

Developing Intercultural Competence: A Pedagogical Experience through Virtual tool IVECA for promoting Cultural Exchange

Desarrollo de la Competencia Intercultural: Una experiencia Pedagógica a través de la Herramienta Virtual IVECA para la Promoción del Intercambio Cultural

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ABSTRACT

This paper intends to describe a pedagogical experience through Moodle platform: IVECA, where Physical Education Faculty freshmen students from the *Onda Bilingüe* program at *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia* and tenth graders at HOOVER High School from Alabama performed a three-month virtual program. First, it opens a questioning about what strategies teachers should seek for motivate students to learn meaningfully, in this concrete case a foreign language. Second, it shows a quick review of the theoretical framework to develop the concept of ICT tool IVECA and Intercultural Competence. Third, it describes the pedagogical experience stages, and as a final point, it closes with the results, product of a motivating experience.

KEY WORDS: Pedagogical Experience, Intercultural Competence, Virtual Platform IVECA.

RESUMEN

Este artículo tiene como propósito describir una experiencia pedagógica de aula a través de una plataforma Moodle IVECA, trabajada por estudiantes del programa *La Onda Bilingüe* de la facultad de Educación Física de la Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia y los estudiantes de décimo grado de la escuela HOOVER de Alabama, Estados Unidos. Primero abre con un cuestionamiento acerca de las estrategias que los maestros deben buscar para motivar a sus estudiantes a aprender de manera significativa, en este caso concreto aprendizaje de lengua extranjera. Segundo, muestra una revisión del marco teórico que desarrolla los conceptos de la Herramienta TIC IVECA y Competencia Intercultural. Tercero, describe los momentos de la experiencia pedagógica y cierra con los resultados producto de una experiencia motivadora.

PALBRAS CLAVE: Experiencia Pedagógica, Competencia Intercultural, Plataforma Virtual IVECA.

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INTRODUCTION

Create a communicative environment in the classroom where learners can have a comfortable atmosphere for expressing their ideas in a foreign language is a challenge. It becomes one of the toughest tasks teachers and students face when they are on basic levels of this process at University. The lack of motivation for learning English as foreign language has become an immeasurable issue among freshmen students, and it is not as easy as it can be perceived since they appear to perform an autonomous work during their years at University. Most of the time, students do not recognize the importance to learn any other language for professional purposes in their field, misplacing the opportunity to open doors to the world.

When students are in their process and perform some exercises where all skills are supposed to be used, the pragmatic competence is not fully achieved. Students are used to repeat information that they do not know, where, and when is going to be used because they do not feel motivated to give proper usage to language. However, teachers look for different methodologies to teach English, at times seem that those practices are not enough to engage the audience. It is very common to see teachers looking for suitable conditions and create the perfect atmosphere, but classrooms can be quite variable that results are in many occasions with low performances. An easy option is to encourage students to participate in exchange programs, but those have many compliances to follow, and a several amount of freshmen students do not really fulfil this process for financial, social, and cultural reasons.

Outside the classroom a globalized world is before students and they need to learn through experience how to develop communicative skills with the aim to explain their own context, feelings and behavior. Hence, some of the questions teachers should ask to themselves: How teachers can set those conditions? Are they willing to do it? Do they need lots of tools to encourage students? Do

they need to become the best teachers to succeed? What can teachers do to help strengthen students' capacities? Are teachers be able to lead processes for students who really understand their capacities and abilities? Is it possible in Colombia?

Consequently, it was imperative to combine experiences from the local context which freshman could share in foreign language by interacting in real situations. That is why at the interior of the Faculty of Physical Education from the National Pedagogical University in its program "*La Onda Bilingüe*" decided to participate in a three-month program which the development of the Intercultural Competence was the key to improve their communicative skills in foreign language, and a window pass to connect them to the world.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To interact in this globalized world where cultures are closer thanks to information placed on the Web, and knowledge is there for everyone who wants to access to it. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is the most meaningful tool that agrees to develop connections with Educational purposes by investigating pedagogical, technological and organizational factors (O'Neill, 2012).

- **Intercultural Competence²**

According to Fantini (1995) taken by (O'Neill, 2012), the intercultural Competence is the ability to understand other's values, ways of living and thinking within a constructive dialogue among

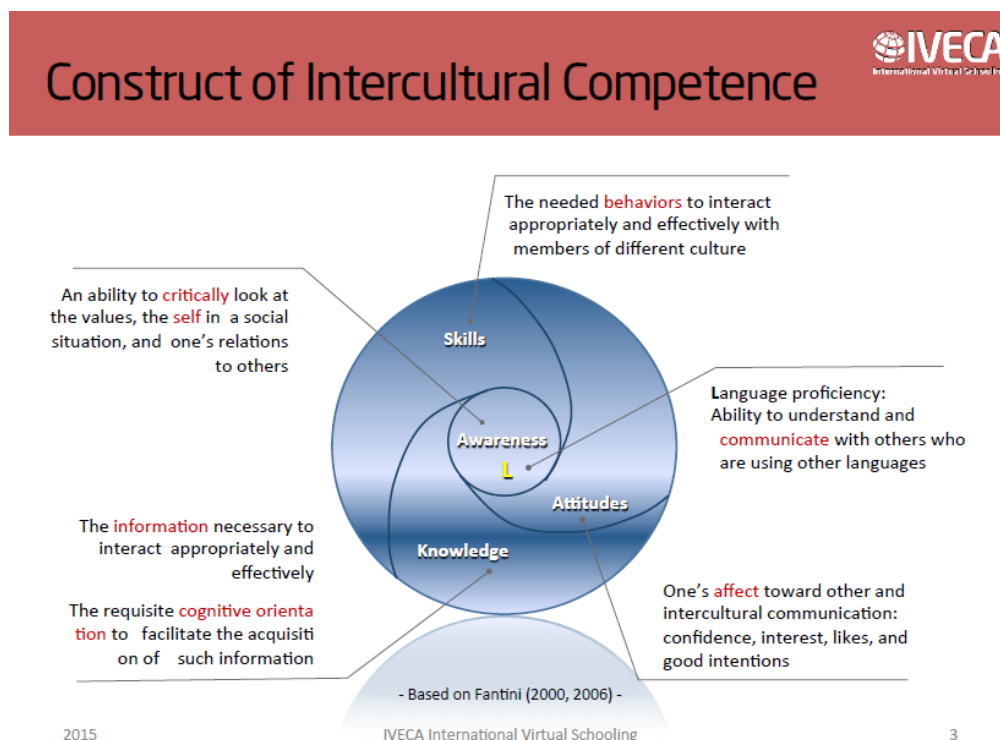
² Concept adapted by UNESCO to promote the Intercultural Competence. This recurrent question is precisely the *raison d'être* for the creation of the United Nations and UNESCO in particular, the latter tasked with a soft power mandate organically integrating the culture of peace, sustainable development and knowledge societies. (UNESCO, 2013)

different cultures, with the aim to foster communicative abilities creating mutual understanding (UNESCO, 2013). The construction of ICC³ is based on four dimensions according to (Fantini, 2010), and the role of dimensions on ICC is to motivate students to interact and learn by sharing.

- **Knowledge:** it refers to the acquisition of information to share and the reception of new ideas.
- **Attitude:** it is the disposition of the individual to express actions or emotions
- **Skills:** The capacity to perform action
- **Awareness:** Generate understanding from both parties.

Table

1:



Construct of ICC based on Fantini (2006) Taken from: O'Neill, E.J. (2008).

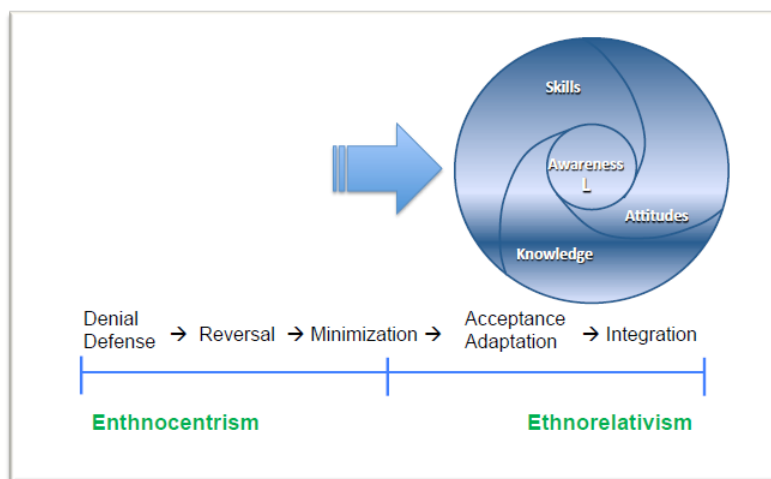
³ ICC stands for: Intercultural Competence

To achieve the construct of Intercultural Competence a model for success on the Moodle Platform IVECA was developed by Fantini (2010) quoted by (O'Neill, 2008) shows five phases during the ICC acquisition process for any subject during interaction.

- **Denial/Defense:** It refers to the idea of rejection when contrasting ideas, opinions, and cultural issues.
- **Reversal:** When the subject perceives the reality from outside position
- **Minimization:** The subject is willing to listen to others
- **Acceptance:** Be able to move to another perspective
- **Integration:** Reaching agreements understanding the other.

Table 2 Developmental Model of ICC (O'Neill, 2008)

Developmental Model of ICC



- Based on Fantini (2000) and Bennett et al. (1993; 2003) -
IVECA International Virtual Schooling

2015

5

- **IVECA International Virtual Schooling**

IVECA⁴ is a non-profit organization which raises from the idea of connecting worldwide classrooms through a Moodle platform in which students' experiences and lifestyles could be shared, according to their contexts and cultural practices in a peaceful virtual environment. IVECA International Virtual Schooling was born with the aim to integrate two cultures through an effective communication achieving Intercultural Competence.

It is a friendly platform designed with educational purposes. It works with all grades from Kindergarten up to Universities. IVECA has a room for each group classified by year of participation. It counts with all bibliographic material for students and teachers, chat rooms for

⁴ IVECA International Virtual Schooling is a Moodle platform result of Doctoral research on ICT "*Intercultural Competence Development: Implementing International Virtual Elementary Classroom Activities into Public Schools in the U.S. and Korea*" conducted by Dr. Eunhee J. O'Neill from University of Virginia, Charlottesville that promotes intercultural exchange in classrooms across the world, where students are able to talk about any global issue under peaceful and democratic virtual environment, using a *lingua franca* (English).

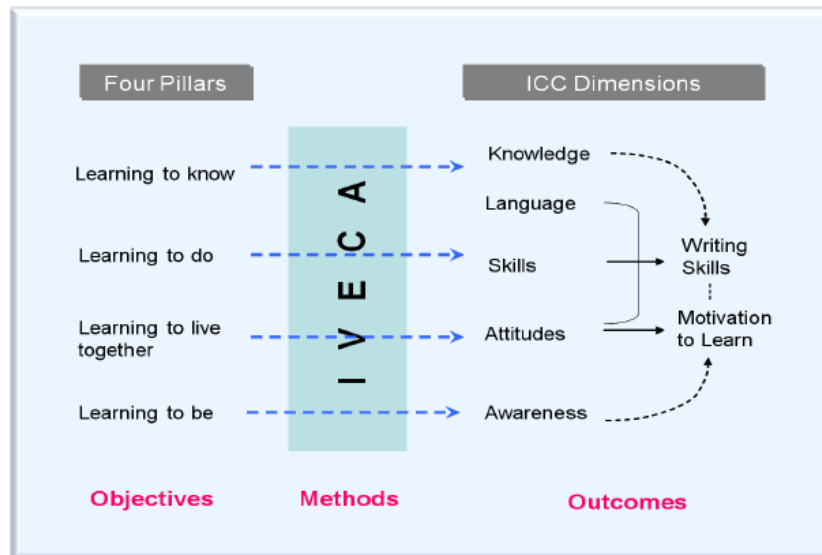
students and teachers, and teachers have access to see their students' progress and participate on discussions related to pedagogical experiences. Besides the writing exercise, IVECA gives a place for a Virtual Live class between the focal groups. For this matter each class should count with proper equipment to perform the class (internet access, webcam, Skype ID, microphone, two screen PPT with both countries' slides, and a previous developed lesson plan)

IVECA found its pedagogical experience on four pillar of Intercultural Integration (O'Neill, 2008), based on Delors, 1996:

- **To Know:** Learn to communicate in other languages about any topic
- **To Live Together:** Conflict management
- **To do:** Skills to handle different situations
- **Learning to Be:** Understanding other contexts and values, taking into account self-perspective

Finally, to achieve the purpose of the platform, it conveys a recompilation of the theory collected.

Table 3 Educational Goals IVECA (O'Neill, 2012)



METHODOLOGY

With the aim of achieve the purpose of project, a method proposed by PhD. Jung in this platform contains five stages to accomplish: (2012)

-Stage One

Teacher training. Twelve hours of training for teachers where theoretical components were revised to achieve the objectives for project. Time for the process was set in a classroom curriculum including topics every two weeks, and one lesson plan for live class as a part of the last task for the project.

-Stage two

Two focus group were selected from different countries. Some considerations such as age, schooling and English level language. A tenth grade students from a United States High School and Undergraduate students from the Physical Education Faculty at *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional de Colombia*. After selecting students, user names were given to create an account for IVECA Moodle platform in the classroom 125 HOOVER-UPN, finding their partner to discuss topics for interaction. Also, writing short messages giving opinion about the topics selected for the project.

-Stage three

Students' Sessions. Before sessions, teacher and students gather together to discuss the messages that were going to be posted. Once the students decided their ideas they proceed to post their messages written in English and Spanish, including pictures and videos from YouTube or some produced by students. During eight weeks students should post their ideas according topics proposed, talking to their partner from the partnership country. For week one, the topic was related to introduce themselves and set a conversation asking and replying questions with his/her partner from the partnership school. During second week students wrote their opinion about what they valued in their lives regarding their cultural context (family, friendship, school, etc.). For third week, the chosen topic was about healthy foods in Colombia and United States, and this topic will be main component for live class between two classrooms. Finally, last week was related to the closing of the term where students express their feelings from the experience.

-Stage Four

Live Class. The live class is the uppermost point on the process. With an established lesson plan previously designed by teachers and IVECA coordinator, a power point presentation with both countries' presentations, and a simple set for connectivity (Computers, video beam, screen, webcam, microphone and Skype connection). During one

hour, students have the opportunity to present their opinions on the topic selected, in which, introduce themselves and share their own perspectives on the topic chosen. Live class has four moments:

- Introduction (Opening): Both schools introduce themselves and after, they proceed with some guiding questions.
- Presentation from both countries: Healthy foods in Colombia and United States.
- Performance: Each group prepared a presentation juggling and cheerleading demonstration.
- Farewell: Each group presented a letter talking about their experience during the program.

The methodology shows several possibilities for the usage of language in order to present and communicate ideas, thoughts, opinions, point of view by determining similarities and differences among two cultures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results are going to be presented in three phases. First, it corresponds to the previous process with the students from the *Onda Bilingüe* Program at the Physical Education Faculty from *Universidad Pedagógica Nacional* de Colombia, and their work not only in the Platform, but also in their regular sessions in the classroom. Second the results from the live class are going to be shown and finally, the discussion with students after the program.

For the very first time, IVECA worked with Colombian students. The Colombian group started with 3 freshmen and along the program, more students were interested to participate. The program received a total of 21 students and ended with 12 students, approximately 48% of participants

complete the program. From 12 students, 6 attended live class with American students and 5 were in academic events from University, 1 did not come back.

Related to English level language, Colombian students were in disadvantage on their level. To solve the problem, we decided to improve English and Spanish communicative skills in basic levels, with the purpose of establishing an open conversation among two cultures selected had students from A1-A2 English Level according to the European Framework. Therefore, it was also the first time IVECA was going to do their process differently. Two languages were going to be used in all videos, messages, etc. This has a great impact because efforts were focused on how create the best communicational bridge between two countries. With this initiative, Colombian students felt very comfortable writing in Spanish and improving their English. The American response was good and they followed Colombian students' guidelines.

To start a process with no motivated students, flexibility is a good element to encourage students to participate. Once students get involved with the process, participation is a decision making by themselves, and they assume their task with no fear, drowsiness or bad attitude.

Previous to posting message on IVECA, student and teacher sat together to discuss the program and how to participate each week. First, they decided to write in Spanish and English short messages and do handwriting, revising, editing and posting. For first week, the program started late. In order to recompense the students from HOOVER, they made a short video, introducing themselves and showing around the Faculty including Dean and administrative staff. They showed responsibility and commitment, understanding the project as a Colombian Citizens and responsible people. Students from Alabama replied to Colombian students with questions about their likes and dislikes.

After the first week, students discussed what they had done, and what they could change for next topic 'Values'. Colombian students posted pictures and wrote about values in their lives. Everything

was related to their families, career, and dreams. American students' replied about material elements as money and cars. Colombian students began questioning about cultural background. They made a short research about Alabama and teenagers' issues. Although, they understood the reason of Alabama's answers, the questioning about Colombian teenagers, made them think about the way they perform their jobs.

For third week and closing, they had several encounters discussing what they considered healthy foods and the concept of healthy in Colombia. The concept for healthy foods in Colombia depends the region and the type of activity people usually do, and why food has a great value for Colombian culture.

Following these ideas, students generated their post for the platform and slices for live presentation, divided in three important topics as they considered: the weather, variety of food. Countryside, understanding the importance of the life in the countryside of Colombia, and traditional agriculture, going back to organic market and products.

Table 4 PPT Slice for Live class (UPN, 2015)

(Group1) Colombian Perspective of Healthy Food		
* Colombian context. What we consider healthy food has a relation to the following topics:		
Weather	The importance of the countryside	Traditional agriculture (back to organic)
Our climate depends on height (Climatic Zones)	Traditions come from the countryside. Food for us is an opportunity to gather the family and express love	We value our tradition and we are learning to take care of our land.

For live class students prepared the presentation, they wrote some signs for basic vocabulary in Spanish, they came with recipes ready (Natilla, buñuelos and salpicón), their joggling performance

(what they learn in a subject at University), and set the classroom all electronic devices. First they had to talk to IVECA coordinator and they were very excited and motivated to be able to speak in English in real context, talking about settings for good connection. They felt the need to communicate in foreign language, when they achieved transmit the message, they realized they had handled a conversation and they understood the whole propose of communication. The motivation issue is now a task to work on it every day. The class began and students themselves had created their own comfortable space to share their ideas and opinions. They followed the lesson plan pattern, but with a sense of spontaneity, that allowed accomplished 60 minutes of class with English speakers.

Figure 1 Live Class Picture. Taken By Camilo Moyano (2015)



After the live class, students discussed the experience, from their answers it is perceived that motivation comes from feelings, what makes people feel comfortable and relaxed. More importantly, their behavior and their rejection of learning English was no longer an issue.

Certainly, classrooms truly ought to enter into a democratic exercise to solve problems and discover solutions together. Flexibility, follow-up process and constancy are the concepts should be

integrated to generate those democratic places within classrooms. IVECA enormously contributes to create conditions for classroom with a simple ICT tool. Constancy makes better teachers to help to encourage and accompany better citizens.

Intercultural competences were fully achieved. Students understood the value of establishing a communication with other cultures and compare local situations that can be solved with a gathered effort among communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Colombia a country with a great diversity and Intercultural implemental model should be applied to work among Colombian citizens. We Colombian need to understand cultural differences we have to create a better and solid nation.

Thanks to the experience had, the idea of spontaneity shall not be killed by implementing rigid lesson plans and accomplish established objectives. Sometimes let the student be, allow him to discover what he is able to do and solve problems with motivation.

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ANEXES

- Annex 1:** Modified Lesson Plan HOOVER – UPN 2015

ANNEX 1

Live Class Lesson Plan (Script) – IVECA 125

Topic: Our Healthy Foods& Farewell

Date and time: Dec 1, 2015 10:45am (USA); Dec 1, 2015 11:45am (Colombia) for 45-50 minutes

Locations: Hoover High School (Hoover), National Pedagogical University of Colombia, Colombia

Time	Stage	Hoover (The US School)	UPN (Colombia School)	View/Note
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(UPN)

Lead Teachers: Ms. Lindy Bearden and Ms. Carolina Guerrero

Support Teachers: Mr. Keith Fulmur

International Coordination: IVECA International Virtual Schooling

06'	Introduction Opening 6min	<p>Greetings by teachers to each other's class (Bearden→Guerrero), followed by quick greetings of each student, "Hi___, my name is (first name)," with camera on each student (Guerrero's students → Bearden's students).</p> <p>Guerrero: Throughout this semester, we have enjoyed working together on the IVECA project. Today, we will present healthy foods and ingredients of each country Also, to celebrate our global friendship, we will exchange some cultural performance and show talents for each other. First, Hoover students will present about healthy foods and ingredients in the United States of America, Ms. Bearden?</p>		<p>PPT: Greetings</p> <p>PPT: Overview of today's activities</p>
07'	Guiding question 1min	<p>Bearden: When we present to each other, please think about the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the food relate with the healthy life? 2. What kind of ingredients and food are famous in your country and how can you cook in healthy way? 		PPT: Listening guide (TBD)
14'	Presentation (USA) 9 min	Bearden: We have groups. Each group analyzed healthy foods and ingredients in Our country. My students would like to present them for our friends in UPN High School.	<i>(After each presentation ends, the partner school students give a big clap)</i>	PPT: Healthy foods and ingredients in USA
16'		<p>Bearden: I hope you enjoyed our presentations. Now, we would like to give OX quiz to UPN students. I will read each statement and ask if you are ready. When I count 1, 2, 3, then, please let us know if it is right (O) or wrong (X) by using your hands like this (show how to make O and X). Here we go, Question # 1....., Are you ready? (Guerrero checks her students and gives Bearden ok sign) Bearden: One, Two, Three! The answer is O/X! (Bearden encourages her students to clap their hands). Q # 2.</p>		PPT: OX questions
23'	Presentation (Colombia) 9 min	<i>(After each presentation ends, the partner school students give a big clap)</i>	Guerrero: Thank you so much for the wonderful presentations. Our students also studied Healthy foods and ingredients in Our country. The first group will present:	PPT: Healthy foods and ingredients and stories in Colombia
25'				PPT: Questions

32'	Discussion 7min	<p>Guerrero: Now, let's discuss the following two questions with your group members, and we will exchange the answers by group. The questions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the similarities and differences among health, foods, and life of each country? 2. What do you think about the foods that IVECA students introduced and how can you reflect them to your life style and diet for health? <p>I will give you three minutes. At __: __, please get back to your seats and look at the screen quietly.</p> <p>Bearden: Okay, time is up. Let's share your answers. Hoover Group 1 and 2, each group representative student, please come to the front and read your group answers. (Group 1 answers to the question 1 and 2 at once → Group 2 answers to the questions 1 and 2 at once). Now, Group 3, 4 please come to the front and answer to the two questions. (Group 3 → Group 4). Good answers, Ms. Guerrero?</p> <p>Guerrero: Yes, UPN Group 1 and 2 representative students come to the front. Please say your group answers to the two questions: #1 What are.....? #2 What are? (Group 1 → Group 2). And now, Group 3 and 4, come to the front and answer to the same questions, please. (Group 3 → Group 4). Good job everyone, Ms. Bearden?</p> <p>Bearden: All groups shared wonderful thoughts on the questions. I believe that all our students had a good opportunity to learn healthy foods and ingredients of each country and how IVECA friends analyzed them.</p>		<p><i>PPT: Discussion questions (TBD)</i></p> <p><i>When time is up, teachers look at the screen and exchange OK sign.</i></p> <p><i>After each group answers, teachers encourage students to clap their hands.</i></p>
35'	Performance (USA)	<p>Bearden: Now, we would like to celebrate our global friendship by sharing cultural performances. My students prepared the following:</p> <p><i>Performance 1</i></p> <p><i>Performance 2</i></p>	<p><i>(After each performance ends, the partner school students give a big clap)</i></p>	<p>PPT: HOOVER school and Bearden's class picture</p> <p>PPT: Images relevant to the performances</p>
	3min	<p>Bearden: Thank you for listening. Is there any Colombian student who likes to comment on our performance or ask questions? (e.g. One or two Colombian students express their appreciation toward American students' performance) Now, UPN Elementary School students will perform for Hoover students.</p>		
	Performance	<p><i>(After each performance ends, the partner school students give a big</i></p>	<p>Guerrero: Thank you for the performance. We really appreciated it. Our students will perform</p>	<p>PPT: UPN school and Guerrero's</p>

	(Colombia)	<i>clap</i>	performance. Hope you enjoy it. Group1 : performance	class picture PPT: Images relevant to the performances
38'	3min	Guerrero: Thank you for watching our performance. Is there any American student who likes to comment on our performance or ask questions? (One or two American students talk about Colombian students' performances).		
	Closing	Bearden: Thank you all for the excellent performances. We appreciate that students have learned many things from each other..... Now, it is time to say good-bye. Two representative students from each school will read farewell letters for their partner school friends. Hoover School student will read it first.		
	Farewell letter (USA)	Bearden: (call the student's name), please come to the front and read your letter. (1 letter read by students)		PPT: Letter (Translation)
42'	Farewell letter (Colombia)		Guerrero: (call the student's name), please come to the front and read your letter. (1 letter read by students) Student: name, name	PPT: Letter
45'	Wrap Up & Good-bye	<p>Guerrero: Thank you all for the kind letters. Other students will have time to post your own letter to each partner through IVECA Virtual Classroom. Here are our principals from each school. They would like to send messages to the students. (Guide them to exchange farewell messages in front of camera)</p> <p>- Hoover principal: Mr.</p> <p>- UPN dean of P.E. faculty: Mrs.</p> <p>Bearden: Thank you for being here with us today. Now, shall we take global photos together with IVECA friends through the screen? Let us take our picture first (Hoover stand against the screen and UPN students stand toward the camera, then switch the positions)</p> <p>Guerrero: Yes, we got the pictures. Everyone, let's say good-bye.</p> <p>Students: Good-Bye (guide students to wave hands towards camera)</p> <p>(Allow students to come close to the camera and freely wave hands to the partner school)</p>		PPT: Principals/dean(?)' remarks Good-bye Announcement (Go to the IVECA board and leave individual farewell messages to the partners)

<The Live Class Checklist>

- **Camera view**
 - Check the location of the webcam, mic, student seats, and the 2nd screen (you can put mark on students' presentation spots)
 - Determine the area for teachers position and students' performance
- **Feedback effect** – control the location of mic and speaker (do not put them close to each other)
- **Students voice** – train them to speak clearly, loudly and slowly
- **Student product display** – visibility and readability (camera setting: zoom or move for the best view)
- **PowerPoint slides** – match the slides with the lesson plan
- **Teachers' guide for students** – short and clear for both schools
- **Responsive and friendly reactions** – smiling, clapping, controlling laughter and chats, raising hands straight, etc.
- **Tips:** When video connection is not good, turn off the video and turn it on shortly. Before the Live Class starts, inform students that there can be a pause or disconnection in video. *Tell them to be in stop motion (like a freeze game) if that happens, until the video is on again.*