A Democratic Reflective Syllabus in a Second Language Acquisition Context: In-person, Digital and Hybrid Experiences

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A B S T R A C T

Since its inception in 2004, Siena Italian Studies (SIS) has worked to offer students a challenging and engaging intercultural experience thanks to the implementation of the service-learning pedagogy and the practice of reflection combined with language acquisition. Over the years, SIS courses have been aligned with European policies and developments so that students could better understand the impact of their experience and build competences useful for their future as global citizens. For this reason, the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) was incorporated in the syllabus of the renewed reflection course, "Intercultural Dialogue, Democracy and Global Citizenship through Reflection".

The sudden change of habits and perspectives due to the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020 abruptly caused a shift in education. Therefore, proceeding along its ever-evolving path, SIS has come to develop new ways of educating to democracy: a digital and a hybrid reflective course.

This contribution will present the Democratic Reflective Syllabus used in the EUFICCS (European Use of Full-Immersion, Culture, Content and Service) approach and compare its in-person version with its two updated versions developed.

Keywords: democratic competences; intercultural competence; global competence; global citizenship; digital citizenship education

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Introduction

This contribution will present the Democratic Reflective Syllabus implemented by Siena Italian Studies (SIS) and used in the EUFICCS (European Use of Full-Immersion, Culture, Content and Service) approach, and compare its in-person version with its adjustment to the digital environment.

Since its inception in 2004, SIS Intercultural Study abroad program has been working to offer students a challenging and engaging intercultural experience thanks to the implementation of the service-learning pedagogy and the practice of reflection, which was matched and combined with language acquisition. Over the years, SIS courses have been more and more aligned with European policies and developments so that students could better understand the impact of their experience and build competences and skills useful for their future as global citizens. For this reason, the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC, 2018, vol. 1) was incorporated in the syllabus of the renewed reflection course, "Intercultural Dialogue, Democracy and Global Citizenship through Reflection", which explicitly includes the themes of human rights, democracy, democratic competences, as well as intercultural dialogue and global citizenship.

Even though the RFCDC was created and elaborated for European societies and even though whether and how it can be applied to other contexts is still disputable, undoubtedly for an international student who decides to study a semester abroad in Europe, this renewed syllabus of reflection, that revolves around the RFCDC, represents a very useful and suitable tool since it allows to approach and hopefully acquire a set of competences that are required for (young) people to function as democratic citizens: in this way it becomes an appropriate gymnasium where to practice global citizenship.

Although this transformation of the reflection course had taken place before the outbreak of the pandemic in Spring 2020, the sudden change of habits and perspectives the Coronavirus caused abruptly created further shifts in many related educational areas. Courses and objectives needed to be re-thought and adjusted to the new situation, not just in the content they proposed but also in the ways and channels this content was to be borne. Therefore, proceeding along its ever-evolving path, SIS has come to develop new ways of educating for democracy and global citizenship, and starting from 2020, all courses have been offered both in their in-person version and in a digital, or hybrid, version in order to satisfy the new needs of international education. The case of the reflection course, though, proved to be a crucial one. New challenges and issues, in times of global crisis, have come to underline even more the importance of democratic competences and confirmed their relevance both in the real world and in the digital environment.

Review of Literature

The sudden onset of the pandemic and digitization on an ever-widening scale, along with reduced student mobility, offered an opportunity to reflect on the importance of the RFCDC, from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, from its inception, the RFCDC pointed out that the digital online world is as important as the physical world and is relevant to the development of 'digital citizenship':

It is important to note that democratic and intercultural situations occur not only in the physical world but also in the digital online world. In other words, democratic discussions and debates and intercultural encounters and interactions take place not only through face-to-face exchanges, traditional print and broadcast media, letters, petitions and so on, but also through computer-

mediated communications, for example, through online social networks, forums, blogs, e-petitions and e-mails. For this reason, the Framework has relevance not only to education for democratic citizenship, human rights education and intercultural education but also to digital citizenship education. (RFCDC, 2018, vol. 1 p. 32)

On the other hand, the RFCDC constitutes a powerful means and vehicle for developing citizens' general competences, including two other key competences, namely the global and the intercultural ones. The notion of global citizenship is defined in more detail in the work of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) as part of its work to produce tests of global citizenship competences:

Global competence is not a specific skill, but rather a combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values successfully applied both in face-to-face, virtual or mediated encounters with people who are perceived to be from a different cultural background and in individuals' engagement with global issues (i.e. situations that require an individual to reflect upon problems that know no national borders and that have deep implications for current and future generations). Acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes and values is a life-long process; there is no single point at which an individual becomes completely competent in this domain. PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] assesses where 15-year-old students are situated in this process and whether their schools are effective in helping them to develop the necessary knowledge, skills and dispositions. (OECD 2018, p. 56)

In language and cultural immersion programs such as the ones offered by SIS, students' acquisition of intercultural competence is developed and processed thanks to the practice of reflection. Intercultural competence is defined by Barrett as "the set of values, attitudes, skills and behaviours which are needed for: - understanding and respecting people who are perceived to be culturally different from oneself; - interacting and communicating effectively and appropriately with such people; and - establishing positive and constructive relationships with such people [...]" (2013, p. 152). This competence used to be developed by students in the local context, passing through a series of progressive stages, successes and possible obstacles, which for quite a few years have been analyzed and assessed thanks to the use of the RICA (Reflective Intercultural Competence Assessment) Model, a developmental model elaborated in 2012 by SIS faculty and research team (Biagi & Bracci, 2020) and applied to students' journals. As suggested by the analysis of students' reflection, reflective intercultural competence seemed to be propaedeutic to the eventual acquisition of global competence. By moving from the local to the global context students may acquire the competences of a "glocal actor", which represents the highest and ultimate stage of the RICA scale and "implies a clear awareness of cultural chains and implications as well as the consciousness of being able to overcome cultural boundaries in order to navigate the globalized world with the right, powerful tools" (Biagi & Bracci, 2020, p. 87). In fact, in the path towards the development of reflective intercultural competence, the local immersion experience becomes key to fostering a wider global competence.

Together with democratic, intercultural and global competences, the pandemic has underlined the growing relevance of digital competence and digital citizenship education (DCE), which has been claimed as fundamental by documents from the Council of Europe (2017, 2019) and described as composed by three areas and ten domains. Global citizenship education has become inextricably interwoven with digital citizenship education. The imperative for present-day students and future citizens is their ability to be digital citizens, i.e. someone "who, through the development of a broad range of competences, is able to actively, positively and responsibly engage in both on- and offline communities, whether local, national or global. Educational stakeholders need to take these new demands into consideration and digital citizenship education ought to be implemented from the earliest years of childhood at home and at school, in formal, informal and non-formal educational settings" (Richardson & Milovidov, 2019, p.11).

The interconnections among all these competences has become evident and it still holds true, yet their relationships need to be re-evaluated and re-analyzed under the circumstances of the pandemic and its consequences.

In line with what has been said so far, the present article will illustrate how both the in-presence and the digital courses of reflection are two parallel paths that may bring to the development of democratic competences in the real and the virtual world, and how DCE can be implemented and become an added value in a study abroad program.

The Democratic Reflective Syllabus

As mentioned before, Siena Italian Studies was founded in 2004 by Lavinia Bracci together with former study abroad students who shared the same desire to create something unique, and has evolved over the years to become Siena's most original study abroad program as well as a recognized innovator for intercultural study abroad in Europe.

Students at SIS live a complete intercultural experience through immersion in the host society. They are offered a leading alternative to a trend in study abroad that typically provides sojourns in foreign cities but does not bring genuine opportunities to experience the cultural realities of those cities and the countries of which they are integral parts because students live in isolation, in "bubbles". The founder's vision for SIS Intercultural Study Abroad has been the creation of a program that enables students to experience life outside these "bubbles," living as locals as much as possible. Instead of looking at the local culture as if it were a museum, students at SIS are integrated into the local society through coursework, host families, and service-learning in the host community, which is mandatory for all.

In order to create an experience of integration that also meets university level academic standards, SIS implements a unique method of instruction called European Use of Full-Immersion, Culture, Content, Service approach for Language Learning (EUFICCS), together with other innovative pedagogies that stand at the core of SIS, such as service-learning, NOn-Level Concept (NOLC) content teaching, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), and plurilingual education, as well as reflective education.

As stated above, SIS Intercultural Study Abroad program also shows a European vocation and a regular in-person semester includes a three-day trip to Brussels, as the "capital" of EU and seat of European institutions as well as a living example of a modern multicultural city. Just like all other experiences lived by students, this trip is meant to be the occasion of thoughtful, deep and appropriate reflection.

Within the course of reflection, students participating in the SIS Study Abroad program produce reflective journals: these represent the collection of students' reflection entries that are written during the time of a semester under the guidance of course instructors, who, week by week, provide specific prompts and input. At the end of the semester students' journals are assessed by using the RICA Model scale (Biagi & Bracci, 2012, 2020), that envisages seven successive and progressive phases in the development of reflective intercultural competence: pre-contact, contact, culture shock, superficial understanding, deep understanding, social acting, glocal acting. For each week's entry, students are assigned a level of proficiency according to this scale, and eventually their path is tracked on a line graph, which visually renders students' development of reflective intercultural competence along the time they spent in Siena. The purpose in carrying out such analysis is to test the value and the benefits of a service-learning immersive experience and obviously to assess students' accomplishments. The RICA analysis of students' journals has been

carried out for about 10 years and it has produced a substantial amount of data, since it has been applied to approximately a hundred journals.

The pandemic has been an opportunity for SIS faculty and research team to re-consider both the content of the reflective democratic syllabus and the modalities with which it can be implemented and taught, as well as the occasion to introduce digital citizenship education as a further objective for this course. The analysis of students' journals has been enriched by applying the RFCDC descriptors (RFCDC, 2018, vol. 2) for the assessment of students' entries. This means that the process of assessment is carried out on two levels: the reflective intercultural competence is assessed through the RICA Model, while the democratic competences are assessed through the RFCDC descriptors.

Currently, SIS faculty and research team is working to elaborate a multi-method assessment plan that might encompass students' entire experience, both in the real and in the virtual environment: this plan should include various assessing tools, such as the RICA scale, the RFCDC descriptors and DCE descriptors, the latter being one of the current work at SIS.

As mentioned before, the reflective democratic syllabus, originally born as the combination of the previous reflective writing syllabus (inside the EUFICCS approach) and the RFCDC, plays a leading role in the renewed reflection course, aimed at developing intercultural, democratic and global competences. Students who attend this course are usually undergrad international students (mostly Americans), experiencing a semester of full-immersion in Italy and/or attending SIS courses from afar via digital channel. Instructors of this course play the role of listeners and facilitators: they "guide turn-taking and invite students to participate and share [...] they can pose questions intended to bring about further reflection, but should not interfere with a free discussion as long as significant issues arise" (Biagi & Bracci, 2020, p. 62)

In this section the Democratic Reflective Syllabus will be presented in its entirety and in-presence version, divided into weekly sessions. In this syllabus, the reader can find the key prompts for students in bold, the description and tips for instructors in normal print and students' reflections in italics.

Week 1 (Orientation)

What are your expectations for this course?

What is reflection in your opinion?

What is the difference between observation and reflection?

The instructor explains the role of the reflective writing course in the EUFICCS curriculum, course objectives, class structure and organization, re-writing process, final evaluation, and his/her role.

Week 2

[in case of in-person course]

Have you ever kept a journal?

What do you think the benefits of keeping a journal are?

What are the reasons for writing with pen and paper?

The instructor uses two quotes from past students' journals and writes the first quote on the board and asks students how many of them share the quote's feeling or have ever felt like that. Brief open discussion. At this point the instructor writes the second quote on the board and explains that it represents the aim of the course.

> *"I don't do journaling" (V., comment at the beginning of a semester)*

> *"At first I was a little apprehensive about journaling. I prefer to keep it all bottled up. After this last term with classroom journal assignments, I am sold on using a journal. Sometimes I want to tell life to slow down so that I can think and take it all in. I hope I maintain the self-discipline to journaling so that I don't miss the journey." (Z., reflection at the end of the semester)*

Then the instructor asks students what they think the reasons are for writing with pen and paper and writes their list on the board. Following this list, students are encouraged to discuss the reasons thus facilitating the reflective process.

[in case of a digital course]

Have you ever kept a journal in a digital/electronic format?

What do you think the benefits of keeping a digital journal are?

What are the differences between a paper journal and a digital journal?

Which one do you prefer and why?

The instructor explains that digital writing allows for instantaneous proofreading, deleting and rewriting. He/she invites students to add date and time to each entry they produce and, in case they successively decide to change an entry, they need to copy and paste it with a new date and time and add modifications in the copy in a different font color or type.

Afterwards the instructor explains what the three basic writing principles are and how they support journal writing:

1. Writing is thinking: central to our understanding of our writing process and teaching students about journal writing is the idea that writing is thinking on paper. Oftentimes students believe that writing is what happens after they have all their thoughts organized in their mind. The wrong assumption therefore is to think that all they have to do is to sit down and transfer those thoughts to paper. There are several problems with this mindset. First, this means that students do not write papers as "drafts" but just "produce" the papers in their heads and put their ideas down on the page, often at the last minute. Second, given all the thinking it took to produce the ideas in the first place, the problem is that there is little room for adaptation or change. Teachers have no idea how a final paper was developed. So, journal writing can also become (if students are aware and are guided to think of this process) a gymnasium in which to exercise the practice of writing as thinking on paper.

2. Practice builds fluency in writing and motivation to write: the second writing principle is that practice helps students to be more motivated to write and builds writing fluency, that in the end is the ability to simply get words down on the page without editing. When completing a journal writing assignment students may end up writing more about a topic than they realized they knew. They may recognize some connections between ideas that they did not appreciate before. These discoveries can surprise them and encourage them to continue the exploration and clarification of their thinking through writing. Peter Elbow (1973) states that, if it were not for the "surprises", no one would be motivated to write. Surprises are the "A-ha! when writers look at what they have

written and say to themselves "Oh! So, that's what was on my mind".

3. Students value journal writing when it is fully integrated into the course objectives and structure. Although course objectives are explicitly presented, students will achieve awareness through the course of the semester. As one student put it: "I am also very grateful that technology has made this whole experience more positive for me. I can use my phone, computer, and apps to be able to communicate with family members, and friends that I can't see."

Week 3

Assignments for the following week:

Complete the Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE) at home.

Article reading: Diversity – the Evolving Language of Diversity by Kathy Castania

Class journal sharing and discussion about the prompts given so far. In the last twenty minutes, the instructor introduces students to the *Autobiography of Intercultural Encounters (AIE)* (Byram et al., 2009) with the aim of exposing them to a different meaning of the concept of diversity in the European context.

Week 4

What did you learn through others' encounters?

Did your story change at all in telling it as opposed to reading it?

Has your opinion changed about your encounter? Did you change your mind on the meaning or function of intercultural encounters?

Reflect well on why you picked this experience.

What comes first to your mind when you think about "Europe" and the "European Union"?

Do you think that the reflections on diversity in the article can be applied to the European context? If yes, why? If not, why?

Europe's motto is "United in diversity": reflect on it using the following questions.

What do you think is/are the official language(s) of the EU?

What does diversity mean to you? What does cultural diversity mean?

Where have you seen/observed diversity in your experience abroad? What have you seen/observed so far that represents diversity?

How do you think locals perceive diversity? And your diversity?

Have you perceived local cultural diversity?

Through what senses (5 senses) do you perceive cultural diversity?

What are basic human rights?

In your perception, are there differences across cultures of what should be included as human rights? Give some examples.

How would you welcome someone in your home or country? How have you been welcomed here?

Role-play:

students are encouraged to find a volunteer who can lead the discussion about the AIE in the way he/she thinks best in order to express and clarify the concept of diversity that emerges from the AIE itself. The instructor facilitates the discussion.

Class discussion about the reading assignment:

The instructor can show students different European maps of languages: the first map represents all the languages and dialects spoken on the European continent, the second map represents official and co-official languages in each country, and the third map shows only the official languages of each state. The instructor guides students reflecting on the fact that there are 24 official EU languages, but the working languages used for official documents are English, French and German, and that during the European Parliament sessions each member speaks and listens in his/her mother tongue.

Class activity about Italian words for "diversity":

the instructor asks for help from the advanced students and invites them to name the Italian words (they know) that describe different types of diversity. The instructor can also recount the etymology of the word "diverse/diversity": in Latin it meant "changing route, leaving the right way, turning away from the right direction" and it had a negative connotation. The adjective "diverse" derives from the past participle of the verb "divertire" (= to have fun), originally meaning "to go away from, to be separated from". The following terms may be used as a guiding list:

- gender/sexual orientation: omosessuale, gay, lesbica, transgender, pansessuale, eterosessuale, bisessuale, fluido/a
- physical disability: handicappato, disabile, diversamente abile
- mental disability: disabile mentale, matto, pazzo, demente, mongolo/mongoloide
- skin color: nero, negro, africano, di colore, bianco, differences between white people (Balcanian, Slavic, Mediterranean, ...), "marocchino"
- ethnicity: etnia (termine dell'antropologia), etnico (cucina), "extra-comunitari" (Romanian vs American), rom, zingari, gipsy
- religion: islamico, arabo, musulmano, ebreo
- age: vecchio, anziano
- legal and social status: clandestino, immigrato, migrante, rifugiato
- emigrati (brain-drain)
- body consciousness (grasso, grosso, magro, snello, ...)

The same activity could be done for each of the languages of Europe. The instructor might refer to the lessons on Italian history and geography (included in the course of Italian language) to underline the inner diversity in Italy. As one student put it:

To me, diversity means existing with people from all different racial, cultural, religious, sexual, gender, and economic backgrounds. I believe it is important to recognize that everyone comes from a place that might not necessarily be the same as my own background, and that means that it

is important for me to pay attention to what opinions and deeply held beliefs other people have because they are informed by that person's specific background.

I believe that basic human rights means that everyone deserves to be treated with respect regardless of their background. Respect extends to one's body- making sure everyone has the right to be treated safely and the right to adequate healthcare.

Week 5

Why do you think we use this as a guide/reference model? What value can you see in it?

Do you have other experiences with competency-developing frameworks or coursework that covers some of this material? Explain.

How and in what ways do these ideas/topics relate to your experience here in Siena? Explain.

The instructor presents a brief slide show about the Council of Europe and the Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture. Later on the slides are emailed to students.

The instructor guides the discussion about the values of the RFCDC 'butterfly' model, focusing on some key terms such as democracy, justice, fairness, equality and the rule of law. The instructor may use the glossary given in vol. 1 of the RFCDC (pp. 67-78) in order to clarify some terms that students might not be familiar with.

The instructor facilitates the discussion and sharing of reflections about the prompts on diversity, which is the first value of the flower that we take into consideration.

Week 6

RFCDC: Openness to otherness:

How would you define yourself in relation to the "other"?

What does "other" mean to you?

Have you ever felt like the "other"?

What are the defining elements/categories of "otherness"?

What other worldviews (different from your own) have you experienced?

What does "being open" mean?

Give an example of a situation where you were "open" or "closed".

Have you observed "openness" and "closedness" in your experience in this country?

Are there advantages and disadvantages to being open?

Can you tell an episode in your service activities that is representative of openness (or lack of openness) to cultural otherness?

RFCDC: Respect

Are there instances in which you have felt respected or disrespected?

How can you show respect in this country? Compare with examples from home.

Where have you observed respect/disrespect?

Do you feel more obligated to be more respectful at home or abroad?

What is normal for you that may be considered disrespectful in this country?

Do you see differences with respect to rules/laws?

Who bears more responsibility to respect rules in a different cultural context, locals or visitors?

Can you tell of an episode in your service activities that is representative of respect?

The instructor facilitates the discussion and sharing of reflections about the prompts of the previous week and afterwards leaves time for the re-writing phase. Then he/she recalls the concept of attitude and guides an open discussion about openness and respect using the given prompts.

Week 7

RFCDC: Civic mindedness and responsibility

Have you observed any examples of the local perception of community?

How do locals participate in the community? Is it different from how you would participate in your community?

What levels of community have you observed here?

How do locals express a sense of belonging to the community?

What is the "glue" of the local community?

What contributions can you as a foreign student make to the community?

Do you feel that you are able to participate in the local community?

What new ways have you found to participate and contribute to the community?

How can a strong sense of belonging to the community influence service?

Do you feel any responsibility to the society in which you live? Or wherever you are?

Do you feel the same responsibilities in Italy as you do at home?

Where do you feel the burden of social/civic responsibilities to be stronger?

Does local culture influence your attitude and behavior towards social responsibilities? (Give examples)

The instructor facilitates the discussion and sharing of reflections about the prompts of the previous week and afterwards leaves time for the re-writing phase.

Reading assignment for next week: article by Drechsler (2006) "The Contrade, the Palio and the Ben Comune: lessons from Siena".

One student responded to this work as follows:

I feel a strong attachment to my various communities back home & this is a large driver of what I want to do for work. I believe in doing something that makes life better for the people around me

and the global community as well. I think it's a fallacy, or an ignorant position, to say that we as people have no responsibility to each other. Denying this responsibility is central to right-wing thinking and is something I find absolutely disgusting. In less abstract terms, and to bring this reflection to Italy, I'm really glad to be doing community service with OXFAM. It's been a rewarding experience because it feels like I'm helping a group of people who are often demonized feel more at home in their new country. Our responsibility as humans is to each other! Something else I wanted to write about our service is that I think it is important for our time here not to feel like it's all 'taking' from Italy.

<p style="text-align:center">Week before the break</p>

RFCDC: Tolerance of ambiguity

What were your feelings in ambiguous situations?

What ambiguous situations have you experienced here? How did you react? How did the locals react?

Have you experienced situations where local culture reacts with what you perceive as an ambiguity that has made you uncomfortable? But were you left confused? (Give some examples)

What situations at your home may be perceived as ambiguous for a foreign person?

Compare your first impressions of Siena/Italy to your first impressions of another Italian city or region/European country: has your tolerance for ambiguity changed (increased or decreased) or stayed the same?

The instructor facilitates the discussion and sharing of reflections about the prompts of the previous week and afterwards leaves time for the re-writing phase.

In the session during the week before the break, the instructor invites students to bring journals on trips, look for/pay attention to situations in which they are dealing with tolerance for ambiguity and describe/reflect on that. He/she should also ask them to reflect on their initial tolerance for ambiguity when they first arrived at the beginning of the semester to Siena (phase of re-reflection). Three students responded as follows:

As an American, I am used to wanting large amounts of information about things that affect me in the future. [...] The issue with setting these expectations is they cause me to have a lower tolerance for changes, whether they are large or small. In the future, I understand that I should prepare for these. I know better not to "put all of my eggs in one basket.

Because the corona virus spread so rapidly in the United States, I think that the country will learn from this experience and be more prepared for a pandemic in the future and make people realize that they should have taken the disease more seriously from the start because now we have to deal with the consequences.

Just some thoughts on ambiguity since I haven't covered it yet here: I have always been good at going with the flow, 'chillin,' in 95% of situations. I didn't find my transition to Siena that difficult, just challenging. (Subtle difference). However, that 5% of the time is when I have a plane or a bus to catch in a place I'm not very familiar with. My most repeated line while traveling recently: 'I won't be comfortable until I'm on that bus!

Week 9

The following prompts are aimed to have students reflecting on the service in the local community, which is an integral and mandatory part of their experience in Siena:

Do you feel your participation in service is effective and impactful for you and/or the local community?

During your time serving this community do you feel that you have gained a new sense of self-efficacy?

How has your perception of your self-efficacy changed during your time here or at service?

Re-reflection phase: has anything changed in your concept of the use of time, efficiency and productivity from the beginning of the semester?

Can you compare efficiency and time management in service activities in this country and in your home country?

The instructor facilitates the discussion and sharing of reflections about the prompts of the previous week and afterwards leaves time for the re-writing phase. The instructor guides a new discussion about self-efficacy and proposes the given questions. Here are some reactions from one student:

1. Do I feel like my service is effective & impactful for the community? Yes! My primary service is with OXFAM & Language Partners, both of which feel 'bigger' than myself in a way. LP is mostly fun & games, but it's also valuable for the Sienese folks who come every week and want to practice their English. OXFAM is so important - I really love it. I'm helping people who are often refused help because of their status (I think especially in Italy). Issa and I (my principle work partner) have definitely crafted a sort-of bond over the semester - which has been great because he started off super shy and closed.

2. I definitely felt super-nervous to 'teach' in a language I barely speak, and my experience with OXFAM has definitely given me the tools to do so and improved my confidence in my self-efficacy.

3. I have always felt fairly 'self-effective,' but, more than my service, this trip overall (being in a new place, facing unknown circumstances) has been really positive for my self-efficacy.

Week 10

Students are asked to fill in the questionnaire given by the instructor.

The instructor facilitates the discussion and sharing of reflections about the prompts of the previous week and afterwards leaves time for the re-writing phase. The rest of this session is structured around the following questionnaire about students' skills: "My skills abroad: Skills self-assessment questionnaire" (see Appendix, Table 1).

Brussels Week

Trip to Brussels. Ice-breaking reflection prompts:

What do you know about Belgium and Brussels?

What do you know about the EU?

Do you know something about the Belgian population in general and about the population in Brussels?

What language(s) is/are spoken there?

How do you expect it to be?

Planned visits:

Guided visit to the Islamic neighborhood "Molenbeek"

Parlamentarium Museum and guided visit to European Parliament

Visit to ENAR – European Network Against Racism

The instructor uses the prompts given and the worksheet: "Trip to Brussels" (See Appendix Table 2).

Re-entry from Brussels Week:

The instructor facilitates the discussion about the trip in Brussels. The phase of re-writing is structured around the request to review students' experience in Brussels. No other prompt is given.

Final Week

RFCDC: Knowledge and critical understanding of the self

How has your experience here changed your knowledge of yourself?

Have you discovered new things about yourself?

RFCDC: Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication

What have you learned?

RFCDC: Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture(s), religion, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability

What have you learned?

In the final session the instructor facilitates the discussion and invites students to reflect on the overall experience. As a final reflection on the semester spent in Siena, the instructor invites students to find a metaphor which can describe their experience; the same metaphor can be further elaborated in their final assignments. As a final assignment, students are asked to complete the worksheet about the 20 competences (See appendix Table 3): for each competence they should find an example, an anecdote, a situation, an experience that occurred to them during their time abroad.

Final Project

Do you feel anything has changed since you wrote all your entries?

Have you learned anything more that might change your perspective on the subject? Anything else to add.

The instructor asks students to type each journal entry, while they type it up he/she invites them to re-think carefully about each week's entry and re-reflect upon it.

Discussion

In line with what has been said in the previous paragraphs, SIS has worked in the direction of adapting the democratic reflective syllabus to the new challenges posed by distant learning, as well as to other social and personal issues linked to the experience of the pandemic on the part of students. This adaptation has touched different aspects and has reached different results.

In the first place, the use of technological devices and the impossibility of living local study abroad experiences (at first perceived as a downside) was thoroughly reconsidered and eventually opened up new perspectives: the web space offers a myriad of possible occasions to face global issues, which, when approached with the right tools, could pave the way to renewed awareness and consciousness, thus reinforcing students' global competence. In students' words:

Another unexpected positive learning experience from this is that we need to reduce pollution because it's hurting our planet. For the first time in years, marine life is returning to the Venice canals and people can see blue skies in India. Overall, the water and air quality has improved so much since the corona virus shutdown.

A positive that people have discussed is the condition of the environment. The lack of industry has cleared pollution in the air and waterways. [...] Given how much concern my generation has, in terms of the environment, it is a relief to know that some parts of that problem are seeing improvement. The world as a whole will inevitably be different once it returns to normal.

On the other hand, this fact does not necessarily imply an increase in students' intercultural competence, since the latter needs to pass through the direct contact with diversity and/or full immersion in a different cultural context.

Secondly, those democratic competences that were already comprised among students' learning objectives, came to assume a wider and deeper meaning when adapted to the virtual world. As mentioned before, there is as much (if not even more) need for democracy in the virtual environment, and the democratic competences represent a powerful tool to tackle discrimination, cyberbullying, and hate speech in general.

A further reflection and adjustment concerned the completion of service requirements, which during the pandemic were fulfilled in students' own communities or through online advocacy activities. Again, this transformation in service modalities may increase the perception of global issues and therefore of global competence, but at the same time it does not automatically imply the development of intercultural competence, whose growth was strongly conditioned by in-presence service in the host community, as proved by the assessment of students' reflective journals in the past (Biagi et al., 2012).

On a different level, the transition from a physical setting to a digital one for teaching and learning activities has led to a different management of the lesson 'space', of turn-taking, of kinesics and non-verbal communication, and more in general of the modalities of class discussion. Finally, the democratic competences in the digital world need to be revisited, re-learnt and inevitably linked to digital citizenship education and the ten digital domains, envisaged by the Council of Europe as characterizing an educated and competent digital citizen.

Conclusion

In pre-pandemic times the concepts of intercultural and global competences complemented each other and the path of perception and appreciation of the 'other' went hand in hand with the perception of global issues that could arouse the curiosity of the student before or parallel to the encounter with the other. The massive digitization during the pandemic led to a new possibility of approaching global issues, digitally mediated, without the immersion in the host culture, which implies an increased difficulty in the development of intercultural competence. Moreover, an evolution of the reflective democratic syllabus was needed in order to adjust to the digital demands. While not disregarding the intercultural dimension, it had to be primarily focused on the understanding of the global scenario, at least in its hybrid and fully digital versions. It goes without saying that, after the pandemic experience, a theoretical re-consideration of global and intercultural competences, of their status and of their correlations needs to be taken into account. The necessary transition of the reflective democratic syllabus from the physical setting to a digital one has opened up a wide range of reflections and possible adjustments that have been mentioned above and that do need critical re-thinking and future detailed analysis. Furthermore, an overall re-positioning of democratic, intercultural and global competences and their correlation in the digital world together with an ongoing updating of teaching practices is claimed and auspicious. More specifically, teaching and learning foreign languages seems to represent a privileged path towards the acquisition of those competences since dealing with different worldviews and perspectives allows us to put them into practice. Now more than ever language teachers are challenged and required to constantly train and change their roles: in a language class taught with the aid of digital devices they are no longer mere instructors but they need to supervise students and guide them through digital activities and interactions helping them to become responsible citizens both online and offline.

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Appendix

Table 1

My skills abroad: Skills self-assessment questionnaire	
1. Please rate your improvement for each skill based on the following ranking: 1=weak; 2=satisfactory; 3=good; 4=very good; 5=excellent A.　　　autonomous learning skills B.　　　analytical and critical thinking skills C.　　　skills of listening and observing D.　　　empathy E.　　　flexibility and adaptability F.　　　linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills G.　　　cooperation skills H.　　　conflict resolution skills	1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5 1　2　3　4　5
2. Begin to think about experiences that could possibly show how you have improved (or not) your skills while abroad, thus far. Think in terms of your general intercultural encounters with Italy/Europe and how being in/interacting with/in a different cultural environment, and with people of other cultures has impacted these skills (positively, or possibly negatively). Describe and reflect on your experiences that have led to skill development: you can focus on one specific skill or a combination of skills or all skills you have retained, improved or changed. Alternatively, if you feel you have not improved on any skills, craft your entry reflecting on why that might be (aim for 500 words).	……………………… ……………………… ……………………… ……………………… ……………………… ……………………… ……………………… …………………

Table 2

Trip to Brussels	
1. The institutions and organisations you will be visiting are very different, even if they all deal with European integration. They welcome us but they expect our students to be interested in their activities. So, please, make sure you ask questions! Ideally each of you should have two questions for each visit (Molenbeek, European Parliament, ENAR), but of course there is flexibility…it is just important that we have questions for each site. Also, keep in mind that the first ones to benefit from the questions are you! The goal of this trip is to understand Europe...keep yourselves as active as possible in this process of discovering Europe. Also, activate your 5 senses to understand diversity in Brussels.	- 2 QUESTIONS FOR MOLENBEEK .... -2 QUESTIONS FOR EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT .... - 2 QUESTIONS FOR ENAR ....
2. Once you are back in Siena, try to respond to the following prompts. Now that you have lived in Siena for almost a semester, travelled throughout Europe and visited its heart and institutions in Brussels...	What is the deep essence of the meaning of diversity in our continent in your perception? (After your trip to Brussels your perception may change quite a bit...) How do you feel about the "flower" of competences? What do you think is the need for such a framework? How hard do you think it is to implement it in different European contexts? AND, also, do you think the validity of this framework could go beyond European borders? Try to think of a situation you experienced during your time in Europe that confirmed the absolute necessity of such an education tool.
3. Lastly, while in Brussels...EAT FRITES!!!!	

Table 3

Values	
Human dignity and human rights	…………………………………..
Cultural diversity	…………………………………..
Democracy, justice, fairness, equality and rule of law	…………………………………..
Attitudes	
Openness to cultural otherness and other beliefs, world views and practices	…………………………………..
Respect	…………………………………..
Civic-mindedness	…………………………………..
Responsibility	…………………………………..
Self-efficacy	…………………………………..
Tolerance of ambiguity	…………………………………..
Skills	
Autonomous learning skills	…………………………………..
Analytical and critical thinking skills	…………………………………..
Skills of listening and observing	…………………………………..
Empathy	…………………………………..
Flexibility and adaptability	…………………………………..
Linguistic, communicative and plurilingual skills	…………………………………..
Co-operation skills	…………………………………..
Conflict resolution skills	…………………………………..
Knowledge and critical understanding	
Knowledge and critical understanding of the self	…………………………………..
Knowledge and critical understanding of language and communication	…………………………………..
Knowledge and critical understanding of the world: politics, law, human rights, culture(s), religions, history, media, economies, environment, sustainability	………………………………….