

Dr. Bin Li ✍️ Apr 19, 2022 3 min read

# Virtual Exchange Project between Hong Kong and Turin

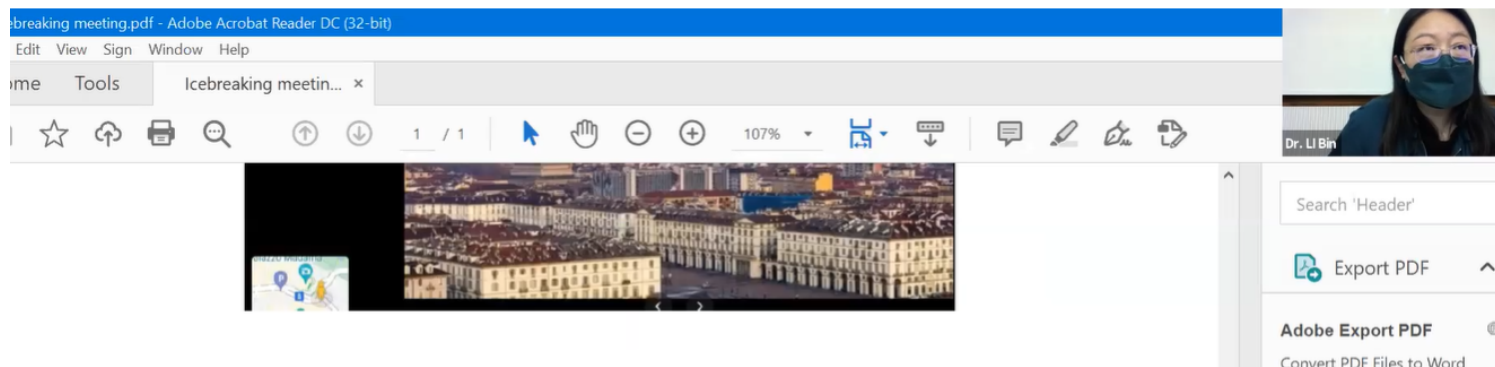
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Nurturing students' globalized perspectives is of utmost importance for tertiary education. However, global exchange and travel of students depend on financial and social conditions. In the prolonged global pandemic situation, international flights are periodically maintained and many exchange programs between institutions suspended. These have forced educators and practitioners to rethink how students can foster intercultural dialogue despite physical barriers. Dr. Bin Li, Associate Professor, Department of Linguistics and Translation at CityU, initiated a virtual exchange project which increases language and culture exchange between two international cities: Hong Kong and Turin. This initiative focused on linguistic and educational perspectives. She explained that, from a linguistic perspective, cross-culture communication could help students appreciate and embrace their own culture and language by seeing the similarities and variations between different cultures. On the other hand, not all CityU students are financially prepared for co/extra-curricular activities. So, to achieve equal access and participation in overseas exchange, she sees virtual exchange as a way to enable more students to enjoy this cross-cultural and cross-institutional collaboration from an educational perspective.

The project arises from joint effort with faculty and students from University of Turin, Italy. Before meeting with Turin students - the "pre-departure," CityU students were trained on fundamental icebreaking skills, linguistic landscape knowledge, and Turin culture to prepare well for the virtual activity. Due to the difference in class size, Dr. Li grouped four to five CityU students with one to two Turin students. During the virtual exchange, each group was required to collect photos from neighborhoods that demonstrate examples of linguistic landscape of the cities. Students then presented together the "linguistic and cultural evidence" in class, and CityU students submitted a "post-departure" assignment to discuss and evaluate linguistic relevance in the cities' landscapes shown in their collections.



In the post-course survey, Dr. Li's students expressed appreciation of the project and complimented the initiative. She noted that not just Hong Kong students enjoyed the program but also did Turin students according to professors at University of Turin. Some Turin students studied tourism, and they were enthusiastic about the occasion to practice their professional skills by promoting Turin culture and introducing beautiful places to international students. Dr. Li reflected that many logistic and technical problems were encountered, such as permission of ZOOM setting, internet stability, time differences, teaching schedule gap, and even class size. Eventually, students learned to compromise and collaborate with others. It was also an excellent opportunity to tackle issues and problems by themselves. Cross-cultural communication and challenges help students grow a global awareness and appreciate differences in geographic, cultural, linguistic, and even technical differences. It achieved fairness and equity in education.

When asked if any advice was given to someone who would like to undertake a similar strategy as hers, Dr. Li answered, "Try it, do it, embrace it!". She remarked, "People see the current situation as a challenge. I think it isn't just a challenge but also an opportunity to update and upgrade our understanding of modern higher education." The virtual exchange has first launched at the end of 2021. With the positive feedback from students, Dr. Li planned to continue her excellent practice of fostering technology-assisted cultural exchange after the COVID-19 pandemic. She excitedly shared the intention of extending the collaboration to more continents, such as partners from Canada, and the United States, and from Africa as well.

#### Latest update

Since our last interview, Dr. Li has continued the initiative's original design while incorporating on-site teaching. In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the virtual exchange has become an effective alternative for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural exchange and now complements regular teaching in the post-pandemic landscape. Dr. Li and her team have published a recent paper in *Lingua*, which reflects on the virtual exchange experience and showcases the initiative's pedagogical and research implications. This paper has been selected as Editor's Choice Articles, highlighting the significant impact of the Virtual Teaching and Learning Beyond the Classroom project. The strong partnerships and friendships formed through this virtual practice continue to shape the perception of teaching and learning, demonstrating the lasting impact on both educators and students.

Article published

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(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0024384123000153>)

