



VIRTEACH

*A Virtual Solution for a comprehensive and coordinated
training for Foreign Language Teachers in Europe*

Interactive Digital Notepad
for Practicum Monitoring

USER GUIDE



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2018-1-ES01-KA203-050045

INTERACTIVE DIGITAL NOTEPAD
FOR PRACTICUM MONITORING
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This Toolkit offers a guide to use the Interactive Digital Notepad developed for Foreign Language Teacher Training Practicum management. The contents of this toolkit fall within the frame of the Erasmus+ VIRTEACH Project, A Virtual Solution for a comprehensive and coordinated training for foreign language TEACHERS in Europe (Project Reference: 2018-1-ES01-KA203-050045).

VIRTEACH is an Erasmus+ funded project to create a digital tool to improve the postgraduate certificates on Masters on Education (Foreign Languages). For more information, visit www.virteachproject.eu. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union



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01

INTRODUCTION

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The Practicum –also known as practical training– is an essential and significant form of teacher training usually included in the official university training for the exercise of the teaching function. This stage provides real classroom experience and enables trainee teachers to put the skills and knowledge acquired in the training programs of their home countries (Zabalza Beraza, 2011; Canh, 2014) into practice. The Practicum favors socialization and stimulates the development of effective teaching skills, thus contributing to the building of a teaching identity. Furthermore, according to Hascher, Comobcard and Moser (2004), it also allows experimentation and increases the motivation of future teaching professionals.

Despite the importance of the training practices, these are still very varied and diverse, leaving room for improvement (Canh, 2014). Moreover, a lack of harmonization in their basic principles is observed throughout the European Higher Education Area. At this point, it seems clear that the nature and quality of this learning depends on the particular conditions of each educational context, which may limit or extend the practice of the future teacher. It is beyond dispute that training has become more international in the last decades (Martínez-Rodríguez, 2004). Thus, already in the 21st century, the internationalization of education requires rapid technological changes that improve current practices in teacher education (Townsend, 2011). In addition to this dynamic reality, there is an evident lack of unified formats for teacher training programs at the international level, since national agencies tend to work in each country separately. Finally, the digitization of education has proven to be the opportunity to overcome all these obstacles as new technologies allow for greater agility and cooperation in training.

Therefore, we believe that there is still room for flexibility and innovation when it comes to improving this training stage. To this end, the collaboration between the school's mentor, the university tutor and the student's teacher is key (Borko and Mayfield, 1995) working within a collaborative environment that facilitates mutual learning and brings greater coherence to the training process.

Within the framework of the Erasmus+ VIR_TEACH project, the following interactive digital notepad (IDN) is presented as a suitable tool for monitoring the Practicum of future foreign language teachers. Its objectives, structure and operation will be detailed in the following lines.

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**THE INTERACTIVE
DIGITAL NOTEPAD (IDN)**

2.1. BASIS OF COLLABORATIVE AND INTERACTIVE DESIGN

The optimal design of the interactive digital notepad for the Practicum is housed in a digital platform, a virtual learning environment (VLE) that provides a visual and public sequence of the organization, assignment and tutoring of the Practicum. Our notepad proposal externally uses flexible project management tools based on Kanban. In other words, our Practicum is conceived as a progressive project consisting of an initial approach, a development and its final conclusions (López et al., 2010). In addition, this platform has a unified and standardized organizational plan for the management and implementation of the Practicum, which is usually left to the universities that provide the teaching qualification.

Furthermore, this interactive digital notepad conceives the Practicum as a collaborative project between the three participating agents: the student, the school mentor and the university tutor. These three agents make up an interactive and dynamic community that interacts and collaborates from the very first moment in order to get the best possible results. Therefore, we understand that the active formula inherent to this this notepad is beneficial for both the mentors and tutors, as well as for the future teachers.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

This proposal is based on the Kanban methodology. This is an easy-to-use methodology that provides freedom of interaction to users, two key aspects in educational contexts (Kniberg and Skarin, 2010). Although there is a wide range of software apps that implement Kanban boards, Trello is one of the most popular project management tools worldwide and is appropriate for supporting learning (Parsons et al., 2018). Based on a Kanban approach, Trello offers free licensed cloud distribution (SaaS) and is compatible with mobile platforms. Within this framework, the Practicum becomes a project and each project is defined by dashboards that include task card lists that can be dragged from one list to another.

2.3. PEDAGOGICAL PRINCIPLES

In order to ensure consistent pedagogical principles, the orientation of the Practicum and the design of this notepad are based on the proposals of Graham Crookes (2003). According to this author, the professional development of language teachers must revolve around five key aspects: knowledge; observation and management in the classroom; the development of teaching techniques; contextual interaction; and social skills and motivation. Therefore, the objectives, competences and evaluations put forward in this digital notepad are geared towards these aspects, thus ensuring that the Practicum is a solid and effective training experience for language teachers.

2.4. STRUCTURE

The digital board of the notepad is organized in six lists:

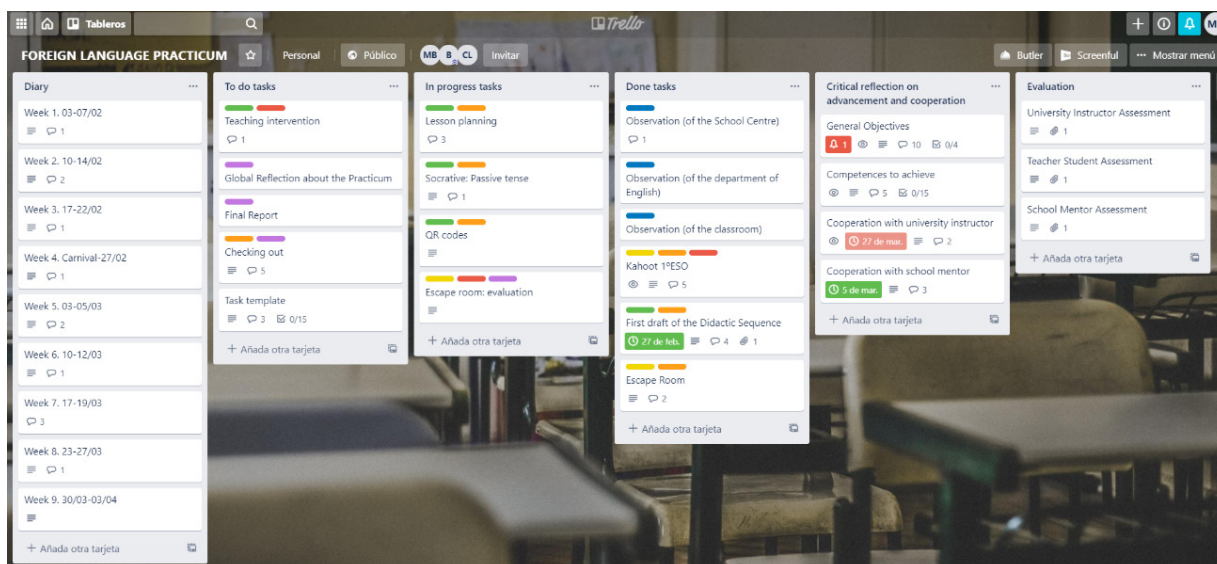
- Diary
- To do tasks
- In progress tasks
- Done tasks
- Critical reflection on advancement and cooperation
- Evaluation

The following diagram represents the intention of the flows and the natural dynamics in the use of the IDN:

Goals	To do tasks	In progress tasks	Done tasks	Cooperation	Reflection	Diary
Objectives: • O1 • O2 • O3 • O4 Competences • General • Instrumental • Personal • Systemic	Observation			Cooperation with school mentor	O1: monitor and record the progress	Daily entrance of personal performance
	Lesson Planning					
	Teaching Intervention			Cooperation with university tutor	O2: assessment of didactic competences	
	Reflection about the practicum stage				O3: reflect about own knowledge and skills	

As shown in the diagram, the final objective is to progressively advance in the development and execution of the tasks by always bearing in mind the objectives and competences to be achieved.

When the scheme is captured in the Trello digital board, the result is a very visual and intuitive representation. The design offers plenty of possibilities, allowing to incorporate background images and move the columns as the student wishes. All this has to be done in order to trace the progress and modify, if necessary, the suggested tasks. Below is a real IDN already transferred to Trello:



The creation of a list of weekly meetings under the title “Journal” helps the future language teacher to describe the tasks and interactions carried out during the week. It is advisable to use a structured description that answers questions such as: “what did I do during this week?”, “what problems did I encounter?”, “how did I solve them?”.

In the column “To do tasks”, we think of specific tasks and create a card for each of them. Each task can be associated with labels in order to facilitate its classification. The default tags created for this IDN are: Observation, Evaluation, Implementation and Planning, as they serve to indicate the progress stage of each activity.

The Kanban methodology allows us to manage the flow of tasks through the lists: “To do tasks”, “In progress tasks” and “Done tasks”. Then we can drag each card with a task from one list to another as they are completed. In this way, any activity and its flows are recorded, including its description, classification and comments. The task of the mentor and supervisor is to collaborate with comments, attached resources and links.¹

To facilitate the reflection of the future language teacher, the column “Critical reflection on advancement and cooperation” has been enabled. In this section, the cards are designed to reflect on the general objectives and competences. Conceptually, it includes four general objectives that summarize the main objectives of the Practicum established by Crookes (2003) for the field of teaching English as a foreign language (and, by extension, other languages), and fifteen metacognitive competences, organized according to general instrumental, personal and systemic competences. All these elements work as checklists that can be checked by any of the three participants once the objectives are met. In addition, these objectives and competences can be paired with specific tasks and participants can make comments on how they met them.

Therefore, it is a matter of verifying and linking the related tasks to the objectives and competences. This step can be achieved in two ways:

- The trainee teacher can progressively check the progress each time he or she performs a task by linking a card to the corresponding objective and/or competence.
- The trainee teacher can check the objectives achieved after all the tasks have been completed and before meeting the school mentor and the university tutor.

Regardless of the option chosen, this IDN is designed on the basis of the principles of the European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Languages (EPOSTL),

¹ Review is a key aspect of the learning experience. In this proposal, a task is reviewed before being placed in the “Done tasks” list. Ideally, this review should be done by a different person. In this regard, the future language teacher can record the mentor’s informal comments and feedback in the “Diary” list.

an effective instrument for future teachers to boost critical thinking. As suggested by its creators (Newby et al., 2011), self-evaluation and evidence of progress are two primary contributions of the EPOSTL. Following these criteria and trying to train future language teachers in a critical and constructive perspective as suggested by other studies (Barros-del Río, 2019), the design of this IDN allows to take control of one's own learning and the responsibility it entails.

Therefore, in the list “Critical reflection on advancement and cooperation”, the three members of each Practicum team can also comment and reflect on the quality of their cooperation. All of this information is undoubtedly of great value for the evaluation of the school mentor and the university tutor, and also for the self-valuation of the student teacher.

Finally, the “Evaluation” list includes pre-designed, role-specific evaluation templates, i.e., one for the school mentor, one for the university tutor, and one for the future language teacher. The school mentor template is geared towards evaluating the achievement of the competences and performance of the future teacher. For the university tutor, the evaluation is oriented towards the organization of the practicum. The future teachers are asked to rate their achievements in the classroom and their degree of satisfaction with the organization of the Practicum.² These templates help to evaluate the knowledge of the future teachers about the foreign language and the teaching skills shown in the classroom.³

By clearly seeing the objectives and competences, both mentors and students can keep their goals in mind more easily. When the Practicum is about to end, each element can be validated if achieved, providing valuable feedback for future teachers. The final evaluation takes the shape of this formative evaluation, enhancing the reflective process and providing a meaningful practical experience for all participants.

² These two aspects are in line with the principles of critical thinking, autonomy and professional publicity, as outlined in the EPOSTL. For more information, see Mehlmauer-Larcher, 2009; Newby et al., 2001.

³ An international curriculum for foreign language teacher training programmes would be desirable. However, the curricula are currently established by National Agencies and/or Ministries of Education.

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FINAL REMARKS

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The intuitive, progressive and dynamic nature of this digital and interactive notepad ensures its versatility for most Practicum projects.

The aim is to review, comment and link the tasks with their corresponding objectives and competences. It is important to highlight its reflective orientation, which invites future teachers to reflect on their training experience in the classroom and to develop critical thinking skills. Weekly reflection on the progress, stagnation or regression of the Practicum can be expressed as daily entries and/or through interaction with the other participants in the team.

This process encourages active teaching and develops long-term reflective skills. With this digital and interactive notepad, the Practicum will prove to be a collaborative, constructive and meaningful experience for future language teachers.

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