



Level Up Village®

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Case  
Study

# Virtual Exchanges Address the Challenges of Student Engagement and Authentic Experiences



Bristol Central High School,  
Bristol, Connecticut & Liceo  
Laurana-Baldi, Urbino, Italy



# Summary

World language teachers face many challenges in engaging their students and meeting their diverse needs. Traditional in-person extracurricular activities often come at a high cost and may not be accessible to all students, particularly those from low-income backgrounds. Post-pandemic teaching has brought on a new set of obstacles, with many students lacking interest and motivation. In response to these challenges, teachers are seeking alternative ways to engage students in cross-cultural communication activities that are more accessible and equitable. Gina Gallo, an Italian teacher at Bristol Central High School, met these challenges by adopting Level Up Village (LUV). LUV's virtual exchange programs provided a solution that was accessible to all students and allowed for authentic collaboration with students in another country. The program was flexible enough to meet the needs of all-level learners.



LUV came to us at the perfect time. Finally, we had a program that was accessible to all, therefore offering an equitable, authentic project that the entire class could participate in. The virtual exchange allowed the students to discuss things that interested them, rather than the course being guided by the teacher's interest.

**Gina Gallo**



## ● Challenges



- High costs associated with traditional in-person extracurricular activities.
- Difficulty in finding programs that meet the needs of diverse learners.
- Lack of student interest and motivation post-pandemic.



## ● Solutions

- Adopted the Level Up Village virtual exchange platform.
- Partnered an Italian class in the United States with an English class in Italy.
- Paired LUV prompts with classroom activities for better connection to curriculum.



## ● Results

- The program was accessible and equitable for all students.
- The program was flexible enough to meet the needs of diverse learners.
- Student engagement and creativity increased, with more than 50% of students responding to three or more partner videos.

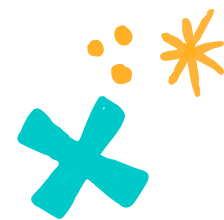




## ● Challenges

Gina Gallo, an Italian teacher at Bristol High School in Connecticut, faced multiple challenges when it came to engaging her students in cross-cultural activities. Due to the high costs associated with traditional in-person extracurricular activities, such as cooking classes, study abroad programs, field trips, and author talks, many of her low-income students were unable to participate. Gallo also struggled to find programs that met the diverse needs of her students. The COVID-19 pandemic made in-person activities inaccessible, so Gallo had to find creative ways to engage her students

in activities that would help develop their cross-cultural communication skills. In addition, post-pandemic teaching has faced a noticeable lack of interest and motivation from her students. Understanding the importance of developing cross-cultural communication skills and infusing the curriculum with authentic cultural content of the target language, Gallo was determined to find equitable and engaging ways to meet the diverse needs of her students and develop their intercultural communicative competence.





## • Solutions

To address the challenges Gallo faced, she adopted the Level Up Village (LUV) virtual collaboration platform. LUV's Languages & Cultures virtual exchanges enable language learners to communicate with peers in other countries via video submissions, engaging them in conversations about shared interests and cultural differences. Gallo's Italian language learners were paired with English language learners at Liceo Laurana-Baldi in Urbino, Italy. The platform allowed the students to engage in real-time conversations, share and discuss cultural perspectives, and develop language skills and cultural competency in a fun and interactive way. To further integrate the virtual exchange into

her curriculum, Gallo paired LUV prompts with classroom activities, such as reading and writing assignments, to provide students with a better connection to the material. Finally, she provided vocabulary support for students to better express themselves when making videos exchanges. This approach enabled her students to apply their language skills in a practical and relevant way, making their learning experience more meaningful and memorable. Through these solutions, she was able to provide her language learners with a rich, engaging, and effective language learning experience.

When I learned about LUV, I was immediately intrigued—my usual study abroad programs had all been canceled and there was a missing cultural and communicative link in my lessons. My first impression of LUV was, 'I can't take kids to Italy but this is the next best thing!'

**Gina Gallo**

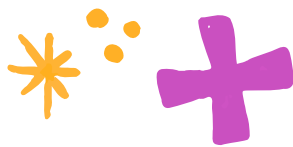


## • Results



The adoption of the Level Up Village virtual exchange platform proved to be a highly effective strategy for Gallo and her Italian language learners. First, the program was accessible and equitable for all students regardless of their backgrounds or learning needs, and it did not require any special technology or equipment beyond computers and phones. The flexibility of the program allowed Gallo to tailor the virtual exchange to the needs of diverse learners, including those with different abilities, learning styles, and levels of language proficiency. Additionally, the virtual exchange program had a positive impact on student engagement and creativity, with more than 50% of students responding to three or more partner

videos, which was more than what was assigned. This increased participation not only reflected a deeper level of engagement but also helped students to build their confidence in using the target language to communicate with their peers in another country. Overall, the results demonstrated that LUV was a highly effective tool for supporting the learning and growth of Gallo's Italian language learners. Ultimately, the adoption of the LUV platform led to an overall improvement of Gallo's students' language skills, cultural awareness, and motivation to learn. LUV proved to be a highly effective tool for supporting the learning and growth of Gallo's Italian learners.



I loved watching the class learn language and culture from an authentic source—this was not a workbook exercise or a fill-in-the-blank, it was real, authentic language use and it was FUN!

**Gina Gallo**



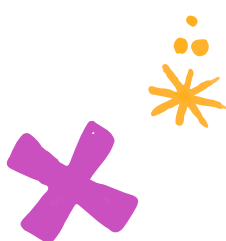
## ● Conclusion



The implementation of the LUV virtual exchange program at Bristol Central High School addressed the challenges often faced by world language teachers. The program was flexible, accessible, and engaging for students, leading to improved results in student engagement, creativity, and participation.

“My classes could not wait to hear the responses of their partners and were completely engaged in the creation of

each video. My students shared tips and tricks on how to make the best videos—learning was happening everywhere! I found that our time dedicated to our virtual exchange became a reward; students wanted to finish any other assignments just so we could focus our energy on our responses. There was a positive buzz in the classroom, a feeling that has been missing since the beginning of COVID teaching,” said Gallo about her experience with LUV.



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The mission of Level Up Village is to globalize the classroom by facilitating cultural collaboration between students from around the world. Guided by our carefully curated content, students build communication skills and collaborate with their global peers to explore topics in Arts & Sciences or Languages & Cultures through our safe and secure online platform. Through these exchanges, students enhance their understanding of other cultures, strengthen their intercultural communication skills, and gain empathy.



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