred in real time.

5.2.3.1 Confirmation and Assurance Part 1

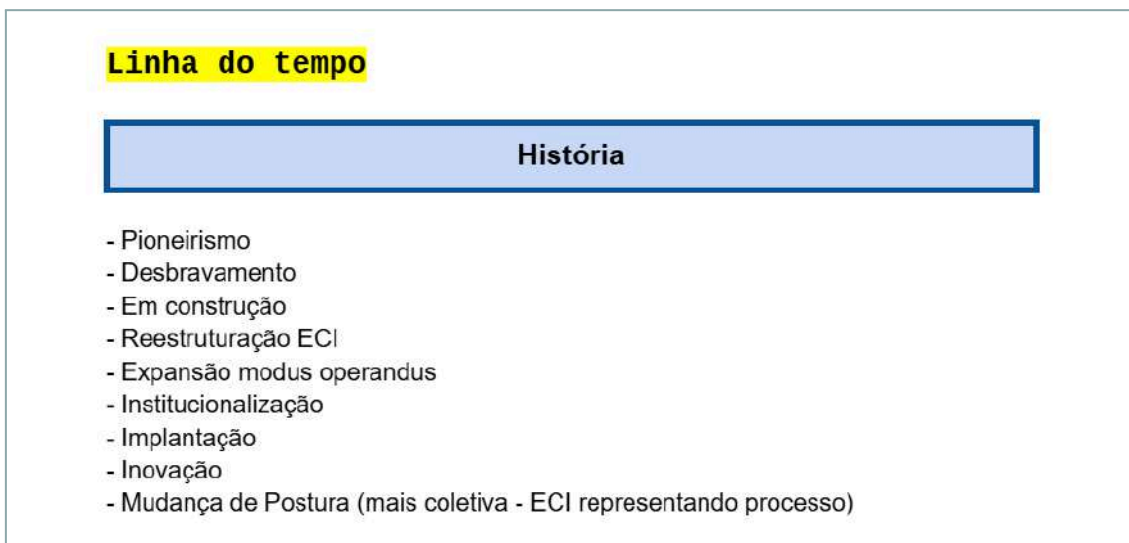
The first stage of the Confirmation and Assurance Part 1 workshop — which included six participants representing managerial, faculty, and external stakeholder perspectives

alongside the researcher-interventionist and the student-observer — focused on revisiting the keywords associated with the Historical Perspective of internationalization at UEM. These keywords — such as *pioneering*, *exploration*, *under construction*, *ECI restructuring*, *expansion*, *modus operandi*, and *institutionalization* — had been previously identified through participants' narratives and Jamboard notes. When presented back to the group, participants generally agreed that these terms reflected positive developments, highlighting progress and institutional consolidation. Beyond signaling agreement about factual historical developments, the collective acceptance of these descriptors also revealed how participants interpret the evolution of IaH and VE within the institution: words such as *pioneering* and *exploration* convey a sense of experimentation and initial learning; *under construction* expresses awareness of ongoing, incomplete processes; while *expansion* and *institutionalization* point to a shared perception of maturation and consolidation. In other words, the set of keywords functions as an indicator of meaning-making, showing how participants narrate their institutional journey as one marked by gradual advancement, increasing coordination, and growing recognition of IaH and VE. Their validation in this session demonstrates factual agreement and also an emerging, collectively constructed interpretation of UEM's trajectory in internationalization.

Building on the collectively validated keywords, Lucas proposed adding *implementation*, stressing that many facets of internationalization at UEM were still in their early stages and that the IntLab had marked a turning point in which concrete actions began to materialize. At this point, Gabriel complemented Lucas's reflection by emphasizing the innovative character of that period, particularly the creation of the IaH Board — an institutional development that, in his view, marked a shift from isolated, individual efforts toward a more collective and organized approach to internationalization. Building on this, Ana reinforced that the Board's work had gained visibility both internally and externally, noting that UEM's initiatives were increasingly recognized outside the institution as well.

Beyond confirming factual aspects of the institutional trajectory, the collective validation of these keywords reflected a shared interpretive framing of IaH and VE as processes marked by experimentation, gradual consolidation, and ongoing transformation. Together, these contributions nuanced the initial list of keywords by suggesting the inclusion of *implementation* to capture practical challenges, *innovation* to signal the distinctiveness of the IaH Board in UEM's trajectory, and *change in attitude*, to reflect the shift from individual to collective approaches in internationalization. Figure 14 shows this validated set of keywords for the Historical Timeline as consolidated during the session.

Figure 14 – Keywords associated with the Historical Timeline, validated collectively by participants during the Confirmation and Assurance Part 1 session



Source: author (2025)

After validating the keywords related to the Historical Timeline, the discussion moved on to the category of *Possibilities* from the managerial perspective. The initial list included points such as *access, understanding, and expansion of new themes related to Internationalization at Home and VE; the standardization; a local perspective — on institutional internationalization processes; strategic planning; the idea of comprehensive and inclusive internationalization; the expansion and dissemination of partnerships; the promotion of VE initiatives (boosted during the pandemic); and the encouragement of linguistic initiatives.*

During the discussion, several terms required clarification, particularly *standardization*. Ana questioned its meaning, prompting a brief exchange in which she and the researcher agreed that the term referred to how actions that had previously been isolated and somewhat informal began to follow routines and flows supported by the ECI. Gabriel complemented this by noting that standardization also involved clearer institutional procedures, such as communication, visual identity, and support mechanisms, reinforcing the sense of a more consolidated process rather than mere bureaucratization. Hence, these contributions refined the meaning of standardization as an indicator of institutional consolidation, not simply administrative control, showing how participants collectively negotiated the meaning of organizational processes related to VE.

The entry “local perspective” also generated discussion. Gabriel suggested complementing it with a “global perspective”, linking back to the slogan “UEM in the world

and the world at UEM.” This addition broadened the conceptual scope of the category, underscoring how IaH simultaneously reinforces local identity and global engagement.

Excerpt 21

Gabriel: *There, in the Local Perspective, I think that also... I think it could be expanded to Local and Global Perspective, which is that slogan: UEM in the world and the world at UEM, right?*

Moving on to the challenges identified by the managerial stakeholders, the first issue on the list was the persistent predominance of physical mobility, which continues to be regarded — both within UEM and more broadly — as the main, or even synonymous, form of internationalization. In particular, they had noted and agreed that opportunities for mobility are concentrated in the STEM fields, while the humanities remain less privileged in terms of access and institutional support. However, Ana observed that a recent ECI call for mobility grants had selected four students from the humanities (College of Humanities, Languages and Arts - CCH), momentarily challenging the notion that opportunities are restricted to STEM fields. Still, she acknowledged that this shift did not yet reflect an overall balance, as most opportunities continue to be offered in the technological and engineering fields.

Gabriel expanded this point by noting that ensuring balance across different areas of knowledge, as well as across UEM’s regional campuses, remains a significant challenge. I further added that, while most mobility opportunities are still centralized in the Maringá campus, VE initiatives had already reached other campuses, such as Umuarama during the pandemic, showing the potential of VE to broaden access beyond the main campus.

Excerpt 22

Gabriel: *To bring together areas and regional fields, right? I think that was a challenge, and I don’t know if there has been any recent change on that point.*

The discussion on linguistic barriers sparked active engagement, beginning with Marcelo’s reflections. He emphasized that the challenge affects both students and faculty. On the faculty side, the main difficulty lies in the reluctance or lack of confidence to teach entire courses in English. As he explained, international experiences abroad do not automatically translate into the ability — or willingness — to deliver academic content in another language. For students, the issue is often linked to fear or lack of confidence to participate actively, which can hinder the quality of interactions in VE initiatives. Marcelo also pointed to the role of ongoing initiatives such as EMI training courses, noting that while these offer important

opportunities for capacity-building, progress is unlikely to occur in the short term, given the heavy workloads and other responsibilities of faculty. In his view, the expansion of EMI and language support programs represents a promising path forward, but overcoming linguistic barriers remains a long-term challenge.

Excerpt 23

Marcelo: *And one difficulty is having professors who teach in English. Many have even taken part in several international activities, but it is one thing to spend some time abroad, and another thing to actually teach a course in English. [...] Students are often afraid to face it too, because here there are no conditions, and it ends up being effectively a barrier. [...] It is a very complicated issue, because it is something that is hard to solve in the short term.*

Lucas broadened the discussion on *linguistic barriers* by situating the issue within a wider cultural and structural context. He argued that the challenge is not limited to the university but reflects a national reality: although Brazil has the highest number of English schools in the world, only a small fraction of the population achieves proficiency. This mismatch, in his view, results in an environment where foreign languages are not naturally practiced or required, which hinders both students and faculty. According to him,

Excerpt 24

Lucas: *There are more English schools than in the United States itself, and it is one of the countries with the smallest share of the population that speaks English. So, it is really something that is a cultural issue, you know? An issue... that even goes beyond the concept of the university, right?*

Drawing on his own international experience, Lucas highlighted the contrast with other contexts — such as Portugal or Ecuador — where English-medium instruction is more common and where the presence of international students creates a demand for teaching in English. At UEM, by contrast, the lack of such a culture, combined with limited institutional policies, means that English is not commonly used as a medium of instruction. For Lucas, therefore, linguistic barriers in VE are symptomatic of broader national and cultural conditions, which makes them particularly difficult to overcome in the short term.

Excerpt 25

Lucas: *But it is a policy that will only have an effect in the long run, right? (when considering the Paraná Speaks English Program). [...] And we don't have this culture of saying: Oh, in my graduate program x courses will be offered in English, because we don't have international students coming with that demand, and there's no such policy either.*

After Lucas's intervention, Marcelo asked to speak again to complement the discussion. This time he emphasized financial and geographical constraints, explaining that unlike in Europe — where immersion in English-speaking contexts can be easily achieved through short and relatively affordable travel — Brazil's position makes such opportunities far less attainable. This, in his view, compounds the difficulty of overcoming linguistic barriers.

Following Marcelo's remarks, Ana added a different perspective by shifting the focus to the students' experience. She argued that linguistic barriers are not always a matter of absolute proficiency but often of perception and self-confidence. Many students hesitate to participate in courses or VE initiatives in another language because they believe they are not sufficiently prepared, when in fact such participation could itself be a powerful source of motivation and learning. From her standpoint, VE should be seen less as a test of linguistic readiness and more as an opportunity to build confidence and discover new possibilities for engaging with foreign languages — suggesting that, in this context, language is not merely a prerequisite for participation but also a developmental outcome of the activity itself.

Excerpt 26

Ana: [...] *maybe he didn't see much potential in the foreign language, but it can be a motivational factor for him, right? Sometimes we have a level of demand or perfection that is never satisfied. Because of that, we don't allow ourselves to have these partnerships, and sometimes these partnerships can open up possibilities, including for improving the language, right?*

She also stressed that English is not the only option; for instance, Spanish — being closer to Portuguese — can lower the barrier for participation. Strategies such as bilingual slides or assigning leadership roles to students with stronger language skills can also help redistribute responsibilities and make collaboration more inclusive.

Gabriel then expanded the discussion by connecting linguistic barriers to broader cultural dimensions. In his view, difficulties in language use are often intertwined with what he termed a sense of inadequacy or inferiority — *síndrome do vira-lata*, in Portuguese — which prevents genuine attempts at mutual understanding. Drawing on his own experiences in multilingual events — where communication relied on intercomprehension across Spanish, English, French, Portuguese, and Korean — he argued that VE has the potential to challenge such barriers by placing participants in real situations that require negotiation of meaning beyond linguistic perfection. His remarks underscored that linguistic barriers cannot be

isolated from cultural ones and that these challenges affect all actors across the institution — faculty, staff, and administrators alike. As he stated,

Excerpt 27

Gabriel: *I think this language barrier is very much connected to the cultural barrier, because many times the deep inferiority complex speaks louder and ends up preventing the person from truly approaching the other, for intercomprehension. [...] because virtual exchange comes to break down these barriers.*

At this point, the researcher-interventionist introduced a comment posted by Andre in the chat, as his unstable internet connection prevented him from speaking. He cautioned against assuming that shared linguistic proximity between Portuguese and Spanish automatically ensures mutual comprehension in VE contexts. Referring to a recent account from a Mexican professor, he highlighted that while Brazilian participants often manage with a form of “*portunhol*,” counterparts from Spanish-speaking countries, such as Mexico, may struggle to understand Portuguese, sometimes failing even to recognize it as a distinct language. Also, he responded directly to Ana’s earlier point about the possibility of adopting strategies to use Spanish in VE as a way to overcome linguistic limitations. While agreeing with her that language should not be seen as a major barrier, Andre cautioned against assuming that Spanish can be taken for granted as a neutral or “easier” option, and that some linguistic scaffolding is always required.

Excerpt 28

Andre: *[...] but I would like to point out that a language barrier is thinking that doing a VE with a Spanish-speaking country means that there is language comprehension on both sides. [...] Ana, I agree with you, it cannot be a barrier, but we can’t assume that without any support it will work, just because we understand Spanish a little better.*

Ana then returned to the discussion, expanding on her earlier point and engaging directly with Andre’s remarks. She suggested that Brazilians may perceive Spanish as more accessible because they are generally more exposed to it than Spanish speakers are to Portuguese. For her, the key issue was not waiting for full proficiency before engaging, since such a standard would prevent initiatives from ever starting. Instead, she argued for broadening the understanding of communication in VE beyond strict linguistic competence. Alternative modes of interaction — such as asynchronous exchanges via Padlet, videos, or images — could help mediate comprehension. In this sense, she proposed adopting a broader view of language that includes multimodal resources and translanguaging practices as part of the communicative repertoire available to participants. In this context, translanguaging refers

to the complex and fluid language practices of bilingual speakers, as well as to pedagogical approaches that build on these practices (García; Lin, 2016). From a theoretical perspective, it can be understood as the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without regard for the socially constructed boundaries of named languages (Otheguy; García; Reid, 2015). In this sense, translanguaging encompasses what García (2009, p.45) defines as "the multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds," emphasizing language as a dynamic and integrated system as opposed to separate, bounded entities.

Viewed collectively, these exchanges on linguistic barriers illustrate how participants used the space to build on each other's viewpoints. While Marcelo highlighted practical difficulties faced by both students and faculty in offering classes in English (a material view), Lucas situated the issue within a broader national and cultural context, noting the limited opportunities for immersion in Brazil (structural approach). Ana, in turn, reframed the discussion by emphasizing the motivational role of engaging with other languages, and by pointing to strategies such as translanguaging or bilingual slides (a pedagogical approach). Finally, Gabriel connected language barriers to wider cultural barriers, stressing the role of intercomprehension in international collaboration a (cultural-affective view). Rather than converging into a single interpretation, these perspectives complemented each other, revealing how participants collectively reconstructed language in VE not as a fixed deficit or prerequisite, but as a multifaceted, shaped by participants' beliefs, and pedagogically mediated dimension with multiple possibilities for action.

The final part of the workshop turned to the issue of bureaucracy, which had been frequently mentioned in earlier accounts as a significant challenge for advancing both internationalization in general and VE in particular. Gabriel, speaking from his managerial experience, described bureaucracy as a form of institutional resistance that hinders transparency and fluidity in processes. According to him, excessive formalities often discourage participation, while measures such as streamlining agreement procedures, simplifying signatures, and pre-approving activities without financial implications had already shown positive results. For him, the ongoing challenge lies in further "clearing the path" to make participation easier and more inclusive. He also pointed to curricular rigidity as part of this broader bureaucratic landscape, since fixed structures limit the flexibility needed to integrate VE into teaching practices.

Excerpt 29

Gabriel: *I think this is the very institutional resistance to the process being more transparent and more fluid. Many times this bureaucracy ends up discouraging participation. [...] I see it in the curriculum, in the closed, non-flexible curriculum, which even prevents this openness — speaking of virtual exchange, it really hinders it.*

Ana expanded the discussion by stressing that bureaucracy should not be understood solely as an obstacle, but also as a potential facilitator of VE. She argued that formal recognition of VE in students' academic records — for example, by means of transcripts or course descriptions — could both motivate faculty and increase the value attributed to such initiatives. In her view, bureaucratic mechanisms could thus serve as supportive structures, ensuring that VE activities were not merely documented through certificates but integrated into the formal curriculum. Complementing this perspective, Andre noted in the chat that bureaucracy can also be *necessary*, provided it functions in a constructive way. Ana further added that the absence of a university resolution specifically addressing VE highlighted the need for a normative framework, one capable of legitimizing ongoing practices and giving them institutional backing. Together, these contributions introduced two additional dimensions to the category of bureaucracy: its necessary role in establishing standards and its potential to act as a facilitator rather than simply a hindrance.

Excerpt 30

Ana: *I also see bureaucracy here, in the sense of supporting the issue of virtual exchange. [...] There should be a resolution, something like that, to give greater support to what we are already doing.*

Similarly, the exchanges around bureaucracy demonstrated how participants collaboratively expanded the meaning of this challenge. Gabriel initially described bureaucracy as resistance that discouraged participation, whereas Ana reframed it as a potential facilitator, arguing for the value of formal recognition of VE in students' transcripts and course records. André, via chat, added yet another layer by stressing that bureaucracy is also necessary, but should remain positive and supportive. Together, these views did not eliminate the perception of bureaucracy as a challenge, but enriched it by highlighting its multiple dimensions. This collective reasoning process — without the researcher's direct intervention — underscores again how the CL space fostered reflection beyond individual complaints, allowing bureaucracy to be reinterpreted in constructive terms.

Shifting focus to funding, participants once again engaged in broadening the concept beyond its most immediate associations. As the discussion unfolded, Ana pointed out that

while funding is often associated with financial resources — such as scholarships, which had been offered through an ECI call that year — support for VE should not be associated only with monetary incentives. She argued that recognition mechanisms could also play a significant role in motivating faculty to engage in VE and other IaH initiatives.

Excerpt 31

Ana: *But I think that, beyond funding, we also need to think of other ways to motivate VE. [...] Sometimes it will not be financial, it will be recognition.*

Examples mentioned included adjusting teaching loads to account for the additional work of incorporating VE, awarding differentiated points in institutional calls, or formally acknowledging internationalization components in course syllabi. Building on her intervention, the group agreed that *recognition* should be considered alongside *funding*, thereby broadening the category to reflect both financial and non-financial forms of institutional support.

Gabriel further expanded this view by emphasizing that funding should be understood in a broad sense, encompassing not only scholarships but also structural support and institutional investments. He also highlighted that when leadership demonstrates clear support for internationalization, universities become more attractive to external funding agencies. Moreover, he noted that community engagement and voluntary contributions often represent an invaluable, albeit non-monetary, resource that sustains internationalization efforts.

Excerpt 32

Gabriel: *Ah, I keep remembering the possibilities, for example, of having a welcoming structure, having support structures, also regarding calls for proposals and scholarships. [...] Because if the administration is committed, if the Rector's Office, the Offices of Affairs are committed, the university ends up becoming an attractive hub for investments and funding from agencies, both in terms of people and in terms of money, financial and material resources. And also the unpaid workforce, which is the involvement of the community, that often ends up doing even more.*

Andre then added another layer to the discussion, stressing that institutional commitment depends strongly on whether leadership recognizes the value of VE and IaH. Drawing from a recent visit to a Mexican university, he shared the example of a senior administrator who was unfamiliar with the concept of virtual mobility, which includes students and faculty studying/teaching in another higher education institution without leaving home. For him, this lack of awareness illustrates a broader challenge: if decision-makers do not fully understand the meaning and potential of VE, they are unlikely to endorse it or

allocate resources to support it. His intervention echoed Grabiél's earlier point about institutional commitment, underlining that awareness and knowledge at the leadership level are prerequisites for sustained investment and formal recognition of these initiatives.

Excerpt 33

Andre: [...] *I agree with Gabriel, but one thing leads to another, right? If the administrator doesn't have an understanding of the meaning of this, they might, perhaps, doubt that this is an alternative, that this is important [...].*

The discussion on funding and recognition broadened into a more complex reflection that incorporated three additional aspects: knowledge, institutional commitment, and regulation. Ana reminded to add the word knowledge to the list as Andre had pointed out since without knowledge of IaH and VE, it becomes difficult for administrators to allocate funding or grant recognition, thus reinforcing the link between awareness and resource mobilization. Grabiél had already mentioned institutional commitment as a decisive factor, which he suggested could be further developed in the analytical stage.

Andre expanded this point by highlighting the absence of formal national guidelines or regulations on internationalization and VE. He argued that, in the current context, practices often precede legislation, with initiatives emerging from local engagement and exchanges with peers rather than from top-down mandates. To that, the researcher concluded that, while no specific regulation exists yet, these ongoing practices may eventually pave the way for formal institutional frameworks as those terms were included in the list. To illustrate,

Excerpt 34

Andre: [...] *there isn't a document that comes and says, now you need to do this, because this is important. When do we learn this? When we have dialogue with other people, right? [...] It is being done, maybe in the future we will have it, but for now, it is practice. This is being practiced before there is a document that institutionalizes it and provides regulations for internationalization in this modality.*
Milena: *This practice may lead to legislation, right?*

In summary, the theme of financing also evolved through collaborative elaboration with Ana suggesting that recognition should not be reduced to financial incentives but could include adjustments in workload or academic credit, Grabiél expanding this point by mentioning institutional infrastructure such as writing centers, housing for international visitors, and institutional commitment, and André complementing the discussion by stressing that recognition requires knowledge on the part of university leaders, without which institutional commitment cannot be consolidated. Here again, the discussion went beyond

identifying lack of resources to a broader reflection on how institutional commitment and recognition might take multiple forms.

The first Confirmation and Assurance session concluded with the validation of categories from the managerial perspective, highlighting both advances and persistent gaps in the institutionalization of VE. Alongside issues such as physical mobility, linguistic barriers, bureaucracy, and funding, participants emphasized the need for recognition, knowledge, and above all institutional commitment to sustain internationalization initiatives. Before closing, Professor Bruno shared an update on his ongoing VE project with an African partner, illustrating how micro-level challenges such as scheduling across time zones intersect with the lived realities of classroom collaboration, while also demonstrating the enthusiasm that sustains these initiatives. As time was limited, the validation of categories derived from faculty and student accounts was postponed to the following workshop. This allowed for a more balanced process in which Confirmation and Assurance would address not only the macro-level, institutional processes but also the micro-level dynamics of VE implementation in practice.

In short, the exchanges reaffirm the role of the CL methodology in fostering collaborative meaning-making: what began as discrete categories — mobility, language, bureaucracy, funding — were reinterpreted through dialogue, demonstrating how participants themselves constructed a more situated understanding of VE at UEM. Within the interactional dynamics of the session, a range of discursive moves could be identified such as presenting and illustrating concrete experiences, questioning initial assumptions, clarifying meanings, offering complementary perspectives that expanded initial interpretations, and the collective reformulation of terms. Seen from this angle, language itself operated as a primary mediating tool — not merely as a vehicle for communicating pre-formed ideas, but as the core mechanism by which new understandings of VE were negotiated, refined, and collectively stabilized.

Figure 15 shows the table as it was presented in Portuguese, reproducing the terms exactly as they were written, discussed, and reinterpreted during the workshop.

Figure 15 – Possibilities and challenges of Virtual Exchange from the managerial perspective, as validated in the *Confirmation and Assurance Part 1* session. Terms highlighted in yellow represent additions suggested by participants during the workshop. The table is in Portuguese, reflecting the original wording used by participants

Possibilidades	Desafios
- Acesso, entendimento e ampliação de novas temáticas	- Mobilidade física predominante
- Padronização (Procedimentos)	- STEM (mobilidade física)
- Olhar local e global (UEM no Mundo e Mundo na UEM)	- Barreira linguística (discentes e docentes) - soluções de longo prazo
- Planejamento estratégico	- Burocracias Resistências Caminhos (legislações) Currículo fechado Necessária Deveria ser Facilitadora
- Internacionalização abrangente e inclusiva	- Financiamento e Reconhecimento
- Expansão e divulgação de parcerias	- Conhecimento
- Iniciativa planejada de IeC/IV	- Compromisso Institucional
- Fomento da atividade	
- Boost na pandemia	
- Estímulos às iniciativas linguísticas	

Source: author (2025)

5.2.3.2 Confirmation and Assurance Part 2

The second Confirmation and Assurance session, held on December 1, 2023, brought together six participants representing different positions within the activity system (an external stakeholder, faculty members, managerial staff, and a student), in addition to the researcher-interventionist and the student-observer. The meeting began with a retrospective presentation of the table summarizing the terms that had been validated and/or added from the Historical Timeline and managerial perspective in the previous meeting. Following this brief review, the Expansive Learning Cycle was revisited to situate participants within the ongoing process of the CL, emphasizing that the group was still engaged in the empirical and historical analysis of the activity. Building on that discussion, this workshop continued with the same goal of verifying and refining the synthesized keywords and categories; however, the focus now shifted to those derived from the faculty and student perspectives. As in Part 1, the session followed an open, dialogic format in which participants were encouraged to confirm,

question, or complement the previously recorded notes, ensuring that the emerging representation of VE and IaH accurately reflected the collective understanding developed throughout the CL process. The following analysis examines how these exchanges unfolded, highlighting moments where participants expanded or nuanced one another's viewpoints.

The validation items were those listed under *possibilities* from the faculty perspective. As the researcher revisited the table on the screen, participants were invited to confirm or adjust the terms based on their experiences and this process was marked by successive rounds of negotiation among participants. The first discussion centered on the idea that VE represented “a positive point for the humanities,” which Ana immediately questioned. Drawing on her experience, she observed that several initiatives had emerged beyond the humanities, citing examples from Mathematics, Production Engineering, Nursing, and Biomedicine. Although the term had been initially included to complement the observation that physical mobility tends to be more available and popular in STEM areas, her intervention highlighted a potential ambiguity in its formulation. The term was not reformulated at that moment; instead, it was flagged for subsequent revision, indicating the need for a more precise wording that would avoid suggesting exclusivity while preserving the original point raised in the discussion.

When asked whether other additions or adjustments should be made to the *possibilities* column, Rafael brought a contrasting perspective. While acknowledging that technological tools and active methodologies represent strong potential for VE, he noted that in the technological and engineering fields these very elements often constitute obstacles. Unlike faculty from the humanities or languages, he explained, professors in these areas are rarely trained for teaching and therefore lack familiarity with active learning approaches. His contribution prompted the group to reconsider the initial formulation, leading to the addition of “lack of knowledge of active methodologies” under the *challenges* column as well.

Excerpt 35

Rafael: Milena, I understood this first item that mentions technological tools and active methodologies as something very favorable for the exchange, but I also notice, especially in technological fields, that active methodologies are still a difficulty, they're not common in teaching practice, it's not a known tool, so this is actually a barrier to Virtual Exchange in these areas. [...] because we, in Technology, in Engineering, we weren't trained to teach.

Following Rafael's earlier comment on active methodologies, Ana broadened the discussion, noting that both linguistic and methodological aspects could represent either challenges or strengths depending on context. She also suggested explicitly recognizing

student-centered methodologies as potential outcomes of VE, highlighting the development of agency, leadership, and collaboration skills that emerge when students must engage with peers from other cultural and institutional settings. This contribution expanded the focus of the category beyond tools and strategies, connecting it to the pedagogical transformation that VE can stimulate.

Excerpt 36

Ana: [...] I would maybe include a methodology that's more student-centered too, right? [...] The student, they develop some attitudes, right, like, leadership, initiative, working in groups, more, like, aspects related to collaboration, because they have to engage with groups of students from another context to develop a task, right? [...] Yeah, I think, like, more about agency, leadership, collaborative work...

Marcelo then requested clarification about the term *changes in linguistic perspectives*, which led to a rich exchange that sharpened the conceptual accuracy of the table. The researcher explained that this referred to the re-signification of language from being perceived as a barrier to being seen as a medium for interaction — particularly through practices such as the use of English as a lingua franca and translanguaging. Ana proposed rephrasing the expression to “re-signification of the concept of communication or language,” making the category more precise and theoretically grounded. From there, participants turned to the remaining terms — *common themes*, *accepting risks*, and *future developments* — which also underwent collective adjustment. Ana suggested replacing *common themes* with *transcultural* or *glocal perspectives*, emphasizing the connection between local and global dimensions of knowledge, while also adding *interdisciplinarity* to capture how VE promotes collaboration across related fields.

Finally, Gabriel revisited the earlier item concerning the humanities, clarifying that VE had indeed found fertile ground in those areas, not because it was limited to them, but because physical mobility remains more accessible to STEM disciplines. He also pointed out that curricular rigidity often prevents the institutional recognition of VE activities, which, although offered as extension courses, are not yet fully integrated into students' programs. This observation connected micro-level teaching practices to macro-level institutional processes, highlighting how curricular flexibility remains essential for sustaining VE.

Excerpt 37

Gabriel: Regarding this issue of the Humanities as the biggest, like, more fertile ground for virtual exchange: that's true, because the exact sciences and the other biological fields, and so on, it's easier for them to do physical mobility, right, which is kind of what's being pointed out there. [...] It's a reality, it's a fertile field, right?

The discussion of *linguistic barriers* opened the analysis of challenges from the faculty perspective and immediately revealed both individual and shared concerns. Participants were encouraged to consider this issue at two levels: the macro level — concerning the viability of implementing VE — and the micro level — referring to the actual conduct of the activities. At the macro level, Marcelo noted that when courses are offered in English, participation becomes self-restricting, as some students refrain from enrolling due to low language proficiency. In compulsory courses, this leads to unequal engagement: as Rafael explained, even when comprehension is manageable, as in exchanges conducted in Spanish, students’ oral participation tends to be limited, which affects the overall dynamics of the group. These reflections highlighted that language barriers shape not only interaction but also access, determining who feels able or entitled to participate in VE.

Ana then reframed the issue by introducing a more pedagogical and inclusive perspective. Rather than viewing language solely as a limitation, she suggested that group-based tasks could mitigate inequalities by allowing more proficient students to act as facilitators or spokespersons. She also mentioned practical strategies used by other colleagues, such as bilingual slides and translation tools, emphasizing that technological mediation could support understanding. This exchange exemplified how the collective validation process moved from identifying difficulties toward co-constructing feasible responses. Through complementary perspectives — Marcelo’s structural concern, Rafael’s classroom observation, and Ana’s inclusive strategies — the group collaboratively re-signified the “linguistic barrier” as both a persistent challenge and a site of pedagogical innovation.

Excerpt 38

Ana: [...] *Maybe, the student who has more fluency, they can take the initiative and be, like, the spokesperson, for example, for the group. [...] We can help with slides or any other material. Maybe, like, work with some platform that we can't really handle in terms of translation. Also work with these tools that make understanding possible.*

As the discussion moved to *curricular rigidity*, Marcelo expanded the understanding of this challenge by linking it to broader structural and social conditions. He argued that limited curricular flexibility is compounded by the fact that most Brazilian students cannot dedicate themselves exclusively to academic life — many work during the day and attend classes in the evening, which restricts participation in VE activities scheduled across time zones. Drawing from his own experience of coordinating a joint course with Germany, he described how scheduling constraints often exclude part of the student body and hinder

partnerships with institutions such as those in South Africa, where academic calendars differ substantially. His account thus reframed the issue: rather than being a matter of curriculum design alone, flexibility also depends on time availability, institutional calendars, and students' lived conditions — an insight that situates the challenge at the intersection of micro and macro levels of the activity.

Excerpt 39

Marcelo: [...] *Yeah, there's an aspect that I think isn't exactly, like, linked to this lack of flexibility in the curriculum, but that is a characteristic of our Brazilian university, which is that a large part of the students, they don't have full-time dedication to the university.*

Ana and Gabriel built on Marcelo's remarks, reinforcing that such constraints were not unique to one course or partnership but systemic. Ana illustrated how students in another VE project, involving partners from Togo, faced the same limitations — often needing to meet on weekends to complete collaborative tasks. She then expanded the discussion toward recognition mechanisms, suggesting that VE activities should appear in students' transcripts as formal components of internationalized curricula. Gabriel complemented this view by recalling a proposal developed earlier in the CL to include VE in faculty evaluation criteria, arguing that international engagement should count toward career progression. Together, these reflections extended the notion of rigidity beyond the curriculum itself to encompass institutional recognition and workload structures, showing how participants jointly elaborated a multidimensional view of flexibility — temporal, curricular, and professional — as key to sustaining VE.

Excerpt 40

Ana: *Besides this issue of flexibility, I think another issue that is needed, and that is also important, is to think about recognizing these Virtual Exchange activities in the students' curriculum.*

[...]

Gabriel: *I remembered that proposal that was also made through the lab about better recognition of the professors who do exchange, both in the scoring for hiring processes, and also in their career, right?*

At this point in the discussion, Mari — the student who had participated in a previous VE project developed by professor Ana — was invited to share her impressions, adding the learner's perspective to the ongoing validation of the categories. Reflecting on the theme of *student shyness*, she noted that hesitation during virtual interactions often stemmed less from linguistic insecurity and more from personal factors related to self-exposure and the novelty of using certain tools. For instance, while some students felt comfortable recording their

videos, others preferred to show only their voices or photos. It is noteworthy to remind that she is from the Languages Art course and therefore language was not considered a barrier during that VE experience. In this sense, Mari's observations somehow echoed Rafael's earlier reflections from the faculty perspective, as both emphasized affective and experiential dimensions as central to student participation in VE, beyond issues of linguistic competence.

Her comment prompted the group to reframe and add shyness as an affective rather than linguistic challenge, revealing that VE also requires emotional adaptation and digital confidence. Mari's input thus added an important micro-level nuance to the discussion, showing that individual experiences and interpersonal dynamics are integral to understanding participation in VE — often overlooked dimensions of VE implementation.

Excerpt 41

Mari: So, regarding shyness, what I felt there in my interaction with my classmates was that it was more of a... it was more of a... something like not turning on the camera, a... a voice thread that we recorded. It... some students recorded just the voice, others recorded their faces, some added photos, others didn't. So, I think all this shyness was something personal, and everything being a very new kind of interaction.

The following topic addressed the availability and adaptation to technological resources. Marcelo was asked to open the discussion and he highlighted the uneven access conditions faced by students and guest speakers alike. While some participants joined from university facilities, others joined from home. Overall, some experienced unstable internet connections that limited their engagement. He also recalled episodes where a guest lecturer from a partner institution in South Africa had to teach from home due to power outage at their university. His account thus illustrated that technological barriers extend beyond equipment or institutional infrastructure, encompassing broader socioeconomic and geographical inequalities that shape participation in VE.

Rafael and Ana were requested to add complementary perspectives that further qualified the issue. Rafael reported that his students, who already worked on digital projects, brought their own laptops and did not face technological limitations. Ana, in contrast, pointed out that although the Department of Languages Art and its graduate program had adequate facilities — including videoconferencing equipment and shared computers — this was not necessarily the case across all departments. She noted that synchronous sessions still demanded improvisation, with students bringing personal devices or using hybrid setups. These exchanges collectively reframed *technology* not as a uniform challenge but as a differentiated one, dependent on local conditions, available infrastructure, and the nature of

each discipline. The group concluded that connectivity — rather than device ownership — remained the most persistent obstacle, reinforcing the need for reliable digital infrastructure to develop VE projects across the institution.

Excerpt 42

Marcelo: *Some have difficulty accessing the internet, for example, the connection is kind of bad. So we, actually, we have this difficulty. [...] she said, like... I'm going to have to do it from home, because at the university I can't at that time, because at that time there's no electricity [...].*

The final challenge discussed in this session concerned the time required for planning and sustaining collaborative activities. Ana confirmed that both professors and students needed to dedicate additional hours to prepare, coordinate, and complete VE projects, as in previous accounts. The researcher complemented by recalling examples from earlier testimonies, such as Mari's mention of coordinating schedules for group work and final projects, which frequently required asynchronous collaboration among students. The discussion thus consolidated *time* as a cross-cutting constraint that affects not only the implementation of VE but also participants' engagement. This collective reflection also reinforced a shared understanding that while VE offers meaningful pedagogical and intercultural outcomes, its sustainability depends on institutional recognition of the extra time and effort it demands.

Excerpt 43

Ana: *But it takes time, right, just to confirm everything, both from the students and from the professors.*

As the session approached its conclusion, the researcher posed one final, open-ended question to all faculty members: *From a macro perspective, what was the main difficulty you encountered in developing your VE — finding a partner, implementing the activity within institutional constraints such as bureaucracy or curriculum, or simply understanding how to do it?* This closing prompt invited participants to step back from the specific categories of challenges and reflect on what they perceived as the most significant barriers to realizing VE at UEM.

Rafael was the first to respond, pointing to a lack of knowledge and familiarity with VE design and tools as his greatest difficulty. He explained that his initial experience, conducted jointly with a Spanish colleague, had been largely intuitive — *something we did in the dark* — and that more guidance and examples would have allowed for a stronger outcome.

His comment echoed earlier discussions about institutional capacity-building, emphasizing that many faculty members still begin VE projects without a clear methodological framework or technical assistance.

Marcelo, who already had a long-term partnership with a colleague in Germany, approached the question from another angle. For him, the challenge was not to start but to *sustain* and *expand* the partnership. He described how continuity had been possible because both partners shared an interest in experiential and globally oriented teaching. Nonetheless, he noted that such success depends heavily on context: not every partnership enjoys the same institutional conditions. To maintain quality across editions, he had brought in another professor, a doctoral student, and a colleague from another university to form a collaborative working team. His account illustrated how VE sustainability also demands collaborative effort.

Ana's answer introduced yet another dimension. Since her VE had been developed within her regular course, she did not face difficulties in recruiting students or securing a partner through the ECI — as is the case of Marcelo. Instead, she highlighted *time* as the main constraint: the time required to plan, coordinate, and adapt the activity while simultaneously learning about VE. However, she reframed this challenge positively, describing it as a productive kind of effort. The iterative nature of the work — backed by her concurrent research project on VE — allowed her to continually refine the activity, plan future editions, and extend the project into new modalities such as outreach courses. In their words,

Excerpt 44

Rafael: *I think that, in my case, it was little knowledge about the possibilities of VE, of tools, of strategies.*

Marcelo: [...] *For example, we were lucky to find a partner who is enthusiastic and wants to continue the work. So we did it once, did it a second time, we're on the third round, it's not even a try anymore, it's like doing it, improving it, trying to adjust [...].*

Ana: *The biggest challenge is planning, it's time, it's learning about VE through the process.*

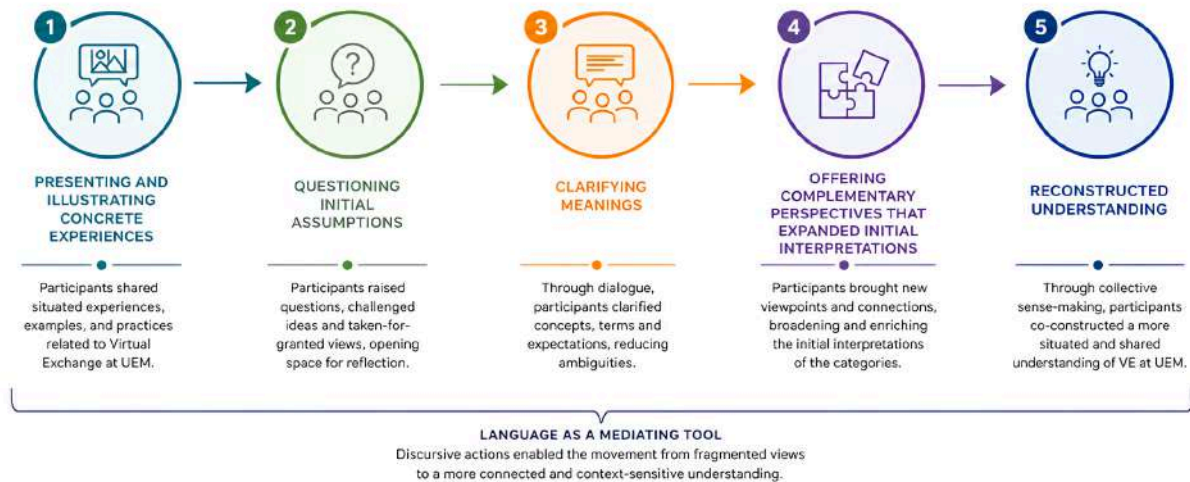
Professor Bruno was unable to attend this CL session; therefore, his confirmations and additional insights were not included in this analysis. Taken together, these responses revealed a layered understanding of VE implementation. Rafael's emphasis on limited know-how underscored the need for institutional guidance; Marcelo's account of partnership maintenance pointed to structural and relational sustainability; and Ana's reflections illustrated how time and iterative practice operate as both a challenge and a source of learning. The discussion thus moved beyond a list of obstacles, instead portraying VE as a developmental process that evolves through experience, collaboration, and reflection — a

finding that resonates with the underlying premise of the CL: that expansive learning occurs when participants collectively analyze their own activity, identify constraints, and envision ways forward.

Importantly, the discussions in the Confirmation and Assurance workshops showed that the institutional (macro) and practical (micro) levels were not experienced as separate spheres, but as interdependent dimensions whose misalignments generated many of the tensions later analyzed as contradictions. In these sessions, the multi-voicedness of the activity became especially visible: participants did not merely confirm or repeat previous points but engaged in productive disagreement, complementing, questioning, and refining one another's contributions. This dialogical movement — marked by negotiation, re-interpretation, and the expansion of initial ideas — reflects the type of collective reasoning that CHAT describes as central to understanding and transforming an activity system.

As the discussions in Confirmation and Assurance workshops unfolded, it also became evident that language played a structuring role in the collective elaboration of understanding. The interactions were not limited to the exchange of viewpoints, but they constituted a space in which meanings were continuously negotiated, questioned, and reformulated. By means of processes such as illustrating experiences, challenging initial assumptions, clarifying interpretations, and adding complementary perspectives, participants progressively reworked their own understandings of VE. In this sense, language functioned as a mediating tool that both enabled and shaped the movement from initial, often fragmented interpretations toward more elaborated and collectively constructed understandings. This dialogical process, synthesized in Figure 16, highlights how the use of language was central to the re-elaboration of perspectives observed in this stage of the intervention.

Figure 16 – Illustration of the discursive movements in the collective construction of understanding during the Confirmation and Assurance workshops



Source: Created by the author using DALL·E (OpenAI), April 2026.

Moreover, as participants revisited categories such as bureaucracy, recognition, and institutional commitment, their interpretations began to move beyond description toward envisioning what a more supportive environment for VE would require. Although the workshops were still situated within the Confirmation and Assurance stage, these exchanges already hinted at early movements toward modelling processes: participants articulated the kinds of institutional arrangements, policies, and resources that could better sustain VE, thereby beginning to outline elements of a future model. This emergent tendency to collectively imagine alternatives marks an important developmental shift, demonstrating how the CL process gradually activates expansive learning. Finally, the coexistence of managerial, faculty, and student perspectives did more than enrich the description of VE; it enlightened the historical layering of practices and expectations that shape internationalization at UEM. In this sense, the Confirmation and Assurance phase functioned as a moment of collective stabilization, in which previously articulated categories were not only validated but also re-signified through dialogue, reinforcing a shared and situated understanding of VE at UEM.

The final version of the table consolidating the confirmed categories from this session is presented below. Modifications and additions made during the live discussion are highlighted in yellow, while the pink highlights indicate comments that emerged as possible solutions or alternative perspectives to the challenges discussed. Although participants were not explicitly asked to propose solutions, several constructive suggestions naturally surfaced throughout the exchanges and were incorporated to reflect the collaborative and reflexive character of the session. The item highlighted in green indicates a term that was noted for subsequent revision, as its formulation required further clarification following the discussion.

Table 6. Final version of the table summarizing confirmed categories from *Confirmation and Assurance – Part 2* (in Portuguese).

Possibilidades	Desafios
- Aproximação de ferramentas tecnológicas e metodologias ativas	- Barreiras linguísticas - docentes - discentes - barreira para participação do discente (curso de extensão) - participação desequilibrada (disciplina) - incentivar participação ativa de discentes mais fluentes como porta-voz (por exemplo)
- mudanças de perspectivas linguísticas - translinguagem - inglês como uma língua franca - ressignificação do conceito da competência comunicativa e de linguagem	- Pouca flexibilidade do currículo (aproveitamento ou reconhecimento das disciplinas) - reconhecimento das disciplinas com componentes internacionais constando no histórico do aluno - reconhecimento dos professores (carreira)
	- flexibilidade de horário - dedicação exclusiva não existente
- metodologia centrada no aluno (agência, liderança, trabalho colaborativo)	- desconhecimento de metodologias ativas
-	- Adaptação de horários
- IV Ciências Humanas	- Timidez alunos (pessoal)
- Aceitar riscos	- Adaptação com tecnologia (ou a falta dela)
- Temas comuns, disciplinas correlata - perspectivas transculturais, glocais - interdisciplinaridade	- Tempo para colaboração e atividades conjuntas
- Desdobramentos futuros (projetos, apresentações, etc.)	- Trabalho final da atividade

Source: Author (2025)

5.2.4 And Now

Sessions seven, eight, and nine — titled *And Now? Part 1*, *And Now? Part 2*, and *And Now? Part 3* — marked the transition into the third stage of the Expansive Learning Cycle: Modeling the new solution. At this stage, participants were invited to revisit the main contradictions that had surfaced throughout the earlier phases of the CL, particularly during the *Perspectives* and *Confirmation and Assurance* workshops. These contradictions were systematized and presented back to the group as a second stimulus, creating the analytical

tension necessary to move from recognizing tensions toward collectively envisioning new possibilities for VE at UEM.

Before addressing each workshop individually, it is important to discuss the key contradictions identified and how they were interpreted as sources of expansive potential. Rather than being treated as obstacles to be eliminated, these tensions were reframed as developmental contradictions, which revealed misalignments between existing practices and emerging needs.

At the macro, or institutional level, the contradictions identified revealed structural and organizational tensions that hinder the consolidation of VE as a recognized and sustainable practice within the university. Among them are a) absence of clear institutional legislation to guide and formalize VE initiatives, which often leaves faculty uncertain about the b) bureaucratic procedures and “pathways” to follow when proposing or implementing activities. The c) rigidity of the curriculum was also highlighted as a barrier, hindering the integration of VE components into regular courses and limiting their recognition within students’ academic records or faculty workload. Closely related to this is the d) lack of institutional acknowledgment of VE in both curricular terms and career advancement criteria, which discourages broader engagement. Financial constraints were equally emphasized, with participants noting the e) scarcity of funding mechanisms to support VE, alongside a perceived f) limited institutional commitment, particularly regarding whether management fully understands the strategic relevance of VE for internationalization at home. Additionally, g) finding partners and ensuring the h) feasibility of VE implementation were described as recurring challenges. Finally, i) unequal access to technology across departments and among students was identified as a persistent obstacle, reflecting broader infrastructural limitations that affect the equitable participation of all actors in VE projects.

Based on Engeström’s (1987, 2015) activity triangle and his layered model for conceptualizing contradictions, the macro-level tensions identified in this study can be understood predominantly as primary contradictions. The analysis revealed that many of the tensions experienced in the development of VE at the institution were not the result of conflicting institutional norms, but rather of the absence of formalized rules altogether. From an activity-theoretical perspective, this absence constitutes a primary contradiction located within the rules component itself, as there were no established regulations, guidelines, or institutional instruments explicitly defining how VE should be recognized, organized, or endorsed. However, another dimension can be identified within this contradiction as divergent interpretations emerged among institutional actors regarding how VE should be regulated and

acknowledged. These differences revealed an additional secondary tension between subjects and rules, as they held different views on issues such as curricular flexibility, funding priorities, and the degree of institutional commitment required.

In addition, a cluster of closely related tensions all shared the same origin: the absence of established institutional regulations. The unclear or nonexistent bureaucratic procedures and “pathways” to follow, the rigidity of curricular structures, the lack of institutional acknowledgment of VE in both curricular terms and career advancement criteria, the scarcity of funding mechanisms, and the perception of limited institutional commitment to the initiative emerged as primary contradictions within the *rules* component. In the absence of such rules, there was no stable framework to organize responsibilities, allocate resources, or legitimize practices, which meant that decision-making relied largely on individual initiative, informal negotiations, and contingent arrangements across the institution.

The regulatory gaps also had cascading effects on other components of the activity system, giving rise to secondary contradictions, which is the case of the process of finding international partners for VE. This tension emerged between subjects (faculty members interested in implementing VE) and rules, as there were no clearly established institutional procedures indicating how partnerships should be identified, formalized, or sustained. Although the ECI emerged as an important mediator — facilitating partnerships, disseminating opportunities, and assisting faculty — it operated in a space shaped more by practical necessity than by formal mandate.

A further secondary contradiction concerned the viabilization of VE, emerging in the relationship between rules and tools. In the discussion, participants associated this issue with the absence of procedural frameworks capable of clarifying how VE initiatives should be organized, communicated, and implemented within the institution. This included uncertainties regarding how to find partners, how to initiate projects, and which steps should be followed, pointing to the lack of shared guidelines. Consequently, VE implementation depended largely on individual initiative and ad hoc solutions, revealing a possible misalignment between available tools and the regulatory structures needed to sustain their use.

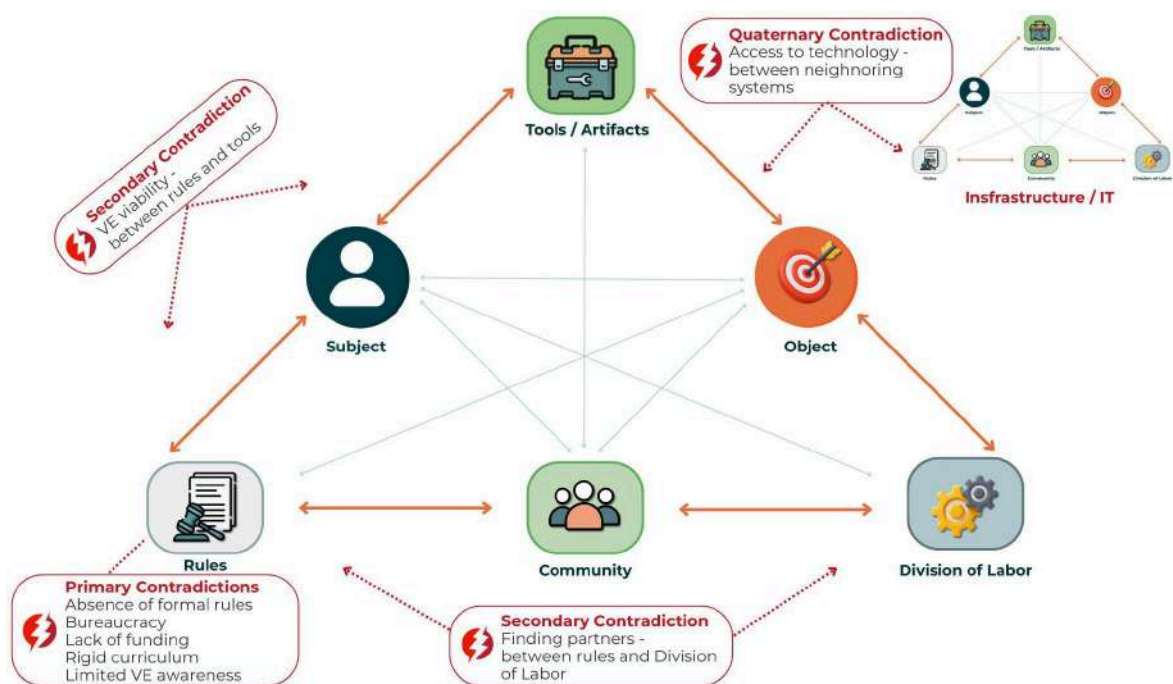
One macro-level tension stood out as qualitatively different: access to technology. This contradiction extended beyond the immediate activity system and depended on neighboring systems, such as institutional IT infrastructure, administrative assistance, and, in some cases, the material conditions of partner institutions abroad. Situations in which technological access was constrained — such as unstable internet connectivity or limited access to electricity — highlighted the dependency of VE on external systems. For this

reason, access to technology can be understood as a quaternary contradiction, intersecting with, but not fully contained within, the primary activity system.

All considered, this classification indicates that the macro-level contradictions were not isolated difficulties, but interconnected tensions concentrated mainly around the rules component of the activity system, with secondary effects on subjects, tools, and institutional practices. While most tensions were classified as primary or secondary contradictions, access to technology was understood as a quaternary contradiction because it depended on conditions extending beyond the immediate VE activity system. This classification provides an analytical basis for the following sections, in which these contradictions are examined in greater detail within the discussions developed during the *And Now* workshops.

These macro-level contradictions are visually synthesized in the activity triangle presented in Figure 17, which maps the tensions across the main components of the institutional activity system related to VE.

Figure 17 – Activity triangle model illustrating macro-level contradictions in VE at UEM



Source: The author (2025)

At the micro, or activity level, the contradictions identified centered on the concrete pedagogical, linguistic, technological, and interactional challenges that shape the everyday enactment of VE. They were the a) limited knowledge of VE — including uncertainty about its concept, associated methodologies, and suitable pedagogical strategies — which often

leaves faculty and students unsure about how to design or engage in collaborative tasks; b) linguistic barriers, manifested differently for each group. Another significant contradiction concerned the c) time required for collaborative planning and for carrying out the activities themselves, which placed additional demands on both teachers and learners. This was compounded by d) scheduling constraints and time-zone mismatches between partner institutions, which made synchronous interactions difficult to coordinate. Participants also pointed to e) challenges in adapting to new technological tools and platforms, as well as f) unequal access to technology, with some students lacking stable internet connections or adequate devices. Beyond these structural issues, g) student shyness emerged as an affective barrier inhibiting participation, while h) difficulties in producing final assignments further revealed discrepancies in engagement task achievement within student groups.

Drawing on Engeström's activity system and layered model, most of these tensions can be understood as secondary contradictions, emerging from misalignments between the subject (primarily faculty and students) and the mediating elements of the activity, especially rules and tools. One of the most recurrent micro-level contradictions concerned the limited knowledge of VE, including uncertainty about its conceptual foundations, appropriate pedagogical models, and the use of active methodologies and strategies. This tension manifested as a secondary contradiction between subjects and rules, insofar as participants lacked institutional guidance or shared reference points to orient their practices. At the same time, it also surfaced as a contradiction between subjects and tools, since uncertainty about VE was closely tied to difficulties in selecting, appropriating, and meaningfully using digital and pedagogical resources, and methodological repertoires.

A closely related set of tensions involved barriers associated with language, time, and technological mediation. Linguistic barriers were discussed mainly in relation to students' and faculty' ability to act through digital tools, positioning this issue as a secondary contradiction between subjects and tools. This included not only linguistic competence but also the technical knowledge required to engage in online interaction and sustain communication in multilingual settings. Such contradiction manifests differently for faculty and students. For faculty, it was often associated with insecurity, cultural perception of inadequacy, and what participants referred to as *síndrome do vira-lata*, as expectations to internationalize coexist with implicit norms of linguistic perfection and academic legitimacy. For students, linguistic barriers were reported to result in uneven participation.

Similarly, the time required for collaboration between peers and difficulties in coordinating schedules across time zones were experienced by the subjects as tensions

mediated by tools, such as teaching loads, timetables, and digital infrastructures, which shape participants' engagement with the activity. According to participants' perspectives, VE activities require sustained collaboration, joint planning, and iterative interaction, yet institutional temporal structures — class schedules, workload allocation, and semester organization — are not designed to accommodate these demands. They consistently described VE as requiring “extra time,” both for faculty coordination and for student group work.

The adaptation to new technologies and platforms also reflects a secondary contradiction between subjects and tools, as participants had to appropriate unfamiliar digital environments (e.g., VoiceThread, Padlet, videoconferencing tools) while simultaneously accomplishing pedagogical objectives. In contrast, access to technology, particularly regarding connectivity, constitutes a quaternary contradiction as previously mentioned. The workshops showed that this issue extended beyond the VE activity itself, involving neighboring activity systems such as institutional infrastructure, IT services, energy supply, and broader regional inequalities. Unequal access to stable internet connections affected both students and international partners, revealing tensions between the central activity system and external systems.

At the micro level, another tension identified — students' shyness — extended beyond the immediate boundaries of the activity system and was therefore understood as a quaternary contradiction, as it involved historically and culturally situated practices originating in neighboring activity systems. During the discussion, this tension was associated with students' reluctance to participate, which participants related to factors such as linguistic insecurity or the absence of preparatory activities (e.g., icebreakers). This tension could also be linked to broader cultural and educational traditions that shape students' dispositions toward interaction and authority. These dispositions were not produced within the VE activity itself but may have been brought into it from prior schooling experiences and wider sociocultural contexts. As such, while pedagogical strategies could mitigate their effects, this tension could not be fully addressed within the VE activity system alone.

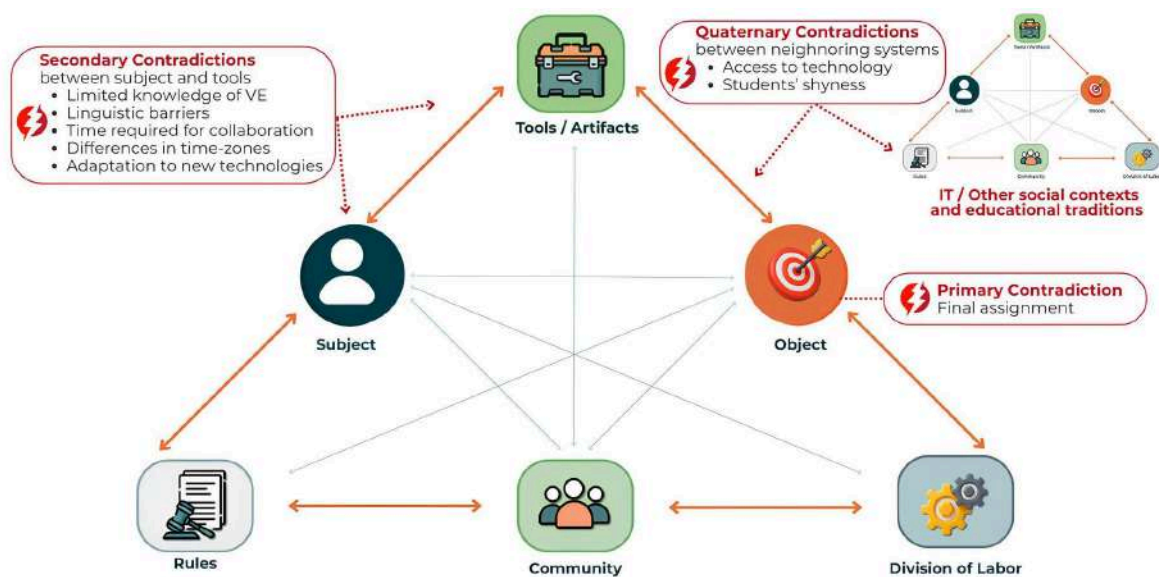
Finally, the design and understanding of the final student task emerged as a distinct micro-level contradiction. Marcelo's uncertainty about what constituted an appropriate final product in VE pointed to a primary contradiction within the object of the activity itself. This lack of clarity revealed that the object of VE had not yet been sufficiently stabilized or collectively conceptualized, leading to fragmented expectations and ongoing negotiation about goals, outcomes, and assessment practices. Rather than reflecting a breakdown between

elements, this contradiction indicated that the object of VE was still in formation, reinforcing the need for shared conceptualization and modeling.

Seen in combination, these micro-level contradictions show that VE implementation is shaped by a dense web of pedagogical, temporal, linguistic, technological, and affective tensions. They also show that advancing VE requires more than institutional regulation at the macro level. Even if formal structures are established, the activity remains dependent on how subjects appropriate tools, interpret emerging rules, and negotiate culturally and historically sedimented practices.

Figure 18 visually synthesizes the micro-level tensions identified in the workshops, mapping how they are distributed across the main components of the activity system involved in the implementation of VE.

Figure 18 – Activity triangle model illustrating micro-level contradictions in VE at UEM



Source: The author (2025)

With the contradictions at both macro and micro levels thus systematized, the analysis now turns to the And Now? workshops themselves. The following sections examine how these tensions were taken up by participants and mobilized in each session as a basis for collective reflection and further development of VE at UEM.

5.2.4.1 And Now Part 1

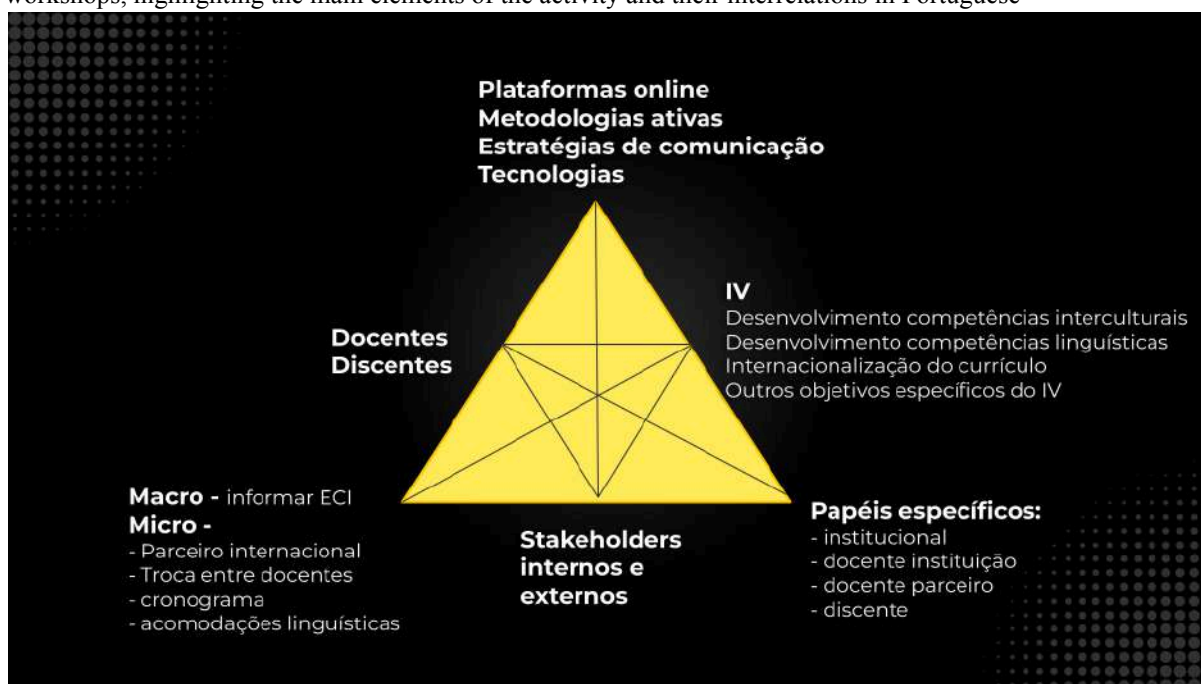
The first *And Now?* workshop (later called And Now Part 1) took place on February 2, 2024, with the participation of three members representing managerial and faculty roles, one student participant, in addition to the researcher-interventionist and a student-observer. In this session, the systematized contradictions previously identified were reintroduced to the group as a second stimulus, orienting the discussion toward the collective envisioning of new possibilities for VE. However, as the previous session had been held in December 2023, a longer interval was necessary due to end-of-year holidays and the beginning of the new academic cycle, requiring adjustments to participants' routines. For this reason, the session began with a welcoming moment followed by a video recap of the previous Confirmation and Assurance workshops (Parts 1 and 2), which played a central role in re-anchoring participants in the key discussions and validated categories developed earlier. Subsequently, the Expansive Learning Cycle was revisited to situate the group within the overall CL process, highlighting the transition into the modeling phase.

At this point, the activity triangle as proposed by Engeström (2015) was also presented, offering a systemic representation of the relationships among subjects, objects, mediating tools, rules, community, and division of labor. Building on this introduction, the researcher revisited the activity triangle in its updated form, explaining how it had been previously constructed based on data generated throughout the CL process. The subjects of the activity were defined as faculty members and students directly involved in VE initiatives, while the community encompassed both internal and external stakeholders engaged in internationalization processes, including managerial staff and invited participants with prior experience in international cooperation.

The object of the activity was identified as VE itself, understood both as a concrete practice and as a set of goals, such as the development of intercultural and linguistic competences and the internationalization of the curriculum, to mention a few. Mediating tools included online platforms, active methodologies, communication strategies, and digital technologies that enable VE activities. The rules component was analytically differentiated into two levels: at the macro level, characterized by the absence of formal legislation or institutional regulations/documentations for VE, alongside informal agreements mediated by the International Cooperation Office; and at the micro level, comprising the flexible yet defining characteristics of VE, such as the presence of an international partner, reciprocal interaction between instructors and students, agreed timelines, and linguistic accommodations.

Finally, the division of labor captured the differentiated roles assumed by institutional actors, partner faculty, and students across these levels. This configuration made it possible to visualize how relationships among elements were mediated and where tensions emerged within the activity system. Figure 19 presents the activity triangle used in this study, illustrating how the main components of the VE activity system were analytically organized based on data generated throughout the CL process.

Figure 19 – Activity triangle representing the VE activity system at UEM, populated with data from the workshops, highlighting the main elements of the activity and their interrelations in Portuguese



Source: The author (2025)

When the absence of a known institutional legislation for VE was introduced as the first macro-level contradiction, the discussion quickly shifted from problem recognition to the exploration of mediating practices already developed by faculty. Rather than halting VE initiatives, the lack of formal regulation had led participants to adopt adaptive strategies that allowed the activity to take place without conflicting with existing curricular rules. Rafael described how he incorporated VE as a voluntary, extra-class activity, deliberately avoiding compulsory participation due to linguistic concerns and institutional uncertainty.

Excerpt 45

Rafael: *So, I think the lack of legislation, the lack of guidelines that put me in this situation kind of forced me to find an alternative to make a meaningful opportunity possible.*

Ana, in turn, reported embedding VE within a regular discipline by maintaining alignment with the syllabus and learning objectives, while transforming the methodology via international collaboration. Marcelo's experience, recalled by the researcher in his absence, added a third pathway through outreach courses, which proved to be the most viable alternative for him in light of constraints related to the amount of VE workload, the need for synchronous interaction, and limited curricular flexibility. This solution, however, also reinforced how VE implementation often depends on parallel institutional arrangements rather than being fully integrated into regular curricula.

Across these accounts, a common pattern emerged: VE was made viable by means of methodological flexibility rather than institutional regulation. At the same time, participants explicitly recognized that such individual solutions, while effective in practice, do not resolve the contradiction itself. The discussion then moved toward modelling possibilities, with participants suggesting curricular mechanisms already available — such as hybrid course provisions or flexible pedagogical designs — as partial mediators. Importantly, the exchange revealed an early modelling movement: participants began to envision how existing structures (pedagogical projects, infrastructure, digital tools) could be reconfigured to better accommodate VE.

After addressing the absence of formal legislation, the discussion moved to bureaucracy as a related contradiction at the macro level. Initially, bureaucracy was not immediately recognized by faculty as a concrete obstacle to VE implementation. Ana's first reaction illustrates this ambiguity: from her perspective as a professor, VE appeared to require *less* bureaucracy than physical mobility, since it did not involve formal agreements, signatures, or financial procedures. This response revealed an important distinction between bureaucratic demands as experienced at the pedagogical level and those operating at the institutional and managerial level.

The debate gained depth when André deliberately reframed bureaucracy from an administrative standpoint, drawing attention to the responsibilities associated with the BRaVE seal. Rather than viewing bureaucracy solely as an impediment, he highlighted it as a form of institutional accountability: holding the seal entails commitments, monitoring practices, documentation, and closer coordination with faculty. In this sense, bureaucracy emerged not as an arbitrary barrier, but as a mechanism that both legitimizes VE and increases institutional responsibility and visibility. Ana explicitly acknowledged this shift in perspective, recognizing that her initial understanding of bureaucracy had been limited to classroom

practices and that administrative coordination involved a different, and often invisible, layer of work.

Excerpt 46

André: *I'm gonna add some fuel to that fire there [...]. Once we have the label, we're even more on display. So we need to be more bureaucratic to be able to handle all the procedures.*

[...]

Ana: *I thought it was great, because I was thinking about bureaucracy as a professor [...]. There has to be some kind of counterpart, right? [...] There has to be, there has to be coordination, there has to be that number of virtual exchanges carried out, there has to be the part of courses or events related to virtual exchange in the institution, there has to be all this kind of monitoring, really.*

This exchange marked a conceptual turning point in the discussion. Bureaucracy began to be collectively re-signified as a dual phenomenon: on the one hand, the lack of clear procedures and formal rules creates uncertainty and forces faculty to rely on improvised or parallel arrangements; on the other hand, certain bureaucratic processes — such as mediation through the ECI, documentation for institutional reporting, and alignment with national recognition mechanisms — were recognized as necessary for VE to be officially acknowledged, counted, and sustained.

The role of the ECI became central in this reinterpretation. While earlier phases of the CL had identified “having to go through the ECI” as a possible bureaucratic obstacle, this session nuanced that view. Participants collectively recognized that, in most cases, VE initiatives at UEM had in fact been mediated by the ECI, which supported partner matching, participated in initial meetings, assisted with platforms, and monitored activities. Exceptions, such as Marcelo’s outreach course, were recalled as viable alternatives, but also as solutions that existed precisely because of institutional gaps. From a modelling perspective, the discussion did not aim to eliminate bureaucracy, but to imagine how it could be better organized, clarified, and shared. By the end of the exchange, bureaucracy was no longer framed simply as an obstacle to be bypassed, but as a structure that, if made more transparent and formalized, could serve as the basis for coordination, recognition, and sustainability of VE.

In discussing the contradiction between the objectives of VE — particularly its articulation with curriculum internationalization — and the perception of a rigid curriculum, participants shifted the focus from structural impossibility to the pedagogical margins of action available in everyday teaching practice. Ana introduced the notion of “working within the gaps,” emphasizing that mediating this contradiction does not imply violating institutional norms, but rather reinterpreting how content already prescribed in the curriculum is

approached. From her perspective, even when the formal curriculum remains inflexible, teaching methodologies can be considerably more adaptable, allowing for the incorporation of international partners, digital technologies, and collaborative forms of learning without altering the officially defined syllabus.

Excerpt 47

Ana: *The curriculum is not very flexible, but the teacher's methodology doesn't have to be, right?*

Rafael corroborated this interpretation by acknowledging that, in the absence of ideal conditions, such pedagogical adaptation has been the most viable pathway for enabling VE. The contradiction was therefore not understood as an absolute barrier, but as a tension requiring pragmatic adjustment, in which faculty adapt their practices to the real conditions of infrastructure, time, and available resources.

André further expanded the analysis by drawing attention to the role of faculty themselves as potential agents of curricular rigidity. According to him, difficulties in flexibilization do not reside solely in formal regulations, but also in deeply rooted conceptions of teaching associated with the centrality of the teacher as the exclusive transmitter of knowledge. In this sense, resistance to curricular flexibility may stem from a tension between traditional pedagogical models and more collaborative, distributed approaches such as those proposed by VE. By sharing responsibility for the learning process with international partners and students, faculty members inevitably reposition their role, a shift that may generate both openness and insecurity.

Excerpt 48

Andre: *Also mention that the ones who can make this curriculum less flexible are the teachers themselves, who won't feel comfortable [...].*

Overall, the discussion suggested that mediating this contradiction extends beyond formal curricular reform and involves transformations in teaching practices, the use of available resources, and underlying conceptions of teaching and learning. Although participants recognized the need for broader changes in curriculum design and institutional infrastructure, the debate revealed that VE has progressed precisely through these local and provisional mediations, which enable its implementation even in contexts marked by structural rigidity. In this sense, the curriculum contradiction was not treated as a problem to be eliminated, but as a space of negotiation.

The final contradiction discussed in this session concerned the lack of formal recognition of VE within both curricular structures and academic career progression, affecting faculty and students alike. Participants agreed that, despite the pedagogical and formative value attributed to VE, such engagement rarely translates into institutional recognition, whether in terms of workload, promotion criteria, or academic records. This absence of recognition was identified as a significant disincentive to broader participation and sustainability, particularly given the additional time and effort required to design and maintain VE initiatives.

From the faculty perspective, the discussion quickly moved toward existing institutional mechanisms that could potentially accommodate VE. Ana and André suggested that participation in VE could be recognized within evaluation systems already in place, such as research and teaching reports submitted to graduate programs, CAPES/Sucupira documentation, or internal processes related to promotion and career advancement. Rafael reinforced this point by recalling ongoing negotiations to include internationalization activities — including VE — in competitive calls such as PIBIC, noting that such recognition was being considered in a non-restrictive manner, applicable to different forms of international engagement. These suggestions illustrate an attempt to mediate the contradiction by re-signifying existing ones to include VE as a legitimate form of internationalization work.

Excerpt 49

Rafael: *This was already a suggestion made to PPG, they said they were going to include this for PIBIC 2024. I think we need to... the International Office needs to go back and check if this has already been included, but it's an intention [...].*

From the student perspective, Mari's contribution added an important dimension to this discussion. Rather than emphasizing formal recognition mechanisms, she highlighted *practice* as the central value of VE: exposure to diverse accents, communicative demands, and intercultural interaction in a context that differed substantially from classroom-based language use among peers who share the same first language. She also reflected on how this experience facilitated later international encounters, including physical mobility, suggesting that VE functions as a preparatory space for future international engagement. Her account reinforced the idea that VE already produces significant developmental outcomes, even when these are not formally recognized in institutional records.

Excerpt 50

Mari: *For me, the biggest importance was the practice, it was a change of environment and also the students' curiosity about another culture, other traditions, about getting to know each other in general.*

As the session approached the one-hour limit previously agreed upon with participants, it was not possible to address all macro-level contradictions planned for discussion. The researcher-interventionist therefore proposed that the remaining contradictions would be revisited in the subsequent workshop, *And Now? Part 2*. Despite this interruption, the exchanges in this session already marked a clear shift toward the modeling phase of the CL: participants moved beyond acknowledging tensions to articulating provisional ways of mediating them, drawing on existing institutional arrangements and pedagogical practices.

5.2.4.2 *And Now Part 2*

The *And Now? Part 2* workshop took place on February 16, 2024, with the participation of six members representing faculty and managerial roles, one student participant who joined the session partially, in addition to the researcher-interventionist and a student-observer. The session began with a welcoming moment followed by a video recap of the previous *And Now? Part 1* workshop, which served to reconnect participants with the initial discussions of the modeling phase. Building on this retrospective, the activity triangle proposed by Engeström (2015) was revisited as a shared analytical artifact, enabling participants to re-engage with the relationships among subjects, object, mediating tools, rules, community, and division of labor. In addition to revisiting the rationale of the *And Now* stage, the researcher-interventionist briefly recalled which macro-level contradictions had already been discussed in the previous session and which ones still remained to be addressed. From this point, the session advanced to a focused examination of the macro-level (institutional) contradictions previously identified, inviting participants to collectively reflect on these tensions and to further elaborate possibilities for mediating them within the ongoing modeling process.

The discussion started with funding and it revealed an important shift in how this macro-level contradiction was understood by participants. Rather than treating funding exclusively as the provision of direct financial resources, the group progressively reframed it as a broader set of institutional conditions that enable, recognize, and sustain VE. From the

outset, Ana challenged a narrow interpretation of funding by emphasizing that incentives could take non-monetary forms, such as adjustments in teaching workload or formal acknowledgment of the additional planning and coordination required in VE. In this sense, funding was reconceptualized as an issue of how academic labor is organized and valued within the university, rather than merely as access to financial grants.

Rafael reinforced this perspective by explicitly questioning the term *funding* itself, suggesting that mechanisms such as bonus points in institutional evaluation systems (e.g., PIBIC, internal calls, or reporting frameworks) could function as meaningful incentives without necessarily involving financial transfers. Both accounts converged on the idea that the absence of funding had not prevented VE from taking place in their experiences; however, they acknowledged that some form of institutional incentive — symbolic, procedural, or organizational — could significantly strengthen faculty engagement and sustainability over time.

As the discussion advanced, the focus shifted from recognition to the material conditions required to *viabilize* VE. Ana highlighted that technological resources are not optional but constitutive of VE itself, stressing that access to computers, laboratories, stable internet connections, and videoconferencing infrastructure is essential. Her account showed how VE has been made possible through the creative use of existing resources — students' own devices, shared spaces, and improvised setups — while also exposing the fragility of relying on such arrangements. At this point, funding became associated with infrastructural investment rather than individual remuneration, reinforcing its systemic character at the institutional level.

The debate further expanded when the researcher introduced the issue of institutional participation in international networks for partner matching. Rafael explained that recent access to external funding had allowed UEM to resume membership in networks with high annual fees, such as GCUB, thereby increasing institutional visibility and partnership opportunities. Ana nuanced this point by noting that, in the case of VE, partnerships have often been established via informal professional networks among COIL coordinators, even in the absence of paid platforms. This exchange highlighted a tension between institutionalized and informal strategies for international networking, suggesting that funding can broaden possibilities but does not fully determine the viability of VE.

Excerpt 51

Rafael: *So, I think that, uh, as we're getting access to other funding opportunities, to resources, we've been able to, uh, maintain these— these partnerships and these connections. We've now, for example, gone back to being part of GCUB.*

[...]

Ana: *And, uh, the SUNNY COIL also has a fee, we don't join, but we manage to find other ways, right? Other networks— that don't require, uh, membership.*

Bruno's intervention introduced a forward-looking dimension by linking VE to the possibility of future physical mobility. Drawing on his experience, he suggested that VE could serve as a preparatory stage for short-term exchanges, potentially supported by new funding schemes. Ana built on this idea by framing VE as a pedagogical and relational foundation for subsequent mobility initiatives, including short visits for both students and faculty. Although participants acknowledged that such developments would require substantial funding, this moment marked a clear modeling move: VE was no longer discussed only as an end in itself, but as part of a broader internationalization pathway.

Overall, the discussion transformed the contradiction of funding from a perceived lack of resources into a more complex question of institutional prioritization, recognition, infrastructure, and strategic planning. While financial constraints remained visible, participants collectively articulated multiple ways of mediating this contradiction — through re-signifying existing evaluation systems, investing in shared infrastructure, strengthening institutional networks, and envisioning integrated VE–mobility trajectories.

Following the discussion on funding, the workshop moved to a closely related but more structural contradiction: the degree of institutional commitment to VE and whether university management effectively recognizes its strategic importance. This contradiction was framed not as a lack of isolated initiatives — participants acknowledged ongoing efforts, particularly led by the ECI — but as a concern about the stability and continuity of support over time, especially in light of periodic changes in university leadership. The discussion thus shifted from immediate operational constraints to the conditions under which VE could be sustained as an institutional practice rather than a management-dependent project.

André opened the debate by emphasizing the need to institutionalize the knowledge already derived from VE practices, arguing that VE should be incorporated into the university's broader policy framework — particularly within language and internationalization policies. Bruno reinforced this position from a governance perspective, stressing that without a formal resolution or regulatory document, VE remains vulnerable to

administrative shifts. For him, institutional commitment should transcend individual administrations, ensuring that accumulated experience, partnerships, and practices are not disrupted with each change in leadership.

Excerpt 52

André: [...] *I think it's very important for us to think about a way to institutionalize this, right? Uh, in a way that, uh, a document that can guarantee, uh, and safeguard the knowledge that has already been produced a-and turn this into language policies, right, within what we already have.*

[...]

Bruno: [...] *To have a resolution, to have a law, something that would make it so that, for example, someone else comes in, uh, another administration, and removes this, or doesn't want this.*

Rafael introduced an important counterpoint by questioning whether VE necessarily requires formal obligation to persist. While he agreed on its pedagogical and inclusive value, he suggested that internationalization itself may already be an irreversible process at UEM, even if VE could, in theory, be deprioritized in favor of other strategies. This intervention surfaced a productive tension between formal regulation as protection and practice-based consolidation as legitimacy, complicating the assumption that institutional commitment must always take the form of mandatory policy.

Marcelo offered a synthesizing perspective by proposing a more gradual and context-sensitive pathway to institutionalization. Rather than relying on top-down mandates — which he considered unlikely in a democratic governance structure with rotating administrations — he argued for a dual strategy: the creation of what he called “facilitating mechanisms” (norms, procedures, and flexible arrangements that make VE viable) alongside a bottom-up, cultural-cognitive process of sensitizing faculty, students, and academic units to the value of VE. Ana aligned with this view and further stressed the importance of clarity and guidance, noting persistent confusion between VE and other forms of virtual mobility. In this sense, institutional documents would serve less as instruments of obligation and more as tools for orientation, recognition, and visibility.

Excerpt 53

Marcelo: *This is the first, the first point. (facilitating mechanisms). A second point, uh, which then is, we would talk about a process of institutionalization, uh, within a kind of cognitive logic, right? Uh, cultural-cognitive, right? Which is an awareness-raising, uh, among professors, right? And among the students themselves and the departments, the centers, uh, about the importance that virtual exchange has for the university.*

The discussion gained concreteness when Ana shared, via the chat, UNESCO's resolution on VE, which functioned as a reference model. Rather than closing the debate, this example helped reframe institutional commitment as something that can be gradually constructed through clear definitions, recognition mechanisms, and enabling procedures, allowing VE to stabilize within the institution while preserving its pedagogical flexibility.

As the session approached its scheduled end, one additional macro-level contradiction was briefly introduced, concerning both the process of finding international partners and the practical viability of VE — that is, how faculty become aware of opportunities and how VE is operationalized within the institution. Although this discussion was necessarily concise, participants converged on the understanding that these difficulties are closely intertwined with the broader issue of institutional regulation and guidance. Rather than generating extensive debate, the contradiction was provisionally framed as one that could be mediated via clearer institutional documentation, such as a resolution or set of guidelines outlining pathways for partner identification, procedural steps, and forms of institutional support. The reference to external models, particularly the UNESCO resolution shared during the session, reinforced this perspective and provided a concrete point of comparison for future discussions.

Overall, this workshop was marked by sustained and in-depth discussions about VE and the possibilities for mediating the macro-level contradictions identified throughout the CL process. The density of the debate — particularly around institutional commitment, regulation, and recognition — meant that the session was largely devoted to macro-level tensions, leaving the discussion of micro-level contradictions to subsequent workshops. Notably, participants repeatedly converged on the need to think about more formal institutional instruments, such as a document, resolution, or set of guidelines, that could enable, clarify, and legitimize the implementation of VE at UEM. This recurrent signal suggests that the modeling phase was already moving beyond the contradictions toward envisioning concrete mediating artifacts capable of stabilizing VE as an institutional practice.

In addition, the discussion reinforced an understanding of VE as a formative and preparatory experience within broader internationalization trajectories. Professor Bruno's remarks, for instance, echoed earlier impressions shared by the student Mari in the previous session, who described her participation in VE as an important preparation for her subsequent physical mobility experience — a perception she articulated while still on exchange abroad. In a similar vein, Professor Bruno framed VE as a possible first step that equips students with linguistic, intercultural, and relational competencies, lowering the threshold for later participation in physical mobility. This convergence between faculty and student perspectives

further underscores VE's role not only as an alternative to mobility, but as a developmental pathway that expands access to international experiences and supports more inclusive forms of internationalization.

Due to time constraints, the workshop was concluded before addressing the final macro-level contradiction related to access to technology, which had already been partially anticipated in earlier discussions on funding and infrastructure. The session therefore closed with practical arrangements for the next meeting, acknowledging both the relevance of the unresolved issues and the need to resume the collective analysis in the subsequent *And Now? Part 3* workshop.

5.2.4.3 *And Now Part 3*

The third and final *And Now?* workshop (Part 3), held on March 15, 2024, brought together seven participants representing managerial, faculty, and a student perspective, in addition to the researcher-interventionist and a student observer. The workshop opened with a welcoming moment followed by a structured recap of the previous *And Now? Part 2* session. This retrospective was conducted through the presentation of key terms that had emerged earlier in the modeling phase — contradictions and possible resolutions —, which were visually organized and shared with participants in the form of word clouds displayed on the slides. This strategy aimed to reactivate collective memory, foreground recurring concepts and tensions, and re-anchor participants in the ongoing analytical process before advancing to the final discussions of the *And Now?* sequence. The images of these slides are presented below, serving as visual traces of the recap that supported the continuation of the modeling work.

Figure 20 – Word cloud summarizing the main contradictions revisited at the beginning of the *And Now? Part 3* workshop, based on the discussions developed across the previous sessions of the modeling phase



Source: The author (2025)

Figure 21 – Word cloud highlighting key terms related to possible mediating actions and solutions collaboratively proposed by participants during the *And Now? Part 1 and 2* workshop



Source: The author (2025)

From this point, the focus shifted to contradictions at the micro level — that is, those emerging within the concrete enactment of VE activities, involving faculty, students, time, and technological conditions. However, before advancing into new discussions, a first set of micro-level contradictions was intentionally grouped and presented for validation rather than

in-depth debate. These included limited time for collaboration among peers, difficulties related to schedule flexibility and time zones, and unequal access to technology for both faculty and students. Participants were invited to reflect on whether these tensions could be understood as derivatives of unresolved macro-level contradictions — particularly those related to curriculum rigidity, institutional recognition, and formal regulation of VE. The group consensually validated this interpretation, indicating that clearer institutional guidelines, workload recognition, and formalized support structures at the macro level would likely mitigate these micro-level challenges. As a result, these contradictions were acknowledged but not further problematized at this stage, allowing the session to proceed toward micro-level tensions that demanded more specific pedagogical and operational mediation.

The next micro-level contradiction discussed in *And Now? Part 3* concerned limited knowledge about VE itself — including its conceptual foundations, pedagogical design, active methodologies, and practical strategies for implementation. Unlike previously grouped contradictions, this tension was treated as specific to the activity level and therefore required targeted mediation. Participants converged on the understanding that this contradiction does not stem from resistance to VE, but rather from insufficient circulation of information and uneven access to formative opportunities. Gabriel emphasized the central role of systematic training, arguing that VE entails a different mode of pedagogical action and, as such, demands intentional preparation of both faculty and students. André complemented this view by highlighting the importance of internal communication, noting that overly technical terminology or complex framings may unintentionally discourage engagement. From his perspective, clearer, more accessible communication — without oversimplifying the practice — could lower entry barriers and foster initial interest, which would then be deepened through structured formation.

Excerpt 54

André: *Yeah, I see it like this, that we need to improve internal communication, right, especially among professors who still don't really know what it is, right, to do a virtual exchange, uh, and maybe simplify it a bit more, right?*

The researcher reinforced these points by drawing on concrete evidence from an ongoing faculty development course coordinated by Ana in partnership with UNESP. Reports from participants who were unfamiliar with VE initiatives at UEM, despite their existence, illustrated how limited visibility rather than absence of action sustains this contradiction.

Collectively, the discussion reframed lack of knowledge not as an individual deficit but as a systemic issue of dissemination and formation, pointing toward professional development programs, improved internal communication, and sustained visibility as key mediating strategies within the modeling phase of the CL.

The next micro-level contradiction addressed concerned linguistic barriers, which had already emerged in earlier workshops but were now revisited with a more explicit focus on mediation strategies. This contradiction was understood as affecting both faculty and students and was closely linked to what participants had previously described as a form of linguistic insecurity — referred to metaphorically as “*syndrome do vira-lata*” — as well as to uneven student participation during VE activities. Rather than treating language solely as a technical prerequisite, the discussion reaffirmed a shift in perspective already outlined during the Confirmation and Assurance phase: language was redefined as a mediational resource and a developmental outcome of participation in VE.

Building on this premise, the researcher recalled strategies previously identified, such as the use of English as a lingua franca, translanguaging practices, the re-signification of communicative competence, and the intentional organization of groups in which more linguistically confident students could act as spokespersons or facilitators. Gabriel expanded this perspective by situating linguistic mediation within a broader cultural and relational process. For him, overcoming linguistic barriers depends not only on formal language instruction but also on the creation of supportive environments that foster bonds, peer collaboration, and a sense of belonging. From this standpoint, peer education, group work, and informal communicative spaces were seen as central mechanisms for mitigating linguistic asymmetries, as they encourage participation and reduce fear of exposure.

Excerpt 55

Gabriel: [...] *This involves, um, we've always talked about this, the planning, building a culture, uh, of internationalization on campus, on the campuses, right? [...] Yeah, I see it as creating a positive cultural environment, right, which is, with events that create connections, like parties, right? Cultural gatherings and other events that aren't so academic. [...] The language barrier doesn't break only with language training, but with communication. The person feels motivated to communicate, right?*

Marcelo's contribution introduced an additional layer by foregrounding faculty-related linguistic barriers. Drawing on his experience coordinating multiple editions of the same VE project, he explained how linguistic mediation had been operationalized via pre-selection interviews conducted in the target language and through application materials designed to prompt early reflection on linguistic demands. However, he emphasized that, in his view, the

most persistent challenge lies less with students and more with faculty members, many of whom hesitate to engage in VE due to the belief that high levels of fluency are required. This perception often leads to postponement and resistance, reinforcing the contradiction. Marcelo suggested that immersive experiences, such as extended periods abroad, can facilitate linguistic confidence, while also acknowledging the personal, professional, and familial constraints that make such experiences inaccessible to many.

From the student perspective, Mari's contribution helped refine the discussion by problematizing a direct association between uneven participation and linguistic barriers. Drawing on her experience in a VE conducted within a Languages program, she noted that differences in participation were largely influenced by contextual factors — such as the fact that partner students were enrolled in an outreach course and participating during an academic break — rather than by language proficiency alone. At the same time, she acknowledged the presence of linguistic insecurity among some students, who expressed hesitation and sought peer support to review texts or confirm language use before interacting with international partners. This collective reliance on peers mitigated potential communicative anxiety, suggesting that linguistic barriers were mediated through collaborative practices rather than becoming an obstacle to participation.

Excerpt 56

Mari: *But, actually, uh, I noticed that some classmates did feel quite shy to talk. Uh, right, I also had classmates who, who came up to me and said, like: "take a look and see if my text is okay?" Or then, I myself would go and ask my friend— "take a look here, see if it's okay?" Because we do have that kind of insecurity, right?*

Taken together, the discussion reframed the linguistic barrier as a complex contradiction involving tools (language and communication practices), and subjects (faculty and students). Rather than proposing a single solution, participants articulated a set of complementary mediations: fostering peer collaboration, normalizing non-ideal language use, expanding formative opportunities for faculty, and cultivating institutional cultures that value communication over linguistic perfection. In this sense, linguistic barriers were not positioned as obstacles to be eliminated before VE can occur, but as tensions that can be productively worked within the activity itself, reinforcing the understanding of language as both a means and an outcome of internationalized learning.

The discussion then moved to a micro-level contradiction related to adaptation to technology, distinct from earlier macro-level concerns about access to infrastructure. In this

case, the tension centered on teachers' difficulties in adapting to the digital platforms and tools required for VE. This issue was articulated primarily via Gabriel's contribution, who highlighted that resistance to technology still persists among some faculty members, particularly among those who question the effectiveness of digitally mediated education and continue to regard face-to-face instruction as the only legitimate teaching modality.

Gabriel reframed the contradiction not simply as a lack of technical skills, but as a challenge of technological adoption and appropriation. According to his perspective, institutional investment in platforms and digital resources does not automatically translate into meaningful pedagogical use. Without adequate support and opportunities for familiarization, faculty may perceive these tools as additional burdens rather than as mediational means that can enhance teaching and learning. He also emphasized that many available resources — such as collaborative platforms, educational workspaces, translation tools, and emerging AI-based applications — remain underused, despite their potential to expand interaction and international collaboration.

Excerpt 57

Gabriel: *So, many times the platform gets implemented, but there isn't really a... it also ends up going back to that issue of training. [...] We still remain very limited, right? Both in how we use the apps, and also in the possibilities that they, that they, right?—the platforms, uh, actually it makes it possible.*

From this viewpoint, mediating the contradiction requires more than technical training. It involves creating conditions for gradual engagement, pedagogical experimentation, and sustained professional development that support teachers in integrating technology into their practices. In this sense, adaptation to technology emerged as a micro-level contradiction closely tied to teachers' confidence and agency in digitally mediated environments, rather than to material constraints alone.

As the discussion progressed, one micro-level contradiction led directly to another, shifting the focus to tensions more closely related to students' participation in the activity itself. From the learners' perspective, two interconnected issues were highlighted: students' timidity and anxiety when engaging in unfamiliar intercultural settings, and uncertainties regarding the development of the final collaborative task. Rather than being treated as isolated problems, these tensions were collectively reinterpreted as closely linked to earlier contradictions concerning knowledge of VE and its pedagogical design.

The researcher-interventionist reminded that students' reluctance to participate and difficulties in understanding the final task are strongly shaped by how the VE is planned and

scaffolded from the outset. Participants emphasized that careful pedagogical sequencing — beginning with preparatory stages such as icebreaker activities, gradual familiarization, and clear explanation of objectives and tasks — can create a safer interactional environment. Such mediation strategies help reduce anxiety, foster trust among participants, and support more balanced collaboration, particularly in intercultural and multilingual contexts.

Rafael reinforced this interpretation by noting that, in practice, the main challenge lies in calibrating these introductory activities within limited instructional time. Drawing from his own experience, he highlighted the absence of prior guidance on how much class time should be devoted to preparatory interaction, suggesting that clearer methodological orientation could support teachers in balancing content coverage with interactional needs. Building on this point, asynchronous icebreakers and preliminary activities conducted outside synchronous sessions were discussed as viable alternatives that preserve class time while still addressing students' affective needs.

Excerpt 58

Rafael: *Yeah, I think that for a course, a discipline related to technology, uh, this part of the icebreaker, this warming up, it needs to be done, I think, outside of class. [...] Because sometimes there's a lot of content, a lower workload and, and, and it's important to have this activity, but if it takes up part of the class, it compromises the course, you know? [...] At the time I didn't have any guidance to say, "The percentage of the, the workload for this activity should be this," some kind of little formula like that, that would make this easier.*

From a more theoretical standpoint, Gabriel emphasized that collaborative final tasks can themselves function as mediational tools to overcome shyness. According to his view, sustained interaction, shared responsibility, and collective meaning-making contribute to the development of communicative confidence and critical engagement over time. Together, these contributions indicate that student-related micro-level contradictions are not merely individual or affective issues, but are deeply connected to pedagogical planning, task design, and the gradual construction of interactional spaces within VE activities.

In the closing moments of the workshop, the researcher-interventionist synthesized the micro-level discussion by returning to the word-cloud of proposed macro-level resolutions, highlighting the strong convergence around a shared direction: institutionalizing VE by means of guidelines, formal mechanisms, and regulatory instruments (e.g., a resolution, internal regulation, or legally recognized procedures). To ground this convergence in a concrete example, the group was reminded of the Unesp resolution (2020), which was reintroduced as a reference model for operationalizing VE within institutional systems — particularly through the formal recognition of “disciplines with VE” and the consequent visibility of this

component in both students' transcripts and faculty records. This document thus functioned as a practical mediational artifact, helping participants move from abstract calls for "institutionalization" to a clearer sense of what institutional implementation could look like in practice.

At this point, the researcher directed a final reflective question specifically to Gabriel, inviting him to consider whether the proposed solutions could realistically be implemented at UEM. Drawing on his sustained engagement throughout the session, Gabriel played a pivotal role in keeping the discussion analytically productive by articulating how institutional mechanisms could be complemented by practical forms of knowledge and guidance. Building on the Unesp example, he argued that beyond cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions, VE frameworks should also account for practical knowledge and implementation know-how. He proposed the development of an "acervo de procedimentos": a structured repository of good practices and actionable steps (e.g., how to design warm-ups/icebreakers, how to scaffold interaction, how to support participation), which would reduce uncertainty for new facilitators and strengthen internal knowledge circulation among faculty. His contribution reframed institutionalization as a legal or administrative achievement, and also as the consolidation of shared procedural knowledge capable of sustaining VE across contexts and personnel changes.

The workshop then ended with brief closing remarks and scheduling negotiations. Given upcoming holidays and prior commitments, the group tentatively agreed to meet again on April 12 for the last workshop, with the researcher-interventionist responsible for confirming details by email, sharing the minutes, and updating calendar invitations. Unlike the previous workshop, however, interactions during this session were less organically articulated, requiring more direct facilitation by the researcher, who frequently invited participants to contribute by addressing them individually. Several contextual factors shaped this dynamic, including partial attendance, delayed arrivals, early departures, and the absence of some usual contributors due to external constraints. Despite these conditions, the closing exchange made visible the researcher's recognition of Gabriel's sustained and substantive engagement throughout the session, as she directly acknowledged the analytical richness of his contributions and encouraged his continued participation in the next meeting.

Across the three *And Now?* workshops, participants collaboratively shared contributions, reflections, and potential solutions that served to support the initial modeling of a reconfigured VE activity system. In line with the principle of double stimulation, contradictions previously identified within the activity were deliberately reintroduced as a

second stimulus, confronting participants with concrete tensions while simultaneously inviting them to move beyond tension recognition. This intervention created conditions for deeper sense-making, as participants were encouraged to articulate possible ways forward rather than describing obstacles. The contradictions explored — spanning both macro (institutional, procedural, regulatory, and structural) and micro (pedagogical, interactional, and experiential) levels — highlighted the systemic nature of the challenges surrounding VE implementation at the institution. In this process, contradictions functioned as sources of disturbance as well as productive stimuli, organizing collective reflection around the recurring question “*And now?*”. This question marked a transition from diagnosis toward identifying directions that could lead to a new form of the activity, setting the stage for the final workshop, which would focus on consolidating insights and advancing the collective formulation of future-oriented solutions.

Also, the contradictions and mediations identified throughout the *And Now?* workshops resonate with findings from international research on the institutionalization of VE. Garcés and O’Dowd (2020), within the Erasmus+ KA3 EVALUATE project, examined how VE could be scaled from classroom-based initiatives to institutionally supported practices. Their study revealed challenges similar to those identified in the present research, including limited expertise in designing telecollaborative tasks, difficulties integrating VE into existing curricula, and the lack of formal institutional recognition and technical support.

Importantly, their findings emphasize that the sustainability of VE is closely tied to collective participation and the presence of institutional mechanisms that legitimize and support faculty initiatives, instead of relying solely on individual motivation. This perspective closely aligns with the modeling movement observed in the *And Now?* workshops, where participants consistently redirected proposed solutions toward the need for structured training, formal recognition, and regulatory frameworks. Together, these converging findings reinforce the understanding of VE as an activity system whose expansion depends on coordinated forms of institutional mediation, as opposed to an isolated pedagogical innovation.

To consolidate the modeling phase developed across the three *And Now?* workshops, Table 7 synthesizes the main contradictions discussed at both macro and micro levels, together with the mediating actions collaboratively proposed by participants. The figure does not present finalized solutions; instead, it makes visible the movement from problematization toward modeling, highlighting how contradictions functioned as stimuli that oriented collective reflection on possible reconfigurations of VE at the institution.

Table 7 – Contradictions identified in the “And Now?” workshops and proposed mediating actions

Level	Contradiction	Possible solutions / mediating actions discussed by the participants
Macro	(a) Absence of clear institutional regulation for VE	Development of formal institutional guidelines and regulations for VE; adoption of existing institutional models as references (e.g., UNESP resolution); integration of VE into existing institutional language and internationalization policies.
Macro	(b) Bureaucracy – lack of clarity in administrative procedures and institutional pathways for proposing and implementing VE	Organization and transparency of procedures already supported by ECI; formalization and sharing of existing institutional workflows.
Macro	(c) Curriculum rigidity hindering the integration of VE into courses	Use of existing pedagogical margins — teaching methodologies can be made more flexible even when the formal curriculum remains rigid (VE as a voluntary extracurricular activity; VE integrated into the course without curricular changes; VE as an outreach course; transformation of pedagogical practices).
Macro	(d) Absence of institutional recognition of VE — in the curriculum (for both faculty and students) and in faculty career progression	Inclusion of VE in existing evaluation criteria (e.g., graduate reports, CAPES/Sucupira documentation, calls such as PIBIC); recognition of the additional teaching workload involved in VE; recognition of courses with VE components in students’ academic records.
Macro	(e) Lack of funding mechanisms for VE initiatives	Reconfiguration of the concept of funding beyond direct financial resources — adjustment of workload and scoring in institutional calls as forms of incentive; investment in shared technological infrastructure; institutional participation in free international networks.
Macro	(f) Level of institutional commitment — particularly regarding management’s strategic understanding of VE	Creation of formal facilitative guidance mechanisms (norms, procedures, and inclusion of VE in internationalization and language policies for sustainability); parallel process of cultural-cognitive awareness-raising among faculty, students, and academic units regarding the strategic value of VE — without relying on top-down mandates.
Macro	(g+h) Difficulty in identifying partnerships and in the operational implementation of VE	Support by ECI as an already established point of reference; development of institutional documentation with practical guidelines on how to initiate and operationalize VE projects.
Macro	(i) Access to technology	Recognized contradiction — anticipated in discussions on funding and infrastructure. No specific solutions were proposed beyond the investment in infrastructure already mentioned in (e).
Micro	(a) Limited knowledge of VE — concept, associated methodologies, and appropriate pedagogical strategies	Provision of continuing professional development for faculty; improvement of internal communication using more accessible language about what VE is; creation of an institutional repository of good practices and procedures, with guidelines on how to plan icebreakers, structure interaction, and support participation for instance.

Micro	(b.1) Faculty language barriers — insecurity, perceived inadequacy (“inferiority complex”), and resistance to interacting or teaching in a foreign language due to the perceived need for ideal fluency	Resignification of communicative competence (recognition that linguistic competence does not need to be perfect for VE to be viable); expansion of formative opportunities for faculty; use of ELF; use of translanguaging practices; use of diverse communicative strategies such as slides in different languages, etc.
Micro	(b.2) Student language barriers — unequal participation and communicative insecurity in intercultural interactions	Reorganization of groups with more fluent students taking on the role of spokespersons or facilitators; promotion of peer collaboration as a strategy to mediate communicative anxiety; creation of supportive environments to foster bonds, collaboration, and a sense of belonging.
Micro	(c+d+f) Time for collaboration and joint planning; incompatibility of schedules and time zones; access to technology	These contradictions were validated as deriving from unresolved macro-level tensions — particularly the absence of clear institutional regulation for VE (a), curriculum rigidity (c), institutional recognition (d), and funding (e). The group concluded that mitigating the corresponding macro-level contradictions would tend to alleviate these tensions. No additional specific solutions were proposed.
Micro	(e) Difficulties in adapting to digital tools and platforms	Creation of conditions for gradual engagement with digital tools; pedagogical support and training for the use of available technologies — including collaborative platforms, translation tools, and AI resources; recognition that institutional investment in platforms does not automatically translate into pedagogical use without adequate support.
Micro	(g+h) Student shyness in intercultural contexts; difficulties in understanding and producing final tasks	Careful pedagogical sequencing from the outset of VE; use of asynchronous icebreakers as an alternative that preserves class time; clear explanation of objectives and expected outputs; collaborative tasks as mediating spaces that promote progressive engagement — collaboration and shared responsibility were identified as means to overcome shyness over the course of the process.

Source: The author (2026).

It is within this context that the *Last but not least* workshop unfolded.

5.2.5 *Last but not Least*

The final workshop of this formative intervention, entitled *Last but Not Least*, took place on April 12, 2024, and brought together the researcher-interventionist, two external stakeholders, a faculty and a managerial member, and one student-observer. As the closing session of the CL process, this meeting was explicitly framed as the tenth workshop following the initial onboarding session, thus marking the eleventh collective encounter of the intervention. The title was intentionally chosen to signal that, although it concluded the

sequence of workshops, this session was not conceived as less significant than the previous ones, but rather as a moment of synthesis, consolidation, and reflective closure.

It began with welcoming remarks and an explanation of the agenda for the day. Given the position of this workshop within the intervention trajectory, the researcher-interventionist proposed a broader retrospective than usual. Instead of revisiting only the immediately preceding meeting, participants were invited to look back at the entire process undertaken since the beginning of the CL. To support this retrospective movement, a short video compilation was presented, visually summarizing key moments, concepts, and phases of the intervention, accompanied by keywords representing each stage of the process.

Following the video, the researcher revisited and systematized the main analytical outputs generated in the previous workshops. Particular attention was given to the macro-level contradictions discussed in the workshops *And Now?* Part 1 and 2 — related to institutional recognition, curriculum flexibility, funding, regulatory frameworks, and technological resources — and to the micro-level contradictions explored in *And Now?* Part 3, which focused on the concrete development of VE activities. These included issues related to knowledge of VE, internal communication and dissemination, technological adaptation, linguistic insecurity, student participation, and the need for procedural guidance, such as ice-breaker activities and shared repertoires of good practices.

Finally, before moving forward to the concluding phases of the session, the researcher explicitly restated the central objective of the doctoral study: to collaboratively construct a locally meaningful and formalized understanding of VE at the State University of Maringá, capable of informing both the development of VE initiatives and the broader process of IaH. By revisiting the methodological foundations of the CL and situating the group within the third phase of the Expansive Learning Cycle — modeling a new form of the activity — the session positioned itself as a key moment for articulating insights, consolidating emergent solutions, and preparing the ground for the closure of the intervention process.

In contrast to earlier meetings focused on unpacking contradictions, this final workshop was structured almost entirely around the open-ended prompt “And now?”, explicitly positioned by the researcher-interventionist as a closing question, inviting participants to pause, reflect, and respond.

Gabriel’s immediate response reframed “*And now?*” as a question about consolidation and diffusion. He shifted the focus away from proposing a single intervention and toward examining whether a localized concept and model had already been achieved, arguing that, if so, these should be socialized through the thesis itself and through the broader circulation of

collectively produced knowledge. Daniel converged with this direction by proposing the materialization of outcomes into a manual/repository of good practices, emphasizing transferability (with contextual adaptations) beyond UEM.

Rafael introduced a productive tension by naming what was still missing: in his view, the group had reached a diagnostic stage, but had not yet arrived at a concrete proposition of change. This comment sharpened the function of “*And now?*” by clarifying the boundary between analysis and transformation. In response, the researcher explicitly gathered the emerging proposals under a shared direction — a material form that could be disseminated — and then invited participants to assess feasibility. Daniel extended the artifact logic by suggesting a MOOC, aligning the “next step” with the micro-level contradiction previously discussed (limited knowledge of VE), while also implicitly addressing scalability and access.

André’s intervention consolidated the closing synthesis by legitimizing diagnosis itself as an outcome (“the diagnosis gives a strong result”) while also positioning the group to decide whether and how to move toward institutional uptake.

Excerpt 59

André: [...] *But I realize that with what you’ve done so far, we’ve raised, right, a series of guidelines, of strengths, of possibilities that were achieved, right? [...] So, you bring to us a discussion, uh, that hadn’t been, right, really unpacked. So, I believe that this is also part of your result, right, as, uh, part of this research process.*

This framing supported a key closure move: the researcher did not “solve” the activity in-session, but handed the future orientation back to stakeholders, proposing follow-up reflection and a concise email synthesis. The discussion then shifted from exploratory modeling to an institutional pathway: André suggested formally forwarding results to the CP Inter (a committee to discuss internationalization at UEM), and Rafael endorsed this, explicitly reinterpreting the outputs as shareable beyond the thesis and proposing that the researcher present them to the committee. This final exchange effectively transformed “*And now?*” into an actionable trajectory: from collective reflection → artifact/document → institutional forum → decision-making (?).

The final moments of the workshop consolidated the expansive learning trajectory initiated throughout the intervention. Gabriel’s closing remarks played a particularly significant role in articulating the coherence of the process: he explicitly recognized how the discussions had generated interconnected insights at both macro and micro levels — ranging from institutional policies, governance structures, and regulatory pathways to pedagogical

procedures, classroom dynamics, and student participation. By framing these outcomes within a “multi-level” perspective, Gabriel underscored the methodological strength of the CL in making visible how localized pedagogical practices are inseparable from broader institutional conditions. His reflection also reaffirmed the formative nature of the intervention, emphasizing that the process had not only produced a shared diagnostic and preliminary model but had also strengthened participants’ analytical capacity to envision structural transformation. The session concluded with mutual acknowledgments and an explicit orientation toward future circulation of the results, reinforcing that the intervention’s significance extended beyond the workshops themselves and into potential institutional decision-making arenas.

All considered, the three *And Now* workshops constituted a pivotal moment in the formative intervention, in which theoretical constructs from CHAT were actively mobilized to interrogate practice and to orient collective sense-making. Instead of aiming at immediate resolution, the discussions foregrounded contradictions as productive tensions, enabling participants to collectively articulate challenges, and envision mediating actions, modeling alternative configurations for VE at the institutional level. In this sense, the workshops did not conclude the interventional process but deliberately opened it, creating the analytical and conceptual groundwork upon which the subsequent insights and results are built. The following section, therefore, does not present outcomes as detached findings, but as developments emerging from this historically situated, dialogical, and theoretically informed process.

Against this backdrop, Chapter 6 turns to the discussion of the results derived from the formative intervention. The chapter returns to the objectives of this study with the purpose of answering them and examines how the understandings of VE articulated throughout the CL were consolidated. The discussion thus foregrounds the results as situated insights, grounded in collective activity and reflective dialogue, and considers their implications for the development of VE and IaH within the institutional context.

6 FROM INTERVENTION TO INTERPRETATION: RESULTS OF THE CL

This chapter presents and discusses the results of the CL, understood not as finalized outcomes or isolated findings, but as interpretative results that emerged from a process of collective reflection during the intervention and from subsequent analytical work. In line with a cultural-historical perspective, interpretative outcomes are approached as historically and socially mediated developments, produced in interaction and re-signified through analysis. The chapter therefore does not aim to reconstruct the chronological sequence of the CL sessions, nor to repeat the analytical procedures already detailed in the methodology chapter, but to articulate how meanings about VE were collectively produced, transformed, and expanded over the course of the intervention.

In order to do so, the chapter explicitly revisits the specific objectives of the study and examines how each of them was addressed across different moments of the CL and the post-intervention analysis. The first objective — to understand the current functioning and status of VE at the institution — is discussed by way of the collective reconstruction of the institutional history of VE, particularly drawing on the Historical Timeline used as mirror data, which enabled participants to situate individual experiences within a broader systemic configuration throughout the Perspectives sessions. The second objective — to reflect on locally developed VE practices — is addressed by examining the discussions that emerged mainly during the Confirmation and Assurance workshops, where pedagogical, linguistic, and organizational dimensions of VE were collectively scrutinized and re-signified. The third objective — to collaboratively design actions to support the advancement of IaH — is approached through the analysis of the And Now workshops, in which the explicit articulation of contradictions functioned as a second stimulus, orienting participants toward the modeling of possible future directions.

By organizing the results around these objectives, the chapter highlights how the CL operated as a space for collective learning and meaning-making, enabling participants to move from fragmented understandings of VE toward more integrated and situated conceptions of the activity. These jointly constructed understandings were identified through the analysis of participants' interactions during the sessions, with particular attention to how meanings were negotiated, reformulated, and expanded through language. The results are discussed in dialogue with the literature on IaH, VE, CHAT, CL, and Applied Linguistics, in order to situate the locally produced understandings within broader theoretical debates.

The first research objective — to understand the current functioning and status of VE at the institution — was addressed primarily by means of the collective reconstruction of the institutional trajectory of VE prior and during the CL. This understanding did not emerge from individual accounts taken in isolation, but from a shared analytical process supported by mediating artifacts, particularly the Historical Timeline.

In this collective reconstruction, VE came to be understood as an activity characterized by fragmentation, informality, and limited institutional anchoring. Participants recognized that, although VE initiatives had been developed over time, they largely depended on individual faculty initiatives, personal international networks, and localized arrangements. At the same time, the discussions also highlighted the role of the ECI as a recurring institutional actor in the development of VE. While VE has not been formalized through institutional regulations or curricular instruments, the ECI has consistently acted as a facilitator by announcing partnerships, intermediating contacts between local and international actors, and supporting the initial organization of VE initiatives.

This facilitative role was recognized by participants as an important form of institutional support, even though it operates via internal procedures and practices that are not fully formalized or regulated. The ECI's involvement follows relatively standardized processes, particularly in terms of communication and dissemination, which provide a degree of continuity and visibility to VE activities. At the same time, the absence of explicit regulations, curricular integration, workload recognition, and stable institutional instruments was repeatedly identified as a central feature shaping how VE currently operates at the institution. In this sense, the ECI emerged in the discussions as both a positive starting point and a potential anchor for future formalization efforts.

From an activity-theoretical perspective, this collective diagnosis pointed to a structural tension related to the absence of formalized rules governing VE. Instead of stemming from conflicting or competing regulations, the tensions experienced by participants were largely associated with the absence of formalized rules governing VE. This absence created a situation in which expectations, responsibilities, and forms of recognition remained ambiguous, generating uncertainty for those involved in planning and implementing VE activities. As participants articulated during the discussions, VE was simultaneously valued as a meaningful internationalization practice and constrained by the lack of institutional mechanisms capable of sustaining it over time.

The use of the Historical Timeline as mirror data played an important role in supporting collective reflection on the development of VE. By revisiting key moments and

initiatives over time, participants were able to situate their individual experiences within a broader institutional trajectory. This process allowed issues that had often been experienced as isolated or contingent — such as difficulties related to curricular flexibility, institutional recognition, or linguistic issues — to be discussed in relation to how VE has historically unfolded within the institution's internationalization efforts. By engaging in this collective examination, challenges that might have been previously perceived as localized and individual were recontextualized as part of a wider institutional configuration shaping VE.

From a post-intervention analytical perspective, the collective understanding produced during this phase can be interpreted as a shift in how the object of the VE activity was articulated and examined. Throughout the discussions, VE came to be approached less as a collection of individual initiatives and more as a historically mediated activity shaped by institutional conditions that extend beyond individual agency. This analytical reframing created the conditions for subsequent discussions oriented toward reflection on local practices and the modeling of future possibilities.

The second research objective — to reflect on locally developed VE practices — was addressed through collective discussions that emerged mainly during the Confirmation and Assurance workshops. In these sessions, participants revisited concrete experiences of VE from both faculty perspectives and the perspective of one student, creating a space in which pedagogical, linguistic, and organizational dimensions of VE could be examined and collectively re-signified. These reflections enabled participants to move from descriptive accounts of what had been done to more analytical considerations of how VE practices were being shaped by local conditions. These discussions resonate with research in VE and telecollaboration that emphasizes that the learning potential of online exchanges does not reside solely in the interaction itself, but in how such interaction is pedagogically framed, supported, and integrated into institutional contexts. Studies on telecollaboration have shown that engagement, reflection, and learning outcomes are strongly influenced by instructional design choices, topic selection, and the broader pedagogical and institutional arrangements in which exchanges are embedded (Gutiérrez-Santiuste; Ritacco-Real, 2023). One such pedagogical arrangement is pedagogical mentoring, which has been highlighted as a key dimension and refers to the strategies and techniques used by teachers to support students' learning during VE, particularly by guiding interaction and fostering reflection on linguistic, intercultural, and digital aspects of communication (O'Dowd; Sauro; Spector-Cohen, 2020).

Within this broader analytical movement, language and communication emerged as a central axis of reflection. These dimensions were discussed not only as practical concerns, but

as sites where participants' beliefs about VE became visible and open to collective negotiation. Concerns related to linguistic proficiency, participation, and confidence in VE interactions were recurrently raised by stakeholders, faculty and the student. Such concerns have also been documented in VE research, particularly in studies addressing the development of intercultural communicative competence through online exchanges. For O'Dowd and Dooly (2020), successful VE experiences depend less on homogeneous linguistic proficiency and more on sustained interaction, guided pedagogical design, and structured opportunities for reflection, especially in contexts marked by uneven linguistic repertoires.

Within the CL, language began to be re-signified as a pedagogically mediated dimension of VE, as opposed to an individual prerequisite for participation. This shift became visible in participants' exchanges, which reflected different yet complementary beliefs about the role of language in VE, with beliefs understood, following Barcelos (2004), as socially and discursively constructed, dynamic, and contextually situated forms of meaning-making.

As participants engaged in dialogue, their turn-taking revealed how these beliefs were articulated from distinct positionalities. While Marcelo foregrounded material constraints faced by students and faculty when teaching or interacting in English, Lucas situated linguistic challenges within broader national and structural conditions, such as limited opportunities for immersion in Brazil. Ana reframed the issue by emphasizing motivation and pedagogical strategies, including translanguaging practices and the use of bilingual or visual resources. Gabriel, in turn, connected linguistic barriers to cultural and affective dimensions, highlighting intercomprehension as a key element in international collaboration.

These perspectives did not converge into a single interpretation; rather, they interacted and expanded one another, illustrating how participants collectively reconstructed language in VE not as a fixed deficit or an exclusionary criterion, but as a complex and flexible dimension shaped by beliefs, pedagogical choices, and interactional conditions. In this sense, language was increasingly understood as something that can be designed for, supported, and mediated through strategies such as multimodal communication, structured tasks, visual scaffolding, flexible use of linguistic resources, and translanguaging (more information on translanguaging can be found in (Garcia, 2009; García; Lin, 2016).

From a CHAT perspective, these strategies can be understood as mediational artifacts that reshaped how participants engaged with one of the purposes of the VE activity — namely, the collaborative construction of meaningful international engagement. Importantly, participants acknowledged that linguistic challenges could not be treated as barriers to be fully resolved in advance. Instead, they recognized that such challenges need to be addressed

pedagogically and institutionally throughout the VE process, even in the absence of ideal linguistic conditions. This shift reflects a broader understanding that action in VE cannot be postponed until perfect proficiency is achieved, but must begin within existing constraints. Such a perspective aligns with approaches to English as a lingua franca (ELF), particularly those that emphasize the development of communicative competence through interaction, highlighting how effective communication emerges from the negotiation of meaning, the flexible and creative use of linguistic resources, and the achievement of communicative effectiveness (Kohn, 2021). In the author's view, VE contexts constitute privileged spaces for the development of ELF communication, as they may create opportunities for participants to engage in authentic interaction and develop strategies for communicating across diverse linguistic repertoires (Kohn, 2021).

A related view is presented in Salomão's (2020) analysis of VE interactions at UNESP, which shows that effective communication in contexts involving ELF depends less on native-like proficiency and more on how activities are designed, facilitated, and sequenced. Notably, some of the strategies identified in that study — such as the use of multimodal communication, translation tools, structured interaction, and the gradual engagement of students with peers — echo the pedagogical approaches discussed during the CL workshops. These findings align with broader discussions on the challenges posed by foreign language use in IaH and VE contexts, which highlight how linguistic difficulties related to proficiency can affect participation and interaction, while also pointing to the need for pedagogical and institutional actions to address them throughout the exchange process (Sataka, 2025). In both cases, such strategies are believed to play a central role in fostering participation and inclusion in VE environments, particularly when linguistic repertoires are uneven and ideal proficiency conditions are not present.

An important implication of this re-signification of language concerns the role of applied linguistics within institutional internationalization processes. As language emerged as a central mediating dimension of VE design, interaction, and participation, the expertise of applied linguistics professionals became particularly visible in the CL discussions. The experiences at the ECI, especially from the perspectives of Ana and the researcher, illustrate how internationalization work frequently intersects with linguistic and communicative issues, requiring informed decisions about language use, mediation strategies, and activity design.

In this context, applied linguistics extends beyond its traditional association with language teaching or proficiency development, operating as a facilitative domain that contributes theoretical and methodological insights into how communication, interaction, and

participation can be organized in internationalized educational settings. This role aligns with Salomão's (2020) argument that applied linguistics professionals play a key role in supporting IaH initiatives by contributing language-related decisions and fostering reflective approaches to communication in internationalization practices. This broader perspective resonates with discussions on the convergence between linguistic studies and internationalization, which highlight the expanding professional roles of language specialists within higher education and their growing involvement in institutional policies and practices (Chagas, 2023). In this sense, language-related sectors are understood as important actors in the design and implementation of language policies and planning processes that support internationalization efforts within institutions (Gomes; Santos, 2023).

Beyond language itself, the reflections also revealed how local VE practices were shaped by pedagogical beliefs about interaction, collaboration, and student engagement. This became particularly visible in participants' contrasting experiences with initial interactional design choices. Rafael's testimony, for instance, revealed that the absence of an icebreaker may have contributed to shyness and difficulties his students encountered in engaging with others. According to him, had he been familiar with and applied icebreakers, these activities might have helped mitigate their initial discomfort. By contrast, Mari's account highlighted the positive impact of icebreakers, describing them as an important step that paved the way for more effective participation and facilitated interaction among students during the VE project she experienced. Taken together, these accounts foregrounded the role of early pedagogical mediation, leading participants to discuss the importance of creating conditions that foster confidence, reduce anxiety, and support gradual participation, especially in the initial stages of VE projects.

These reflections were further consolidated through the identification of specific pedagogical practices that support participation. Practices such as the use of the aforementioned icebreakers, structured interactional tasks, and peer support were identified as significant mediational means that facilitated participation and sustained interaction over time. These pedagogical choices were recognized as central to the success of VE activities, especially in contexts marked by linguistic and institutional asymmetries. This understanding aligns with research on VE and computer-mediated communication that highlights the dynamic relationship between social presence and participants' initial anxiety and communicative tensions in virtual groups (Nissen; Cavalari; Aranha, 2025). Their study shows that early stages of VE are often marked by uncertainty and interactional hesitation, while social presence emerges progressively through sustained interaction. In this context,

pedagogical design — including structured tasks and opportunities for collaboration — plays a key role in supporting engagement and fostering continued participation over time.

Within this line of reasoning, participants' discussions of icebreakers as an integral part of VE design are also consistent with findings reported by Clear; Daniels (2001), who demonstrate that cyber-icebreaker tasks can contribute to the effectiveness of virtual groups by supporting early social communication, trust-building, and the development of a shared sense of purpose. Their study shows that icebreakers function as more than informal activities; they operate as design mechanisms that facilitate the transition from initial social interaction to task-oriented collaboration in distributed groups.

Ice-breakers can be understood as pedagogical tools that could mediate participation by reducing initial anxiety, legitimizing partial participation, and enabling participants to gradually engage with both the task and their partners. This interpretation is based on the concept of social presence as developed within the Community of Inquiry framework. Garrison (2007, p. 63) defines social presence as “the ability to project one’s self and establish personal and purposeful relationships,” emphasizing that participation in online environments depends on participants’ capacity to perceive one another as socially present and engaged in a shared enterprise.

In this framework, social presence is not limited to socio-emotional interaction, but is understood as a condition that must progressively support purposeful and goal-oriented communication. Garrison (2007) argues that, while the establishment of interpersonal connections is essential in the early stages of online interaction, social presence must evolve toward group cohesion organized around common purposes and inquiry. From this analytical standpoint, the emphasis placed by participants on icebreakers during the CL can be interpreted as a pedagogical strategy aimed at creating the initial conditions for social presence, enabling participants to project themselves into the interaction and to develop a sense of security that supports subsequent engagement in collaborative and task-focused activities within VE.

From a post-intervention view, the discussions in the Confirmation and Assurance workshops can be interpreted as contributing to a locally grounded understanding of VE practices. VE emerged as a mediated and adaptive activity that does not need to rely exclusively on high levels of linguistic proficiency, but on the deliberate orchestration of communicative, pedagogical, and affective conditions that enable participation. In other words, the CL enabled participants to collectively articulate a conception of VE in which language, affect, and pedagogy are understood as connected dimensions.

The third research objective — to collaboratively design actions capable of strengthening VE as part of the institution's IaH process — was addressed primarily during the And Now workshops. At this stage of the CL, the collective understanding previously constructed regarding the functioning of VE and the re-signification of local practices served as a basis for a more explicit analytical engagement with contradictions. In line with CHAT, contradictions were not treated as obstacles to be eliminated, but as historically accumulated tensions that could orient collective learning and transformation (Engeström, 1987; Engeström; Sannino, 2011).

During the And Now workshops, the contradictions systematized in earlier phases of the CL were reintroduced to participants, functioning as a second stimulus in the sense proposed by Vygotsky and later operationalized within the CL methodology (Engeström, 2007; Sannino, 2015). This second stimulus explicitly oriented the discussions toward envisioning possible future configurations of VE at the institution. Participants were invited to reflect on how the tensions identified constrained current practices while simultaneously revealing possibilities for change.

Contradictions within the activity system were primarily located in the rules component and can be understood as primary contradictions, as they stemmed from the absence of specific internal legislation to formalize VE practices. VE was not integrated into the curriculum, accounted for in faculty workload, or recognized within the faculty career plan, among other aspects. This absence of regulatory frameworks meant that responsibilities, procedures, and institutional endorsement remained undefined, leading to a condition in which VE initiatives relied largely on individual initiative and informal negotiations. These primary contradictions generated cascading secondary tensions, particularly in the relationships between subjects and rules, as faculty members navigated divergent yet complementary interpretations of curricular flexibility, funding priorities, and institutional commitment. Language barriers were also highlighted, though some faculty members expressed optimism, viewing these challenges as opportunities to motivate other teachers and students to engage in communication with international peers and to see these barriers as incentives to learn foreign languages rather than as obstacles to VE activities.

Technological issues were also raised, both in terms of inadequate or insufficient equipment and the need for improved pedagogical practices within the digital environment. Challenges related to technological access and connectivity extended beyond the boundaries of the VE activity system - understood as quaternary contradictions - originating in neighboring systems such as institutional infrastructure and broader socio-digital conditions.

Taken together, the configuration of primary, secondary, and quaternary contradictions delineates the structural conditions under which VE is currently developing at the institution. Distinguishing between these levels of tension clarifies both the depth of the challenges identified and the scope of transformation that can be realistically pursued. While primary contradictions point to the need for internal normative reorganization, secondary tensions reveal relational misalignments across components of the activity system, and quaternary contradictions signal dependencies on neighboring systems that exceed the immediate boundaries of VE.

In this broader regional context, these findings reflect similar patterns identified by Ramírez (2022) when mapping VE practices in Latin America. In the study, technological instability, limited institutional investment in digital infrastructure, and the absence of formal regulatory frameworks were identified as recurring barriers to VE implementation. Similarly, the need for faculty development in online pedagogies and clearer institutional recognition mechanisms emerged as structural conditions for sustainability.

Within the CL process itself, however, the use of double stimulation was central to shifting the focus of the discussions from problem description to exploratory modeling. As Engeström (2015) argues, expansive learning processes are characterized by cycles in which contradictions provoke questioning, analysis, and the emergence of new forms of activity. In the CL, this movement became visible as participants began to articulate ideas for reorganizing VE in relation to curricular structures, institutional support mechanisms, and the role of different actors involved in IaH. These ideas did not converge into finalized plans or prescriptive solutions, but took the form of tentative models and directions that reflected an expanded understanding of what VE could become under different institutional arrangements.

From a CHAT perspective, this phase can be interpreted as a reorientation of the object of the VE activity. Building on the collective analyses developed earlier, VE began to be conceptualized less as a set of isolated initiatives or individual projects and more as an activity intentionally aligned with broader IaH goals. This reorientation corroborates discussions in the internationalization literature that conceptualize IaH as an intentional and curriculum-oriented process, aimed at integrating international and intercultural dimensions into the formal learning experience of all students (Beelen; Jones, 2015). In this sense, the modeling discussions in the CL contributed to situating VE within a more integrated vision of internationalization at the institution.

The collective engagement with contradictions also revealed how institutional change is mediated by the interplay between agency and structure. Participants acknowledged that

many of the constraints affecting VE were beyond the control of individual faculty members or stakeholders, yet the CL created a space in which collective agency could be exercised through shared analysis and future-oriented thinking. This resonates with Sannino's (2015) discussion of double stimulation as a principle for fostering collective agency in formative interventions. Such interventions create conditions for participants to collectively analyze their activity in contexts marked by historical tensions, expanding their capacity to envision alternative forms of action that may be taken up in subsequent institutional arenas.

From a post-intervention analytical perspective, the outcomes of the And Now workshops and the Last, but not least session can be interpreted as an expansion of the ZPD. The CL enabled participants to collectively articulate possibilities for VE and IaH that exceeded the limits of existing practices, even if these possibilities could not yet be fully realized. This expansion was evidenced in the way participants moved from expressing individual concerns to discussing systemic arrangements, responsibilities, and long-term orientations for VE within the institution.

In practical terms, as the intervention unfolded, participants could articulate VE-related challenges in relation to broader institutional structures, including curricular organization and recognition mechanisms, for instance. This shift may suggest that the CL enabled participants to operate beyond the limits of their previous understandings, collectively exploring possibilities that were not yet part of established institutional practice. Participants acknowledged that the complexity of institutional change required sustained reflection, negotiation, and articulation across different arenas of decision-making. An example of such was the suggestion to forward the results of the collective thinking to the committee for internationalization practices at UEM (CP Inter). This orientation toward the future reflects a key characteristic of an expanded ZPD: the ability to envision transformations that exceed current constraints, even when their realization remains contingent on broader institutional processes.

In retrospect, the use of an online CL format in this study can be understood as a methodological choice that shaped both participation dynamics and the nature of interaction throughout the intervention. The online configuration proved advantageous in terms of flexibility, as it enabled participants to engage in the CL without the constraints associated with physical displacement. Given the institutional context and participants' professional commitments, this flexibility contributed to a more consistent level of involvement across sessions, suggesting that an onsite format could have posed additional constraints to participation.

At the level of subsequent analysis, the digital environment also afforded specific forms of mediation that supported the documentation and analysis of the intervention. The systematic use of video recordings, presentation slides, shared storage on Google Drive, detailed note-taking documents, and attendance tracking through Google Meet enabled comprehensive and organized data generation. These resources ensured that contributions, discussions, and artifacts produced during the sessions were systematically documented and remained accessible for further analytical work. In this sense, the online CL created favorable conditions for tracing interactional processes and revisiting moments of collective reflection, aligning with Karanasios et al. (2021), who emphasize the potential of online CLs for rich digital documentation of interactions.

At the same time, the online format introduced specific mediation dynamics that influenced interaction patterns. Certain forms of informal interaction commonly observed in face-to-face settings, such as spontaneous side conversations or small talk, were largely absent. While such moments may give rise to unanticipated reflections, their absence required alternative strategies to sustain engagement and ensure multivoiced participation. Within the CL, this was addressed through the active role of the researcher-interventionist, who deliberately invited participants to contribute by posing questions connected to their prior experiences and institutional roles, particularly during moments of reduced participation.

Overall, these strategies contributed to maintaining satisfactory levels of interaction and participation within the online environment. Although interaction unfolded differently from what might be expected in onsite CLs, the combination of digital mediation tools and active facilitation supported dialogical engagement and collective reflection.

An additional analytical insight concerns the interactional dynamics observed during the CL discussions and the ways participants positioned themselves in relation to one another. Interaction was not characterized solely by agreement or convergence; instead, different perspectives were articulated and progressively complemented one another throughout the sessions. This dynamic was particularly evident in the discussions related to language and bureaucratic arrangements during the Perspectives workshops, where participants built on each other's contributions without requiring direct intervention from the researcher-interventionist.

These exchanges illustrate how CHAT offers a productive framework for understanding the CL as a space for the joint construction of meaning. Participants did not seek to arrive at a single, unified interpretation of the issues under discussion. On the contrary, their perspectives interacted dialogically, allowing multiple viewpoints to coexist and inform

one another. The collaborative and dialogical nature of the CL also created conditions for participants to reflect upon and potentially reframe previously held assumptions regarding IaH, VE, and the role of foreign languages within these initiatives. Through this process, language in VE was collectively re-conceptualized as a multifaceted and situated challenge, shaped by pedagogical, institutional, and affective dimensions, and open to different forms of mediation and action, for instance.

At the outset, I approached the online CL primarily as an adaptation of the face-to-face format to a digital environment, seeking tools and platforms that could replicate key procedures of the intervention. Recording sessions through the videoconferencing platform and managing digital artefacts were initially conceived as practical solutions to sustain the established CL structure. Looking back at the intervention through the theoretical lens discussed earlier, it becomes possible to interpret the digital setting not only as a logistical adjustment, but as a reconfiguration of mediated activity (Siljebo, 2022). The persistent and retrievable nature of digital traces, as highlighted by Karanasios et al. (2021), created specific conditions for documentation, revisiting discussions, and sustaining collective reflection over time. From this perspective, the online CL can be understood as operating through a particular sociomaterial arrangement shaped by its own affordances and constraints, which shall be considered when interpreting results.

Beyond the specificities of the online configuration, several intersections between VE and the theoretical and methodological foundations of CHAT and the CL became visible. Both VE and CHAT-informed interventions emphasize mediation as a central element of learning and transformation, whether through tools, artifacts, or communicative strategies that shape participants' engagement with the activity. In the VE practices examined in this study, mediation occurred through pedagogical design choices, linguistic resources, digital tools, and interactional arrangements, which structured how participants related to one another and to the objectives of the exchange.

In addition, the collaborative orientation of VE resonates with key CHAT concepts, particularly the idea that learning and development are socially mediated processes. In the discussions examined in this study, VE came to be understood as an activity whose development depends on collective reflection, shared problematization, and coordinated action, especially in contexts marked by linguistic diversity and uneven institutional conditions.

The use of CHAT in combination with the CL methodology also provided a distinctive analytical lens for investigating internationalization in higher education, particularly in

relation to IaH and VE. Although CHAT has been widely applied in educational research — including in Brazilian studies focusing on children, adolescents, and teacher education — its mobilization to examine internationalization processes in higher education remains underexplored. By positioning internationalization as a historically and culturally mediated activity system, this study expands the scope of CHAT-based research and establishes an explicit dialogue with the state of the art discussed earlier in this thesis. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive accounts of initiatives or policy frameworks and foregrounds internationalization as a collective, processual, and institutionally embedded activity.

While the results discussed so far highlight the analytical and formative potential of the CL as an interventionist methodology for examining VE and IaH, they must also be interpreted in light of the concrete conditions under which the intervention was conducted. As is characteristic of formative and context-sensitive interventions, the CL unfolded within institutional, temporal, and organizational constraints that shaped both the process and its outcomes. Acknowledging these conditions does not diminish the value of the results presented; rather, it situates them historically and institutionally, clarifying the scope and limits of the intervention.

One limitation of the intervention concerns participant attendance, which was inconsistent across sessions. Participants occasionally missed meetings or attended only parts of the workshops, a factor that may be considered particularly relevant given the number of sessions required to advance toward the Modeling stage of the Expansive Learning Cycle. In response to this condition, the intervention was organized in a way that allowed participants' contributions to be incorporated based on the sessions they attended.

Despite these attendance challenges, the group was composed of key institutional stakeholders whose contributions proved to be insightful and central to the collective reflection on IaH and, more specifically, on VE practices. Their participation, even when intermittent, played a significant role in sustaining the analytical depth of the discussions and in advancing shared understandings of the activity under examination.

Another constraint relates to the temporal organization of the CL sessions. In some cases, meetings were separated by intervals longer than fifteen days due to participants' schedules, institutional demands, and end-of-year holidays. These gaps made it necessary to begin each session with a confirmation process, usually supported by video recaps, in order to ensure that participants were aligned with the developments of previous meetings. While this process required additional time at the beginning of sessions, it also functioned as a

mechanism for re-establishing continuity and supporting collective engagement in the ongoing analytical work.

From a post-intervention analytical standpoint, an additional limitation concerns the observation of participants' reactions during the CL sessions. The video recordings generated through Google Meet prioritize the speaker currently holding the floor, meaning that only one participant is visually foregrounded at a time. As a result, it was not possible to systematically observe non-verbal reactions, simultaneous responses, or interactional dynamics occurring outside the speaker's turn. Consequently, this stage of the analysis could not incorporate detailed observations of participants' visual reactions during others' contributions. Consideration of such aspects was therefore limited to the field notes and observational records produced by the researcher-interventionist during the intervention itself.

The results discussed throughout this chapter show how the CL functioned as a formative and analytical space for collectively examining VE as a locally situated activity. The intervention did not advance to the implementation phase of the Expansive Learning Cycle; however, it generated substantive outcomes at the level of collective understanding, conceptual reorientation, and future-oriented modeling. In this sense, the collective modeling achieved during the And Now workshops constitutes a significant result of the CL, as it made visible how participants re-conceptualized the object of the activity and articulated possible directions for its transformation within existing institutional conditions.

Across the analytical dimensions explored in this chapter, VE progressively shifted from being perceived as a broadly defined internationalization strategy to being understood as a situated institutional activity. This reorientation was informed by participants' collective examination of rules, mediational means, and persistent tensions shaping VE practices at the institution. Through this process, VE emerged as an activity shaped by local histories, organizational arrangements, and negotiated forms of action.

This perspective aligns with critical approaches to internationalization that argue that such processes are constructed in relation to the specific historical and structural conditions of each higher education system (Gacel; Ávila, 2008). In examining Latin American contexts marked by structural constraints — such as limited funding, institutional inequalities, and reduced participation in global research networks — Gacel and Ávila (2008) caution that the uncritical adoption of models shaped by Global North realities may deepen pre-existing asymmetries rather than mitigate them.

As discussed in Chapter Two, these concerns are embedded in broader critiques of the colonial dynamics underlying international knowledge production and circulation

(Castro-Gómez, 2007; Andreotti et al., 2015; Vavrus; Pekol, 2015), which call attention to imbalances in partnerships, epistemic hierarchies, and access to resources. In response to such tensions, scholars have advocated for forms of internationalization grounded in equity, reciprocity, and recognition of local context (Finardi, 2019; Martinez, 2017; Streck; Abba, 2018). From this standpoint, internationalization cannot be conceived as a homogeneous or hegemonic process, but must be reconfigured in accordance with institutional priorities and regional realities — an ethical principle underscored by Knight (2012).

At the institutional level, the findings also enter into dialogue with the myths and reductionist interpretations of internationalization and IaH examined in Chapter Two. In particular, they complicate the assumption that internationalization can be equated with symbolic partnerships, mobility alternatives, or the simple adoption of English as a medium of instruction (Knight, 2011; De Wit, 2011). When extended to VE as a form of IaH, such assumptions risk framing it as a technical adjustment or linguistic shift rather than as a structurally and pedagogically mediated activity.

The results then challenge the possible belief that international contact, in itself, guarantees intercultural transformation. As noted by Knight (2011) and De Wit (2011), the mere presence of international interaction does not automatically internationalize curricula or institutional culture. In the cases observed in this study, the depth of intercultural exchange depended on the pedagogical design of the activity, students' engagement, and the quality of mediation supporting the interaction. Episodes of limited participation or uneven engagement illustrated how international interaction alone does not necessarily lead to transformative learning.

Similarly, the linguistic tensions observed were not reduced to the adoption of English as a medium of instruction, but were articulated in terms of communicative strategies, confidence, and pedagogical mediation, in line with De Wit's (2011) critique of language-based reductionism. In combination, these findings indicate that both institutional consolidation and pedagogical intentionality are necessary conditions for sustaining VE as more than an episodic initiative.

This insight also highlights the central role of mediation in the development of VE. Language, pedagogical design, digital tools, and institutional arrangements functioned as key mediational dimensions through which participation, interaction, and collective reflection were enabled. Language came to be understood as a dimension to be pedagogically and institutionally addressed throughout the VE process, supporting a more inclusive and

process-oriented understanding of international engagement centered on design, facilitation, and collective responsibility.

From an institutional standpoint, the results point to an expansion of the capacity to collectively analyze and imagine VE-related actions, even in the absence of formalized policies or immediate implementation pathways. Although VE practices at the institution remain at an early stage of development, they were collectively recognized as meaningful and promising, particularly when situated within the broader landscape of internationalization efforts at comparable state universities. In this context, VE was viewed as a reference point for other higher education institutions in the state of Paraná. This positioning does not suggest a finished or exemplary model, but a locally grounded process that holds potential for further articulation and formalization.

The final workshop, *Last but Not Least*, introduced an additional dimension to the modeling process by explicitly framing the question “And now?” as a collective reflection on consolidation and future orientation. As participants revisited the analytical path constructed throughout the intervention, the emphasis shifted toward clarifying what had been achieved and how it could be further articulated within institutional structures. The recognition that the diagnostic phase itself constituted a significant outcome marked an important moment in the trajectory of the CL, as it foregrounded the expansion of collective analytical capacity as a substantive result of the intervention.

The discussion also translated the modeling efforts into possible pathways for institutional circulation, including the development of a repository of good practices, broader dissemination through the thesis, and the formal presentation of results to the university’s internationalization committee. This movement from reflective synthesis to proposals for artifact production and institutional dialogue is consistent with the modeling phase of the Expansive Learning Cycle, in which emerging conceptualizations begin to assume material and organizational form. Although implementation remained beyond the scope of the study, the articulation of these forward-oriented proposals indicates that the activity had generated conditions for continued institutional deliberation and potential transformation.

The results presented in this chapter demonstrate how the CL enabled a shift from fragmented and individualized understandings of VE toward a collectively constructed conception of the activity. By articulating historical reconstruction, the analysis of locally developed practices, and future-oriented modeling, the intervention generated an expanded understanding of VE. Although the intervention did not proceed to implementation, the modeling achieved constitutes a substantive outcome, as it clarified structural conditions,

pedagogical dimensions, and potential pathways for institutional alignment. The concluding section returns to these results in order to synthesize their broader theoretical, methodological, and institutional implications and to reflect on the contributions and limits of the study.

7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This thesis set out to collaboratively construct a locally situated and formalized understanding of VE at UEM, aligned with the development of IaH, through a formative intervention grounded in CHAT and operationalized via the online CL. The research sought to examine existing practices and to collectively rethink what VE means within the institutional, pedagogical, and strategic landscape of the university.

Throughout the intervention, participants collaboratively articulated VE as a structured academic practice embedded in the broader process of IaH, requiring coordination among institutional actors, formal recognition, pedagogical planning, and sustainable support mechanisms. This understanding repositioned VE from an isolated or occasional experience to a collective institutional responsibility linked to the university's internationalization strategy.

The three specific objectives guided this process in an expansive sequence. The first objective — to understand the current functioning and status of VE at the institution — was anchored in the use of mirror data, particularly the Historical Timeline, which functioned as a first stimulus. By revisiting significant events, initiatives, and turning points in the development of IaH and VE at UEM, participants were invited to situate their experiences within a broader historical trajectory. This shared reconstruction of the past enabled the emergence of multiple perspectives and made visible how current practices were shaped by institutional history.

The second objective — to reflect on locally developed VE practices — was addressed primarily during the Confirmation and Assurance workshops. In these sessions, participants revisited concrete experiences of VE from both faculty and student perspectives, creating a dialogical space in which pedagogical, linguistic, and organizational dimensions of VE were examined and collectively re-signified. From an analytical perspective, the findings suggest that VE practices at UEM are shaped by instructional design choices, linguistic demands, and institutional arrangements. This interpretation points to the ways in which VE operates within broader structural conditions of the university.

The third objective — to collaboratively design actions capable of strengthening VE within the institution's IaH process — was addressed during the And Now workshops, when previously identified contradictions were reintroduced to orient discussions toward future possibilities. Building on the shared understanding developed in earlier phases, participants articulated proposals aimed at strengthening institutional recognition, support structures, and

strategic alignment. This movement pointed toward a forward-looking institutional perspective, in which VE was envisioned as a more coordinated and formally supported dimension of IaH.

In light of these movements, the study contributes to the broader internationalization process at UEM by bringing together different institutional actors to collectively examine how internationalization has been understood and enacted. When creating conditions for dialogue among stakeholders directly involved in related initiatives, the research encouraged a more articulated reflection on institutional practices and priorities.

At the level of IaH, this thesis advances the field through a theoretically informed and collaboratively structured operationalization of IaH, articulated in dialogue with CHAT. The analysis of how internationally oriented initiatives take shape within concrete institutional contexts offers a more systematic understanding of IaH as a lived and organized process. Furthermore, by examining IaH within a Brazilian public university, the study contributes empirical and analytical insights from a Latin American context, enriching discussions that have been more frequently centered on European and North American cases.

With regard to VE as an object of study, this research offers an analytically anchored contribution when examining VE through the lens of CHAT. By situating VE within an activity system, the study identifies how its development is shaped by interrelated institutional elements and historically accumulated tensions. The analysis maps contradictions influencing its implementation and makes visible the mediational dimensions involved in its enactment, including language, institutional norms, digital tools, and policy frameworks. In addition, the documentation of collective modeling efforts provides insight into how VE can evolve through structured formative processes, expanding the understanding of its development beyond isolated individual design.

At the theoretical level, this thesis contributes by demonstrating the CHAT relevance as an analytical foundation for examining processes of VE and institutional internationalization. It further illustrates the applicability of the CL methodology within higher education settings, particularly in relation to structured internationalization initiatives. In extending the scope of CL beyond its more established domains of application, the study explores its potential in academic institutional contexts. The articulation of Internationalization, IaH, VE, CHAT, and CL results in a coherent theoretical-methodological configuration that enables the analysis of internationalization as a historically situated and collectively constructed process. Methodologically, this study advances research on formative interventions by implementing the CL within an institutional internationalization process

conducted entirely online. In addition, the implementation of the CL in a fully online format engages with ongoing discussions regarding the possibilities and constraints of online CLs, a dimension that remains comparatively underexplored in the literature.

The contributions outlined above also give rise to a set of implications that extend beyond the immediate research context. From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings suggest the importance of sustained faculty development in the design and implementation of VE initiatives, particularly in relation to instructional planning and integration into course structures. They also point to the relevance of institutional recognition for internationally oriented teaching practices, as well as the need for linguistic and communicative support mechanisms capable of promoting more equitable participation in digitally mediated exchanges.

At the institutional level, the results draw attention to the relevance of clearer policy frameworks capable of integrating VE into broader internationalization strategies. They also underscore the need for coordinated administrative and technological infrastructures that can provide continuity to such initiatives. The analysis further points to the importance of embedding VE within formal planning processes, strengthening its sustainability beyond individually driven efforts.

From a theoretical-methodological perspective, the study invites the examination of internationalization processes as dynamic and historically situated configurations, whose complexity becomes more visible when approached through activity-theoretical lenses. It also brings into focus the role of contradictions as productive tensions that illuminate developmental possibilities within institutional practices. Furthermore, the analysis highlights the importance of understanding VE within its specific historical and organizational conditions, recognizing that its meanings and trajectories are shaped by the contexts in which it unfolds.

While the study offers several contributions, its scope is necessarily bounded by certain limitations. The research was conducted within a single institutional context, which calls for caution in extending its implications beyond UEM. The intervention also unfolded within a defined temporal frame, which did not allow for longitudinal follow-up of the proposals articulated during the modeling phase. Moreover, the extent to which the envisioned transformations may materialize depends on the continued engagement of institutional actors beyond the duration of the research process.

These conditions also point to directions for further research. Future studies may explore how similar formative interventions unfold across different institutional contexts,

particularly in public universities with organizational structures comparable to those of UEM, such as other state universities. There is also scope for extending this line of inquiry to higher education institutions in other regions of the Global South, where comparable challenges related to internationalization, resource distribution, and institutional organization are present. In addition, further research may follow how the proposals articulated during the modeling phase evolve over time, how participation in VE shapes student experiences across different pedagogical and institutional configurations, or extend this approach to other dimensions of IaH.

Underlying the findings of this study is a central argument that this thesis seeks to advance: that VE, when approached through collaborative and context-sensitive processes grounded in CHAT, can be meaningfully understood and developed not as a fixed or externally defined pedagogical practice, but as a locally constructed, historically situated, and institutionally mediated activity — one whose development requires the deliberate creation of spaces in which institutional participants collectively examine the conditions that shape their practices, surface embedded contradictions, and envision new possibilities. The CL proved capable of generating precisely these conditions. In this sense, this study opens a set of questions and possibilities that extend beyond its immediate boundaries. The collective understanding of VE constructed through the intervention does not function as a final outcome, but as a foundation that may inform future institutional decisions, support the development of policies and structures, and offer reference points for other public universities facing similar challenges in their internationalization processes.

This research process also contributed to the development of my understanding of internationalization as a complex and evolving institutional practice. Engaging with the CL as both a methodological and analytical framework required sustained reflection on intervention, interpretation, and positioning within the study. From an Applied Linguistics perspective and professional engagement with language, this experience reinforced the centrality of linguistic and communicative dimensions in shaping participation, mediation, and meaning-making. It also foregrounded how language operates in the organization and transformation of institutional practices. In this sense, conducting this research went beyond transforming my understanding of VE and IaH: it reshaped my sense of what it means to generate knowledge about institutional change from within.

What this study may leave as its most enduring contribution is not a model to be replicated, but a methodological and conceptual orientation: that internationalization, in its most meaningful form, is built from within — through dialogue, through the examination of

tensions, and through the collective willingness to imagine something different from what already exists.

Figure 22 – Internationalization from within: collective construction, mediation, and historically situated practices represented through fragmented Matryoshka compositions



Source: Created by the author using DALL·E (OpenAI), May 2026

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A – Planning of Session 01 (*First Things First*), presented in English translation**FIRST THINGS FIRST**

SESSION 01			GOOGLE MEET, DATA 01/09/2023
NECESSARY ITEMS FOR PREPARATION			
MAIN PURPOSE OF THIS SESSION WITHIN THE EXPANSING LEARNING CYCLE Mirror data - Problem (What is VE?)			
Hour	Time (min)	TOPICS	TOOLS, MIRROR, STIMULUS
	0	1. Welcome to all – Recap (summary) of what was discussed in the Onboarding Session;	Virtual Environment Google Meet
	0	2. Presentation of the Historical Timeline - History of Internationalization (+ IaH + VE) UEM;	Google Slides
	0	3. Participants initial impressions regarding the historical overview;	<u>VE - Historical Timeline - Slides</u>
	0	4. Next steps + Check all participants have signed the Informed Consent Form;	
	0		
Participants task for next session			

APPENDIX B – English version of the minutes of Session 01 (*First Things First*), as shared with participants via email after the meeting

Hello!

Thank you for participating in the session held on Friday (01/09/23), *First things first*.

The summary is as follows:

1) Welcome and recap of session Onboarding (video presentation) [link available];

2) Presentation of the Expanding Learning Cycle;

We are in the first phase of the cycle (Questioning) - current state of the activity;

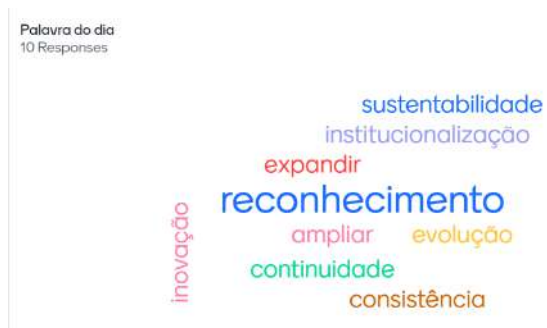
3) We presented the Timeline of VE at UEM + Historical Overview; here, we shared the main highlights from each administration since 2014 to build the history of VE at UEM.



4) On the Jamboard, participants shared information they considered relevant to add to the presented historical overview.



5) In the workshop's second interactive activity (Word of the Day), we created a word cloud using Mentimeter.



6) Final remarks:

Sign the Informed Consent Form, if not yet completed: [\[link available\]](#)

Next session: 15/09 at 16h.

See you in the next session!

Milena Alonso

APPENDIX C – Original Portuguese versions of participants’ excerpts cited in English in the analysis. Each excerpt is numbered (Excerpt 1, Excerpt 2, etc.) to correspond directly with the citations presented in the analysis.

Excerpt	Original Portuguese version
Excerpt 01	<i>É uma institucionalização, né? Do conceito. Então, e o fato de você ter um setor dedicado a isso auxilia bastante, tanto para divulgar o conceito quanto para integrar as pessoas que têm interesse nesse conceito. [...] Apesar de o tema do intercâmbio virtual ser relativamente recente, né? O fato de obter o selo BraVe, quer dizer para quem está de fora, que vocês já vinham desenvolvendo um trabalho dessa área e o selo assim, confirma que vocês têm desenvolvido um bom trabalho, então essa é a impressão que a gente tem.”</i>
Excerpt 02	<i>Então tinha um grupo de trabalho feito com a finalidade [é] de fazer o IntLab com a assessoria do conselho norte americano de educação, mas uma dessas propostas é, foi que tivesse continuidade, né? Foi feita uma comissão posterior, recentemente teve um outro edital reestruturando essa comissão, né? Então deu essa ideia de continuidade, né? Isso é um assunto sempre debatido, a questão da internacionalização. Então, continuidade permanente nesse sentido.</i>
Excerpt 03	<i>Ainda se tem aquela ideia de internacionalização muito ligada à mobilidade física tradicional. [...] Tem a questão das barreiras linguísticas, a baixa proficiência de muitos membros da comunidade em outros idiomas, a própria questão das políticas linguísticas, que muitas vezes você tem um documento, mas às vezes não é colocado em prática.</i>
Excerpt 04	<i>[...] a concepção de internacionalização da construção do modelo UEM, de uma universidade UEM internacional, onde esse tema da internacionalização em casa se torna uma necessidade vinculada à política da inclusão dos diferentes sujeitos...[...]. A gente sabe que uma internacionalização em casa não basta agregar atividades ou combiná-las dentro de uma agenda, mas é preciso que ela incida sobre o currículo, a construção curricular [...].</i>
Excerpt 05	<i>[...] as propostas que surgem depois do laboratório de internacionalização, eles vêm no sentido mesmo de uma adequação com a própria compreensão que lá fora se faz sobre a internacionalização. [...] apesar de termos ferramentas, apesar de termos disponibilidades, termos preparado para isso, a internacionalização em casa ainda tem muita coisa para ser rompida, muita coisa para ser desenvolvida. [...]</i>
Excerpt 06	<i>E acho que queria reforçar o que o Daniel disse antes. A gente tem percebido aqui no Escritório que a mobilidade presencial ainda está muito concentrada nas ciências exatas, nas tecnologias, porém, o intercâmbio virtual predomina nas ciências humanas.</i>
Excerpt 07	<i>[...] eu concordo com o que foi dito aqui, que existe sempre ainda a barreira linguística [...]. Então, assim, a língua pode ser um entrave e talvez ainda mais do que a língua seja a inibição por parte dos alunos. [...] Acho que essa é uma questão que precisa ser trabalhada antes da atividade. [...] É fundamental... uma mudança no currículo. [...] a gente precisa estar mais familiarizado com as ferramentas tecnológicas e com metodologias ativas. Uma coisa está dependendo da outra e ela se complementa.</i>
Excerpt 08	<i>A gente tem a dificuldade linguística, mas isso é um momento de exercício, para os alunos entenderem, aprenderem. A dificuldade não é só dos alunos brasileiros, os alunos alemães também têm alguns que têm muita dificuldade em inglês. Não é tão comum assim, mas tem. [...] a gente vai convidando os professores de fora, de outros países. Isso é muito legal também, porque o que acaba acontecendo é que o inglês não</i>

	<i>é o inglês americano, nem o inglês britânico, né, então é melhor, ele é mais fácil, mas ao mesmo tempo traz as dificuldades.</i>
Excerpt 09	<i>E eu acho que para mim o melhor é a continuidade. Então, como a gente está continuando esse processo, a gente vai aprendendo cada vez mais e desenvolvendo. [...] Mas foi muito legal, as experiências estão sendo ótimas. [...] Então, isso está sendo muito legal.</i>
Excerpt 10	<i>E eles só falam em língua espanhola e isso que eu achei bem interessante. Cada um correu atrás do prejuízo, sabe? Então, quem não dominava certo, a outra colega ajudava ela e assim iam se desenvolvendo.</i>
Excerpt 11	<i>Então, foi muito bom, eu creio que foi uma contribuição muito boa, e os meus alunos também estão bem felizes.</i>
Excerpt 12	<i>Então, uma das questões que eu queria colocar, é pensar uma representação visual na UEM para falar do COIL. [...] toda vez que for falar de COIL ou intercâmbio virtual, tem a imagem lá.</i>
Excerpt 13	<i>Há um desenvolvimento linguístico muito grande, por parte dos envolvidos, mas principalmente por parte dos meus alunos. [...] Para a parte dos alunos de lá, [...] eles começam a ver a linguagem de uma outra forma. [...]. Há um desenvolvimento tecnológico muito grande também. [...] Ele tem um papel ativo, um papel de liderança, um papel de trabalho em grupo, bem colaborativo.</i>
Excerpt 14	<i>As potencialidades acabam se sobressaindo. E é uma maneira mais inclusiva da gente pensar a internacionalização.</i>
Excerpt 15	<i>Então, assim, você não tem uma casa do professor, como você vê em várias outras universidades, que tem o local para o professor externo vir se hospedar, você não tinha uma central de apoio visitante, você não tinha espaço de convivência, você não tinha indicação no campus de onde está as coisas.</i>
Excerpt 16	<i>Porque um ponto que é falho é a questão da burocracia. Então, quando a gente estabelece novas normas, estabelece novos meios como a questão da internacionalização em casa, o COIL, você acaba criando novas regras que sobrepõe as regras existentes.</i>
Excerpt 17	<i>Sabe que eu esqueci de comentar uma coisa que é muito importante [...] Foi uma conquista, acho que para o setor e para as atividades de intercâmbio virtual.</i>
Excerpt 18	<i>Então, acho que foi aí que meus olhos se abriram para todas essas questões que envolvem, internacionalização, internacionalização em casa, questões linguísticas e tudo mais.</i>
Excerpt 19	<i>Foi algo assim para mim muito interessante, porque a gente usou plataformas, me confirma se eu estiver errado, profe, mas é uma plataforma exclusiva da Universidade deles, que foi o Voice Thread. Então, de primeira, assustou bastante a gente, demoramos um pouco para entender como que funcionava a plataforma</i>
Excerpt 20	<i>Mas essa pra mim foi uma barreira de comunicação porque é justamente uma diferença cultural. [...]. Então não foi uma tarefa tão fácil, inclusive não conseguimos contato com um dos integrantes do nosso grupo.</i>
Excerpt 21	<i>Ali, no Olhar Local, eu penso que também... penso que poderia ser acrescentado, Olhar Local e global, que é aquele slogan: UEM no mundo e o mundo na UEM, né?</i>
Excerpt 22	<i>Levar juntas áreas e os campos regionais, né? Acho que era o um desafio, que eu não sei se agora teve mudança recente nesse ponto.</i>

Excerpt 23	<i>E uma dificuldade é você ter professores que dêem aula em inglês. Muitos até fizeram diversas atividades internacionais, mas uma coisa é você ficar um tempo fora, outra coisa é você dar uma disciplina em inglês. [...] Os alunos muitas vezes têm receio de enfrentar porque aqui não tem condições, e acaba sendo efetivamente uma barreira. [...] É uma questão muito complicada, porque é algo que é difícil de resolver no curto prazo.</i>
Excerpt 24	<i>Tem mais escolas de inglês que nos próprios Estados Unidos, e é um dos países que têm menos parcela da população que fala inglês. Então assim, é algo que é uma questão cultural, né? É questão... que extrapola até o conceito da universidade, né?</i>
Excerpt 25	<i>Mas é uma política que vai surtir efeito apenas no longo prazo, né? (Ao considerar o Programa Paraná Fala Idiomas). [...] E nós não temos essa cultura de falar: Oh, no meu curso de pós-graduação vai ser ofertado x disciplinas em inglês, porque nós não temos o estrangeiro que vem para ter essa demanda e também não tem a política.</i>
Excerpt 26	<i>[...] às vezes ele não via tanta possibilidade para a língua estrangeira, mas pode ser um fator motivacional para ele, né? Às vezes a gente tem um nível de exigência ou perfeição que às vezes nunca está satisfeito. Por conta disso, a gente não se permite ter essas parcerias e às vezes essas parcerias podem abrir possibilidades, inclusive para aprimorar o linguístico, né?</i>
Excerpt 27	<i>Eu penso que essa barreira linguística tá muito ligada à barreira cultural, que muitas vezes o senso complexo de vira-lata ele fala mais alto e acaba impedindo a pessoa de fazer uma verdadeira aproximação do outro, para intercompreensão. [...] porque o intercâmbio virtual, ele vem para quebrar essas barreiras.</i>
Excerpt 28	<i>[...] mas gostaria de comentar que uma barreira linguística é acharmos que fazer um IV com o país de língua espanhola significa que há uma compreensão de língua em ambos os lados. [...] Ana, eu concordo com você, não pode ser uma barreira, mas não dá para achar que sem nenhum recurso vai funcionar, só porque entendemos um pouco mais o espanhol.</i>
Excerpt 29	<i>Eu acho que essa é a própria resistência institucional ao processo ser mais transparente e mais fluido. Muitas vezes essa burocracia vem a afastar a participação. [...] eu vejo no currículo, no currículo fechado, não flexível, que até impede essa abertura, falando do intercâmbio virtual, impede bastante.</i>
Excerpt 30	<i>Eu vejo aqui a burocracia também, no sentido de apoiar a questão do intercâmbio virtual. [...] precisaria ter uma resolução, algo, né, assim, para até dar um suporte maior para o que a gente está já fazendo.</i>
Excerpt 31	<i>Mas acho que, além do financiamento, a gente precisa pensar também outras maneiras de motivar o IV. [...] Às vezes não vai ser financeira, vai ser um reconhecimento.</i>
Excerpt 32	<i>Ah, fico lembrando das possibilidades, por exemplo, de ter estrutura de acolhida, ter estruturas de apoio, também que é sobre os editais e bolsas. [...] Pois se a gestão é comprometida, de reitoria, Pro-reitorias são comprometidas, acaba tornando a universidade um polo atrativo de investimentos e investimentos aos órgãos, tanto de pessoas como de próprio dinheiro e recursos financeiros e materiais. E também os recursos de força-não-paga que é o envolvimento da comunidade, que muitas vezes acaba fazendo mais.</i>
Excerpt 33	<i>[...] concordo com o Gabriel, mas é uma coisa que leva a outra, né? Se o gestor não tiver uma compreensão do significado disso, ele vai, talvez, duvidar, né, que isso seja uma alternativa, que isso seja importante [...].</i>
Excerpt 34	<i>André: [...] não tem um documento que chega e diz, agora vocês precisam fazer isso, porque isso é importante. Quando é que a gente aprende isso? Quando a gente tem a interlocução com outros sujeitos, como né? [...] Está sendo feito, talvez no futuro a</i>

	gente tenha, mas, por enquanto, é prática. Está sendo praticado isso antes de haver um documento que institucionalize e dê o regramento para internacionalização nessa modalidade. Milena: Essa prática pode vir a levar a uma legislação, né?
Excerpt 35	Milena, eu entendi esse primeiro item que menciona ferramentas tecnológicas e metodologias ativas como um potencial muito favorável ao intercâmbio, mas eu também percebo, sobretudo nas áreas tecnológicas que as metodologias ativas são ainda uma dificuldade, não é comum na prática docente, isso não é uma ferramenta conhecida, isso é um empecilho ao Intercâmbio Virtual nestas áreas. [...] porque nós, nas Tecnologias, nas Engenharias, nós não fomos preparados para a docência.
Excerpt 36	[...] eu colocaria talvez uma metodologia mais centrada no aluno também, né? [...] O aluno, ele desenvolve algumas atitudes, né, assim, de liderança, iniciativa, trabalho em grupo, aspectos mais, assim, voltados para a colaboração, porque tem que se engajar com grupos de alunos de outro contexto para desenvolver uma tarefa, né? [...] É, acho que, tipo, mais de agência, liderança, trabalho colaborativo...
Excerpt 37	Em relação a essa questão das Ciências Humanas como o maior, terreno mais fértil para intercâmbio virtual: isso é verdade, porque as áreas exatas e as demais biológicas, etc., têm mais facilidade da mobilidade física, né, que é isso que está um pouco colocado aí. [...] É uma realidade, é um campo fértil, né?
Excerpt 38	[...] De repente, o aluno que tem uma fluência maior, ele pode tomar iniciativa e ser o porta-voz, por exemplo, da equipe. [...] A gente pode ajudar slides ou qualquer outro material. De repente, trabalhar com alguma plataforma que a gente não consiga lidar com a tradução. Também trabalhar com essas ferramentas que possibilitam o entendimento.
Excerpt 39	[...] É, tem um aspecto que eu acho que não é exatamente, não está vinculado a essa pouca flexibilidade no currículo, mas que é uma característica da nossa universidade brasileira, que boa parte dos alunos, eles não têm uma dedicação exclusiva para a universidade.
Excerpt 40	Ana: Além dessa questão da flexibilidade, eu acho que outra questão que precisa e que é importante também é pensar no reconhecimento dessas atividades de Intercâmbio Virtual no currículo dos alunos. [...] Gabriel: Eu me lembrei daquela proposta que foi feita também via laboratório de melhor reconhecimento dos professores que fazem intercâmbio tanto na pontuação dos concursos para o professor, e como também na carreira, né?
Excerpt 41	Então, em relação à timidez, o que eu senti ali na minha interação com os colegas, foi que eram mais um... eram mais um... algo assim de não ligar a câmera, um... um voice thread que a gente gravou. Ele... alguns alunos gravaram só a voz, outros gravaram os seus respectivos rostos, alguns colocaram fotos, outros não. Então, eu acho que essa timidez toda foi algo pessoal, e tudo sendo uma interação muito nova.
Excerpt 42	Alguns têm dificuldade de acesso à internet, por exemplo, a conexão é meio ruim. Então a gente, na verdade, temos essa dificuldade. [...] ela falou, é... vou ter que fazer de casa, porque na universidade eu não posso nesse horário, porque nesse horário não tem energia [...].
Excerpt 43	Só que demanda tempo, né, só confirmar mesmo, tanto dos alunos quanto dos professores.
Excerpt 44	Rafael: Eu acho que, no meu caso, foi pouco conhecimento das possibilidades de IV, de ferramentas, de estratégias. Marcelo: [...] Por exemplo, a gente deu sorte de encontrar uma parceira que está empolgada e quer continuar o trabalho. Então a gente fez uma vez, fez uma segunda

	vez, estamos na terceira tentativa, não é tentativa, é fazendo, melhorando, tentando ajustar [...]. Ana: O desafio maior é o planejamento, é o tempo, é aprender sobre IV com o processo.
Excerpt 45	Então, acho que a falta da legislação, a falta de diretriz que colocou nessa situação me forçou a encontrar uma alternativa para viabilizar uma oportunidade significativa.
Excerpt 46	André: Eu vou colocar uma lenha nessa fogueira aí [...]. Uma vez que a gente tem o selo, nós estamos mais na vitrine ainda. Então, a gente precisa ser mais burocrático para poder dar conta de todos os trâmites. [...] Ana: Eu achei ótima, porque eu estava pensando em burocracia enquanto professora [...]. Tem que ter uma contrapartida, não é? [...] Tem que ter, tem que ter uma coordenação, tem que ter aquele número de intercâmbios virtuais realizados, tem que ter a parte de cursos ou eventos relacionados a intercâmbio virtual na instituição, tem que ter todo esse acompanhamento mesmo.
Excerpt 47	O currículo é pouco flexível, mas a metodologia do professor não precisa ser, né?
Excerpt 48	Comentar também que quem pode deixar esse currículo menos flexível são os próprios docentes que não vão conseguir se sentir confortáveis [...].
Excerpt 49	Essa foi uma sugestão já feita para a PPG, disseram que iam incorporar isso para o PIBIC 2024. Acho que a gente precisa... o ECI precisa voltar a checar se isso já foi incorporado, mas é uma intenção [...].
Excerpt 50	Para mim, a maior importância foi a prática, foi um mudar de ambiente e a curiosidade também dos alunos em relação a outra cultura, outras tradições, a se conhecer no geral.
Excerpt 51	Rafael: Então, eu acho que, é, na medida em que nós estamos tendo acesso a outras oportunidades de financiamento, a recursos, a gente tem conseguido, hã, manter essas associações e esses vínculos. Voltamos agora, por exemplo, a fazer parte do GCUB. [...] Ana: É o [Sunny COIL] também tem anuidade, a gente não entra, mas conseguimos outros meios, né? Outras redes- que não precisam do-ah, de adesão.
Excerpt 52	André: [...] acho que é muito importante a gente pensar uma forma de institucionalizar isso, né? Eh, de uma maneira em que, eh, um documento que possa garantir, eh, e resguardar o conhecimento que já foi produzido e-e transformar isso em políticas linguísticas, né, dentro daquilo que a gente já tem. [...] Bruno: [...] Ter uma resolução, ter uma lei, alguma coisa que deixasse, por exemplo, vem outro, eh, outra gestão e elimina isso, ou não quer isso.
Excerpt 53	Esse é o primeiro, o primeiro ponto. (mecanismos facilitadores). Um segundo ponto, é, que aí é, a gentealaria dum processo de institucionalização, é, dentro duma lógica cognitiva, né? Ah, cultural cognitiva, né? Que é uma sensibilização, é, dos docentes, né? E dos próprios alunos e dos departamentos, dos centros, é, da importância que o intercâmbio virtual tem pra universidade.
Excerpt 54	É, eu vejo assim, que a gente precisa melhorar a comunicação interna, né, principalmente dos docentes que ainda não conhecem sobre o que é, né, fazer um intercâmbio virtual, é, e talvez simplificar um pouco mais, né?
Excerpt 55	[...] Isso envolve, hã, a gente sempre falou isso, os planejamentos, a construção de uma cultura, é, de internacionalização no campus, nos campus, né? [...] É, eu vejo criando ambiente cultural positivo, né, que é, com eventos que criem vínculos, tipo festas, né?

	<i>Saraus e outros eventos que não sejam tão academicistas. [...] A barreira linguística quebra não é só com a formação em línguas, mas com a comunicação. A pessoa se sente motivada a comunicar, né?</i>
Excerpt 56	<i>Mas, de fato, é, eu notei que alguns colegas tiveram, sim, bastante vergonha de conversar. É, né, tive colegas também que, que chegou até mim e falou assim: "dá uma olhadinha pra ver se meu texto ficou bom?" Ou então, eu mesmo ir lá pedir pra minha colega "dá uma olhadinha aqui, vê se ficou ok?" Porque a gente tem esse receio mesmo, né?</i>
Excerpt 57	<i>Então, muitas vezes se implanta a plataforma, mas não se faz uma... Também vai cair naquela questão da qualificação. [...] . A gente fica ainda muito restrito, né? Tanto no uso dos aplicativos, como também nas possibilidades que ele, que eles, né?- As plataformas, é, potencializam.</i>
Excerpt 58	<i>É, acho que pra um curso, uma disciplina ligada à tecnologia, é, essa parte do icebreaker, esse warming up. Precisa ser feito, eu acho que, extraclasse. [...] Porque às vezes é muito conteúdo, uma carga horária mais baixa e, e, e é importante ter essa atividade, mas se ela tomar um tanto da aula, ela compromete o curso, entende? [...] Não tive na época nenhum aconselhamento pra dizer: "A porcentagem da, da carga horária pra esta atividade deve ser esta", alguma formulazinha assim, que facilitasse isso.</i>
Excerpt 59	<i>[...] Mas eu percebo que com o que você fez até agora, a gente levantou a, né, uma série de orientações, de virtudes, de possibilidades que foram alcançadas, né? [...] Então, você traz pra gente uma discussão, é, que não havia sido, né, esmiuçada. Então, acredito que isso também faz parte do teu resultado, né, enquanto, é, processo dessa pesquisa.</i>