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The formative role of teaching presence in blended Virtual Exchange

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Abstract

This paper presents the findings of a three-cycle action research study (Nunan & Bailey, 2009) that investigated the role of teaching presence (TP) in nurturing a Community of Inquiry (CoI) in a teacher training virtual exchange delivered in blended format. The study covers three iterations of such an exchange between three different cohorts of Polish and German EFL student teachers working on international teams to design technology-based intercultural tasks for their future educational contexts. Furthermore, we focus on the impact of TP on students' self- and co-regulatory learning accounted for in the newly emergent concept of learning presence (LP). Qualitative analysis of various data sets from the three research cycles reveals that students' LP, and with that their "transformation of participation" (Rogoff, 1994), is nurtured if instructors engage in various pedagogical interventions on the levels of design, discourse and instruction (Garrison, 2006). We identify the various types of such interventions and link them to different virtual exchange project phases. We also highlight the modelling role of TP in blended formats in the context of a teacher training virtual exchange. Modelling, delivered through such interventions, can be formative for future teachers' professional competence.

Keywords: *Teacher Education, Collaborative Learning, Action Research, Task-based Instruction*

Language(s) Learned in This Study: *English*

Introduction

Given the ongoing advances of various types of online and blended instruction based on participants' active engagement rather than on transmission pedagogy, it is becoming vital to equip future teachers with adequate competences (Brandl, 2017; Guichon, 2009; Guikema & Menke, 2014). Research confirms that this can be achieved through engaging them in experiential, socially- and technology-mediated environments of virtual exchange (O'Dowd, 2007; Satar & Akcan, 2018), based on principles of intercultural collaboration and community building. The intercultural format of virtual exchange provokes cognitive conflicts in which students' established views, values and beliefs become confronted (Lomicka & Lord, 2007; O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006). This experience, if reflected upon and adequately supported with instructor interventions within a community of inquiry (CoI), creates space for

participants' epistemic engagement and, with that, the transformation of their teacher identities and the development of new teaching competences (Anderson, Rourke, & Garrison, 2001; Hubbard & Levy, 2006; Turula, 2017).

How can instructors best assist student teachers in the CoIs in turning cognitive and social dissonance into a positive learning experience? While educational experience in a CoI is shaped by the balanced interplay of the cognitive presence (CP), social presence (SP), learning presence (LP), and teaching presence (TP), it is the latter and its impact on the other presences that is the present research focus. Based on the assumption that teachers' activity serves an important modelling role in teacher training programmes, our intention in this study is to examine pedagogical interventions, such as assuring common understanding of tasks or sustaining a safe learning atmosphere that can be provided in the blended mode within the three aspects of TP, namely *design*, *discourse*, and *instruction* (Garrison, 2006) to support and integrate all the CoI presences, with a specific focus on LP.

The context of this research is our long-term partnership delivering virtual exchange-based teacher training for collaborating EFL teacher trainees from Germany and Poland in a blended learning environment. Unlike in online learning environments, in which the data on the instructors' role in shaping group dynamics remains hidden in the usual data collection methods (Pool, Reitsma, & van Den Berg, 2017), applying the CoI framework to blended learning contexts enables investigation of how teachers' face-to-face (F2F) pedagogical interventions strengthen and integrate social, cognitive, and learning presences and, with that, not only impact students' online work, but also model future teachers' competence.

In our attempt to identify how TP is manifested, we use the transcripts of parallel video-recordings of three iterations of semester-long, virtual exchange, in-class interactions, in which Polish and German student teachers worked on international teams to design technology-based, intercultural tasks for their future educational contexts. To achieve the pedagogical grounding for our research, we followed three cycles of an action research paradigm which integrates teaching, learning, and research (Nunan & Bailey, 2009) and which, by being self-reflective, allows instructors to better understand and possibly change their classroom practices.

Literature review

Virtual Exchange and Teacher Education

Successful teacher professional development rests on two interwoven processes of experiential modelling and exploratory teaching practice, both of which can be supported within the didactically complex environment of virtual exchange (Guichon, 2009; Hampel, 2009), in which teacher trainers and students engage in task-induced and technology-mediated collaboration performed in intercultural groups (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2017; O'Dowd & Ware, 2009). In the process, students experience a blend of technical, linguistic, intercultural, and content-related challenges in experiential learning cycles based on the alternating processes of experiencing, discovering, and reflecting on their lived experience (Guichon, 2009; Kolb, 1984; Wach, 2015).

This approach stems from the social-constructivist principle of learning, understood as socially-constructed and emerging from learners' participation in meaningful social activities within a community of inquiry (CoI) (Anderson et al., 2001; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; Hampel, 2009), a social construct denoting "a group of individuals who collaboratively engage in purposeful critical discourse and reflection to construct personal meaning and confirm mutual understanding" (Garrison, 2011, p.2).

The CoI framework is a widely-recognized model for understanding complex interactions in blended and online environments. Importantly, a productive CoI provides a positive learning atmosphere in which cognitive diversity is nurtured in the climate of emotional security (Hampel, 2009; Kurek &

Müller-Hartmann, 2018; Shea, Le, & Pickett., 2006). In virtual exchanges, it is through collaborating in intercultural groups that participants confront their views, values and beliefs with those of others and on this basis, through the process of "constant becoming," transform their identities (Wenger, 1998, p. 154). Principles of cognitive pedagogy support learning in virtual exchanges because students are engaged in understanding their own learning and, through the process of facilitated reflection, develop a new understanding of the subject matter (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Guichon & Hauck, 2011; Turula, 2017), adjusting their self- and co-regulatory behaviours accordingly (Shea et al., 2014). The social aspect, manifested in teachers' and students' attitudes, actions, and interactions facilitates collaborative knowledge construction (Shea et al., 2014), while guided reflection assists them in linking knowledge and experience (Wach, 2015).

Community of Inquiry and the Presences

In its traditional format, the CoI model is based on the concept of a balanced interplay of social, cognitive, and teaching presences, addressing the behaviours and processes required to cultivate knowledge construction (Garrison et al., 2000). The balance between the three results from participants' collaborative knowledge construction (CP), prompted by "instructional orchestration appropriate to the online environments" (TP) and "an encouraging collegial online setting" (SP) (Shea et al. 2012, p. 90). TP is also represented in instructional design, which can facilitate a collegial setting that corresponds to SP, the sense of trust and belonging that supports interaction (Garrison, 2006). TP thus is responsible for "the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes" (Anderson et al., 2001). In blended learning contexts, in which online work is supported with in-class interaction, pedagogical interventions additionally help to repair social bonds by alleviating tensions and emotional load (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018) and, with that, strengthen a community feeling (Pool et al., 2017).

Even though it takes the convergence of all the presences to assure a productive learning environment (Garrison, 2006; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010; Turula, 2017), research confirms the pivotal role of TP in stimulating a higher sense of learning community (Shea et al., 2006), securing a positive learning atmosphere (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018), and assisting participants in transforming their SP into purposeful cognitive commitment (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Dawson, 2008; Garrison, 2006). Research confirms a strong correlation between the quality of TP and the perceived learning outcomes (Shea, Li, Swan, & Picket, 2005; Wendt & Courduff, 2018). For example, in the case of insufficient TP, social activity may outweigh cognitive activity (Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Szeto, 2015), while direct pedagogical interventions may suppress learners' interactions (Zheng & Warschauer, 2015). A revised model of CoI by Shea and Bidjerano (2012) emphasizes the mediatory and regulating role of TP and SP for developing participants' motivation, self-directness and self-regulatory learning. An important observation is that participants' expectation of TP can be culturally driven and linked to the role of the instructor in their local educational culture (Szeto, 2015; Turula, 2017; Wendt & Courduff, 2018).

In virtual exchanges, the learning environment is usually composed of several intersecting communities of inquiry, shown in Figure 1, including the communities formed by local groups, by international teams, and, importantly, by the intense professional interaction of instructors, who negotiate course organization and task design.
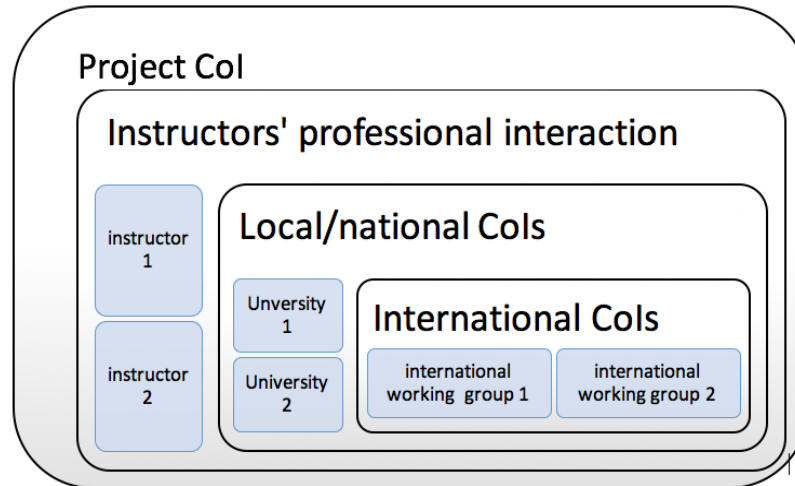
Figure 1. Multiple communities constituting Project CoI in the virtual exchange under study.

TP encapsulates a variety of teacher interventions manifested in a course through the three major constructs of *organization and instructional design*, *facilitating discourse* and *direct instruction* (Anderson et al., 2001), each of them affecting the CoI on the levels of SP, CP, and LP. For instance, both instructional design and facilitating discourse are crucial in the process of community building. In practical terms, instructors can design social tasks to trigger the process of creating socio-affective bonds and, with that, initiate group cohesion and a safe learning environment (Gonzalez-Lloret & Ortega, 2014; Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018; Satar & Akcan, 2018). On the level of CP, instructors can assist participants in their explorations of content and ideas, guide the progression of discourse through online or F2F interventions and design cognitively stimulating tasks (Garrison, 2006). Table 1 gives an overview of how TP can impact SP and CP in CoI.

Table 1. *Teaching Presence (Based on Garrison, 2006)*

	Principles
A. Design	
1. Social Presence	Establish climate that will create a community of inquiry
2. Cognitive presence	Establish critical reflection and discourse that will support systematic inquiry
B. Facilitating Discourse	
1. Social Presence	Sustain community through expression of group cohesion.
2. Cognitive Presence	Encourage and support the progression of inquiry through to resolution
C Direct Instruction	
1. Social Presence	Evolve collaborative relationship where students are supported in assuming increasing responsibility for their learning
2. Cognitive Presence	Ensure that there is resolution and metacognitive development

What is missing from the above framework, is the impact that instructional interventions have on students' LP, which is the focus of the current study. As we showed elsewhere (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018), blended learning formats are particularly supportive of instructors' in-class interventions, through which they orchestrate local CoIs, prompt reflection, and buffer negative emotions, turning them into cognitive

experience and, by "actively guiding and orchestrating the discourse" (Shea et al., 2006, p. 185), strengthen students' belonging to a learning community. In the context of teacher preparation, pedagogical interventions also serve as either direct or indirect modelling in action, as future teachers tend to not only imitate instructors' tasks or technology use, but also develop sensitivity to the importance of trust building and group cohesion, as well as observe how to approach challenges, all of which are part and parcel of virtual exchanges. In this way, future teachers develop their own (online) teaching styles (Savvidou, 2013), which is crucial if one considers that their educational experience is usually limited to conventional brick-and-mortar classes.

Learning Presence

Recent research into CoI points to the newly derived concept of LP (aka *distributed teaching*), accounting for the practical manifestation of learners' control and self- and co-regulation in a learning environment (Coll, Engel, & Bustos, 2009; Hayes, Smith, & Shea, 2015; Pool et al., 2017; Shea & Bidjerano, 2010; Shea, Vickers, & Hayes, 2010; Shea et al., 2012, Shea et al., 2014,). Shea and Bidjerano (2010) link LP with participants' intention to maximize their learning through taking over the role of the teacher and targeting goals through strategic interactions with peers, faculty, and technology. Shea et al. (2012) point to the three major indicators of LP, which they attribute to self- and co-regulatory learning, namely:

- forethought and planning, in which participants coordinate the work and delegate online tasks to themselves and other students;
- monitoring, in which students check and assure common understanding of tasks and on-task performance; and
- use of strategies to respond to gaps in knowledge by seeking or offering help.

Importantly, LP is not only linked to participants' individual efforts at self-regulating their learning, but also includes co-regulation shaped by group dynamics within collaborative activities (i.e., discussing course logistics, dividing tasks, managing time, and setting goals; Shea et al., 2012, 2014). At the same time, students are also participating in the TP, which is a central goal of the teacher education virtual exchange. Coll et al. (2008), for example, use structural analysis to confirm that TP is distributed to different degrees between the participants. Below, we follow Coll et al. (2009) in defining LP as the students' ability to exercise their agency and educational influence to maximize their individual and collective learning. In this study, we examine the pedagogical interventions that instructors use within all three aspects of TP, namely design, discourse, and instruction to integrate all the CoI presences and support future teachers' LP.

Research Methodology

In this study, we focus on qualitative data analysis in line with Shea and Bidjerano's (2012) call for a more complex, qualitative approach when investigating the concept of TP. Our aim is to attain a rich description of the impact of TP on the role of LP in CoIs in a virtual exchange teacher training project and, with that, develop a better understanding of teacher interventions in this context.

Research Context and Participants

This virtual exchange was carried out as a stand-alone activity during three iterations of a teacher training course in the 13-week winter terms of 2015, 2016, and 2017. It was delivered to 38 teacher trainees in an MA course in the TESOL teacher training programme at the Pädagogische Hochschule (PHH) in Heidelberg, Germany and to 33 students in a similar MA TESOL program at Jan Dlugosz University (JDU) in Czestochowa, Poland. The group consisted of 55 female and 18 male teacher candidates aged from 20 to 45. The distribution of participants can be found in Table 2.

Table 2. *Distribution of Participants in Three Iterations*

Iteration	Total Students			German Cohort			Polish cohort			Groups
	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total	F	M	Total
2015/2016	30	23	7	19	12	7	11	11	0	9
2016/2017	24	17	7	13	8	5	11	9	2	7
2017/2018	19	15	4	8	7	1	11	8	3	6
Total	73	55	18	40	27	13	33	28	5	22

In all three iterations, the participants worked on intercultural teams. Students decided on their local teams, which were then randomly matched with the partner teams. All students had extensive pedagogical preparation. As instructors could observe, students represented disparate levels of ICC, language proficiency, and digital competence, which impacted their perception of tasks, mutual communication, and the content knowledge of task design and technology use. Class time allocated to this project in each of the iterations included weekly 1.5 hour meetings in the local classrooms, of which 45 minutes of most meetings was spent online. Groups communicated synchronously using Google Docs and Zoom for joint task creation and evaluation. The other 45 minutes were used to reflect about the online exchange and work on the tasks in the local groups. The tools were selected due to their ability to support multi-user collaboration and communication. The participants used English as the lingua franca.

The course design followed the traditional progressive exchange model (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009) with three phases, or task types: information exchange (see Table 3, T1–4), comparing and analysing cultural practices (see Table 3, T5–6), and working on a collaborative product (see Table 3, T7). The central principle for the course and so also for the task design was to enhance future teachers' pedagogical, digital, intercultural, and foreign-language competence development by having them collaborate in international groups to design and peer-evaluate intercultural, online-based, and technology-supported tasks, as well as reflect on their learning experience. Table 3 presents the task sequence and the modifications implemented between the three iterations.

Table 3 *Task Design Across the Three Iterations*

Task Code	Task Description	Iteration 1 2015/16	Iteration 2 2016/17	Iteration 3 2017/18
T1	Written and Multimodal Personal Intro	Forum	Forum + Padlet intro	Padlet intro + videoconferencing
T2	Group Identity Task	x	x	x
T3	Padlet Wall: Local Groups Post Five Rules of Online Conduct	x	x	x
T4	Intercultural Picture Task	–	–	x
T5	Designing an ICC Activity	x	x	x
T6	Evaluation of a Partnering Groups' ICC Activity	x	x	x
T7	Designing a Sequence of ICC Online Activities (Delivered as a Weebly Site)	x	x	x
T8	*What bothers me most* Padlet Wall Task	–	x	x

T9	Exchanging Views on Christmas via Zoom	–	–	x
T10	Christmas Wishes Posted on a Padlet Wall	x	x	x
T11	Evaluation of the ICC Sequence Created by a Partnering Group	x	x	x
T12	Gallery of Farewell Messages – a Padlet Wall	x	x	x

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

As Anderson et al. (2001) have pointed out, CoIs need time to develop. Analyzing the three iterations showed the process by which the CoI developed, a process that was related to the tasks the students engaged in. The more or less successful attempts by instructors and students at establishing TP and LP in the CoIs were obviously influenced by contextual factors, such as the set-up of the groups; the pre-existing knowledge students brought to task design and technology use due to their educational cultures; their beliefs about the nature of learning and the teacher role; and last, but not least, the tasks they engaged in.

In terms of research design, the course followed an action research approach (Nunan & Bailey, 2009), since we researched our own educational contexts. Unlike design-based studies involving a collaborative partnership between researchers and practitioners in which researchers, who are better trained to conduct rigorous research, take on research responsibilities (Mingfong, Yam San, & Ek Ming, 2010), in action research, the educator is both researcher and teacher (Kuhn & Quigley, 1997), trying to better understand his or her own practice. Action research "involves a codified sequence of steps" (Nunan & Bailey, 2009, p. 19), and is a systematic, iterative, and self-reflective process, allowing teacher-researchers to better understand and possibly change their classroom practices by going through several action research cycles (Nunan & Bailey, 2009). Students partly developed into researchers by engaging in the reflection phases and by evaluating and questioning their own practice in their CoI, but they were not involved in the design of the action research cycles. Researchers adjusted task design and instructional interventions from one iteration to the next to better facilitate TP and LP.

Treating the three iterations as individual case studies, the three phases of the progressive exchange model were the basis for the analysis of instructional interventions. Since TP established itself in different ways in each iteration, comparison across the three cases was necessary and productive.

Data collection followed a mixed method design, following a quantitative --> qualitative --> quantitative data collection sequence (Dörnyei, 2007). A quantitative pre- and post-course survey were conducted and various qualitative data collection methods were used during the course. Qualitative methods helped clarify and detail contextual parameters, providing an emic perspective on the data. The data sets included:

- evidence of instructors' and students' online activity, both asynchronous (e.g., forums) and synchronous (e.g., Padlet, Google Docs, Zoom);
- students' learner texts (e.g., intercultural (IC) task design and the evaluation of partners' design);
- transcripts of video-taped F2F sessions (one camera per classroom focused on the instructor and students' F2F discussions during the reflective phases; students' F2F interactions at the computer during online sessions were not recorded). Transcriptions were verbatim since the focus was on general classroom discourse;
- visual interpretation of students' chosen critical incidents (using the magnifying glass approach, Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018); and
- student teachers' portfolios (German student teachers only).

In this study, we specifically focus on the transcripts of the F2F sessions since it is here that instructors' pedagogical interventions became obvious. Validity in data analysis was fostered by triangulating data from

student teachers with that of the instructors, who were also the researchers. Data naming formats are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 *Presentation of Data Formats*

Data Format	Abbreviation
Data Excerpt	DE
Iteration	15/16; 16/17; 17/18
Portfolio	PF
Reflection Phase in the German Classroom	RG
Reflection Phase in the Polish Classroom	RP
Oral (VC using Zoom) and text-based (Google doc) chat of international group	SCH
Instructor text-based chat (Google doc)	ICH

Data coding was done deductively at first, following Garrison's (2006) principles of design, facilitating discourse and direct instruction for TP, and Shea et al.'s (2012) indicators for self-regulatory learning in LP, namely *forethought* and *planning*, *monitoring,* and *strategy use.* Both researchers established a common understanding of the theoretical categories to enhance reliability. The first round of coding also generated other codes that pointed at the interaction between TP and LP (e.g., students taking on a more pronounced teaching presence over the course of the virtual exchange). Garrison's model did not cover LP, and Shea et al.'s (2012) indicators for LP were not sufficient to account for instructors' pedagogical interventions fostering LP. Therefore, to better understand the relationship between TP and LP, the researchers coded again inductively, looking for critical incidents in the data where TP and LP interacted, since with the instructors' approach of modelling teaching in this teacher education context, the development of teaching competence through online interaction and reflection was very much in focus. Trying to understand the CoI, researchers also looked for incidents that highlighted the impact of SP and CP on this interaction between TP and LP, and also the overlapping or merging of TP and LP at times when students took on more of a TP in their local or international CoI (for example, when coping with the requirements and challenges of task design), which showed their developing experiential knowledge.

Research Questions

Trying to better understand the role of TP in facilitating students' LP in international CoIs, we pursued the following two research questions:

1. How does TP impact SP, CP and LP in CoIs in a blended learning, virtual exchange format?
2. Which instructional interventions do course instructors use in various phases of a blended virtual exchange to affect the development of LP?

Data Analysis

Let us look at how TP is manifested in the three phases in light of Garrison's (2006) principles of TP, that is design and organization, facilitating discourse and direct instruction.

Strengthening LP through Design and Organization

Phase 1: The getting-to-know phase (T1-T4)

To develop the international CoIs and especially to support LP in the first part of the exchange, the instructors used instructional design to strengthen students' SP. The first tasks aimed to trigger students'

group formation and, with that, SP. The tasks included presenting themselves to each other (T1), finding a group identity (T2), and facilitating the group members' interaction by having them establish their own rules of online conduct (T3).

From the beginning, students' LP was also strengthened by involving them in co-constructing the CoIs. Instead of having the instructors set up local groups, establishing netiquette and time parameters (Anderson et al. 2001), these tasks were delegated to the students, involving them in co-regulated planning and coordination. Local CoIs came up with their own sets of rules or netiquette (T3). The affordances of specific tools supported this process. Padlet's virtual wall was used to collect and display the local groups' rules of online conduct, such as "being polite, respectful and open towards your partners is important to create a supportive basis for communication" (DE1: Dieter[1] T4-17/18), or "sharing and exchanging different ideas so that everyone can learn" (DE2: Anna & Majka T4-17/18). That way a collection of rules for all of the CoIs (i.e., the project CoI) was established and made visible to everybody.

To further enhance CoI building, a number of changes were made with T1 and T4 between iterations, again working with the affordances of specific tools. A community feel within the Project CoI was enhanced by replacing individual multimodal presentations in T1 with the gallery-like welcome Padlet task. Using this function, the students could see the greetings by all participants at one glance.

The instructors were also responsive to students' own objectives. Since the analysis of students' data from the first two iterations revealed that they had been missing a stronger focus on cultural practices, the intercultural picture task (T4) was added in the last iteration to prompt the discovery of similarities and differences and, by preparing students for the possible impact of intercultural issues, help them co-regulate their learning in the international CoIs.

Phases 2 and 3: Task design (T5-T11)

With the first iteration, instructors realized that CP-oriented task design led to many problems in the groups (see details in sections on Phase 2 and Phase 3). To support the groups' self-regulation and, with that, their LP, the "What bothers me most" task (T8) was set up and used from the second iteration onward. Here, local CoIs could anonymously post their questions about the problems they had encountered during group formation. In a second step, they were asked to suggest solutions (providing their name) to 2–3 of the questions, thus generating critical reflection of the encountered challenges, an example of CP.

Another change in the last iteration was strengthening the mediating role of SP to alleviate tensions involved in the task design phase. This was done by supporting community building and facilitating a relaxed and personally meaningful conversation by having students talk about Christmas in a Zoom (T9) meeting, profiting from this synchronous video conferencing tool, and by having students post their Christmas wishes (T10). Both tasks restored sociability in the international CoIs and were really well liked (see details in section on Phase 3).

Summarizing, we can say that exercising TP through modifications of task design and organization strengthened the different CoIs, with the LP being especially enhanced. How this was done on the level of interpersonal interaction will be looked at more in detail in the following sections.

Strengthening LP through Facilitating Discourse and Direct Instruction

Coding revealed a number of instructional interventions that instructors used consistently throughout the three iterations to develop and balance the different presences and establish LP in the process (see Table 5). Instructors also used their TP to strengthen students' self- and co-regulation to help them handle the challenges induced by different methodological approaches students had acquired in their respective institutional cultures. As will be shown, apart from reinforcing students' LP, instructors' interventions, performed through direct instruction, had an important modelling role for future teachers' professional competence.

Phase 1: The getting-to-know phase (T1-T4)

As was shown, the first phase in all of the iterations was characterized by instructors using task design to facilitate processes of positive group formation. It is especially in this phase, which can be characterized as a rather playful exchange, that groups developed a positive relationship and in which students established SP and developed trust in a safe learning environment, while instructors supported those students who had problems. During the F2F phases, instructors engaged in a number of discursive moves, such as praising (RP-11/14/16, RP-11/21/16, RG-11/28/16, RG-12/19/16) or empathizing with student teachers (RP-11/21/16, RG-12/04/2017) to model them (see Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018 for a comprehensive analysis of establishing a safe learning atmosphere in Virtual Exchange). In the process of this phase, groups slowly formed their SP:

Petra*: Yes. She seemed nicer. Not like in the first couple of days.*

Instructor*: In what way?*

Petra*: I don't know, she is getting more social I guess and more personal (DE3: RG-11/6/17).*

Even though the evolution of students' SP can be linked to various factors, instructors stressed the issue of trust repeatedly in the reflective phases in all iterations, modelling the role of TP in supporting sociability, also by making their professional online collaboration transparent to the students:

Instructor*: Sometimes it might be helpful to ask the teacher if something didn't work. We had this last time, then Gosia (the Polish instructor) talked to the students who didn't really got going. Ok, this was a little bit frustrating but then it worked (DE4: RG-30/11/15)*

Students follow this approach and realize the importance of trust when reflecting on the process of group formation:

Dilara: *And you need to... to build a ...**have to trust each other** so that you can...*

Instructor: *That you actually can talk about things.*

Dilara: *Yes (DE5: RG-11/6/17).*

In their international CoIs, it becomes obvious that students profit from this kind of modelling, showing this developing competence in their co-regulated learning and, with that, also distributed TP. They engage in corrective action, advocate effort or provide help to less competent group members (Shea et al. 2014). For instance, in the first iteration Reiner comments about his Polish partner:

Reiner: *My first impression was that Maria was a little bit shy. She didn't write a lot in the beginning of the collaboration (DE6: PF-15/16).*

Reiner: *Maria wasn't shy, she was just afraid of making mistakes, so I tried to make her feel more comfortable. From this point on, she wrote a little bit more than before (DE7: PF-15/16).*

Reiner: *One time she wrote me that she thinks our English is so good and that she feels afraid to write something because she makes a lot of mistakes (...) and we said just like teachers, slow down and everything is ok and you can make mistakes and things like that (DE8: RG-15/16).*

Maria's growing emotional security is confirmed when she reflects on her group collaboration:

Maria: *I think they saw I could do something more, that they can also rely on me and that I'm able to help them. And it was a really good feeling. I was so proud of myself (DE9: RP-01/25/16)*

This form of distributed teaching strengthened through SP can also be seen in the F2F reflective phases of the local CoIs. In the second iteration, Milena, an older Polish student, is very uncertain of her competences. The teacher and a student of the local CoI provide emotional support, creating a safe learning atmosphere for her:

Instructor: *Never play down your advantages. What you can definitely offer to your partners is your*

teaching experience.

Robert (to Milena): *They are in the best situation because you know Milena, you are a bit older than others so you have a different point of view.*

Milena (shy laugh): *I'm doing my best (DE10: RP-11/7/16).*

Data triangulation supports the finding that what teachers pursue in the reflective phases, they also discuss in their professional interaction, clarifying the concept of trust for themselves in terms of SP and CP:

Polish instructor: *(…) Finally, I got the impression me and my students are in the same team. It's so important to give them this emotional support they need (…). So, trust building not only in groups but also between the students and the teacher - really important in my system, where teachers are authoritarians.*

German instructor: *Good! What do you exactly mean by trust building here?*

Polish instructor: *Making things transparent, explaining the very concept (experiential learning) and the objectives. Highlighting various perspectives. Also, the relevance of this exchange to their MA programs (DE11: TCH-11/7/16).*

As can be seen, establishing SP in this way also has an important cultural function as it models an authoritative rather than authoritarian teaching style when the latter is dominant in future teachers' own educational culture.

In the next two CP-oriented phases of designing and evaluating tasks (T5 and T7), challenges like planning, coordinating tasks, identifying problems, or monitoring became part of the process, thus asking for increased student self- and co-regulation. At the same time, tensions in group formation appeared, resulting from the different methodological approaches students had acquired in their respective educational institutions. Data analysis showed that due to these intercultural differences, international CoIs developed their LP in different ways, balancing CP-related challenges with the SP they had developed so far. In the following sections we present the last two task phases separately because qualitatively there is a difference as to students' TP/LP.

Phase 2: First task design (T5, T7)

In this 3-week phase, international groups first analysed a negative example of an intercultural task, generating criteria for task design before they then designed their own intercultural task, which was then evaluated by another international group. Due to their different backgrounds in foreign language teaching methodology, with Polish students professing a more teacher-centred and skills-oriented approach and the German students a more learner-centred and task-based approach, students faced major challenges in all three iterations when engaging in collaborative task design, which was supposed to be learner-centred and task-based. This impacted students' CP in various forms. They complained about not being able to find a topic for the intercultural task, they talked about miscommunication, of not being understood by the partner(s), and of not being able to negotiate the task design. The emotional challenge this generated became a first major test of students' SP and, with that, their emerging LP. It could be observed in cases where group formation had worked well to this point that students were able to deal with the challenges even though task planning proved difficult in most of the groups. In the first iteration, Group 5 is a case in point: they were frustrated because they could not decide on a topic.

Magda: *I just want to finish this crazy task... because I feel powerless :(*

Janine: *Me too* 🙈🙈 (DE12: SCH 11/17/15).

Previously established group cohesion and an even workload distribution helped the group find a compromise when they could not agree on a topic. Magda, after her attempt at establishing common understanding failed, eventually withdrew her suggestion, showing her competence in coordinating the work for a new attempt.

Magda: *I thought we are a team so we designed another task (DE13: RP-11/23/15).*

This scenario could also be observed in other groups (e.g., iteration 2016/17, group 6), where the competences of Polish and German students were evenly distributed. Where competence distribution was skewed and German students had more TBLL experience, the group balance was disturbed. In the reflective sessions, instructors became aware early on of this challenge and tried to support students' LP through pedagogical interventions. In this, both instructors followed a similar procedure. They started by having students talk about the challenges they faced, trying to understand the problem by asking additional questions, then involving the local CoI in generating possible solutions, strengthening their LP as well as TP and challenging their CP in the process, and finally providing cultural and contextual background information on Polish and German foreign language teaching methodology to have students realize the reasons for their cultural clashes. Group 5 in the first iteration is a typical example of such an intervention:

Janine: *We like each other but we don't get along on the working level. (...) We didn't understand each other language-wise.*

Instructor: *Is this more the terminology level or where are the problems?*

Janine: *It's mainly how she came up with instructions and she always said "Listen to the teacher's voice, to hear the questions" (...).*

Instructor: *You say this is language barrier, how do the others see this?*

Marta: *I think it's a cultural problem (...).*

Instructor: *When you take your comment about "Listen to the voice of the teacher", how do you take this sentence?*

Janine: *Well, we talked about that before and we think that maybe in Poland, lessons are differently structured than here and they have a lot of teacher focus (...).*

Instructor: *I think so, too, (...) it's a different approach to teaching as such. (DE14: RG 11/30/15, see also RG-11/20/17).*

Instructors thus facilitated students' awareness of intercultural differences in task design, using questions to support their LP in terms of conflict resolution. In groups, though, where the German students used their TP to push TBLL, the clash resulting from competence inequity became more pronounced. With that, instructors faced different challenges in their local CoIs because local groups and individual students needed different kinds of support to facilitate their LP. In this phase, SP played a more pronounced role in the Polish local CoIs since the class was emotionally more challenging for students who did not bring TBLL competences to task design. Technical challenges often exacerbated the problem. The instructor provided emotional support by, for example, talking about students' feelings and giving positive feedback, thus establishing a LP where students would self-regulate their learning better. At the same time, the Polish instructor also had to provide more cognitive support. After having become aware of the lack of competence in task design in the first iteration, in the following iterations she then talks her local group through the analysis of the negative IC task example (T5) and collects suggestions for improvement (RP-11/14/16) to support students' own task design. In the last iteration, she improves on this approach by creating a friendly pedagogical frame, and thus facilitating students' CP.

Instructor: *I have printout copies of the poor task that nobody understood (...). Let's say we are a team of editors working on a course book for online learners and online teachers and this is the task we got from one of the authors and we find it unacceptable.*

Let's go through the task step by step and suggest improvements (DE15: RP-11/13/17).

Given the fact that the German students generally had more TBLL competences (CP), their instructor focused more on students' teaching competences, trying to make them aware of their options in terms of TP in the international CoIs to slowly assume more of a teaching role when engaging in task negotiation

(see explanation of Phase 1). From one iteration to the next (see DE14), he provided more cognitive challenges, confronting students earlier on with task terminology:

> Instructor: *What makes a task? What are the criteria in the end? That's what we're getting at. How do we approach this, from a learner-oriented way, or from a teacher-oriented way? (DE 16: RG-11/13/17).*

As will be shown, in the third phase this led to a number of instances where the international CoIs profited from this developing LP as well as TP of some of the German students.

Phase 3: Second task design (T8 -T11)

In this phase, during which CoIs negotiated a pedagogically more complex task sequence published with online website design tool Weebly (T7), the problem between the different methodological approaches that the students represented persisted, as CoIs negotiated a pedagogically more complex task sequence published with *Weebly* - a tool for creating websites (T7). As the Polish instructor points out in one of the chats:

> Instructor: *I could sense the clash between the two educational cultures today. My students - again - thinking in terms of "exercises" - trying to produce a kind of course book. This is their dominant language learning experience so they are trying to imitate it ;-) (DE17: ICH-12/12/17)*

The 'What bothers me most' task (T8) allowed students to voice the challenges of self-regulation they faced in this phase, such as time management, workload distribution, and task management, as well as deficiencies in SP, since they could do this anonymously. Pedagogical use of technology played an important role in this phase. The unique gallery-like affordances of Padlet facilitated this pedagogical process, since, again, all participants could see all the challenges and then choose the problem they could provide a solution to. This social task, apart from helping them vent their growing frustration and activating their CP, also allowed them to become co-researchers. Generating possible solutions to their own problems, doing action research themselves, and developing solutions which would also be viable in their future careers, their LP was enhanced. They generated an impressive collection of suggestions which, displayed in the form of a gallery in Padlet, formed "a handbook of good practice", as the Polish instructor commented (ICH-12/19/16), which students could apply in their respective international CoI. The task led some students to open up about the problems they themselves had, strengthening the international CoI through collaborative reflection and readjustment of practices, leading to stronger socio-affective bonds (RG-12/04/17). Students thus developed competences for more self-regulation in terms of using strategies to better connect with partners. In the chat, instructors were satisfied with this phase, realizing important issues of SP:

> German instructor: *Did you have a good discussion earlier about the what bothers me most questions?*

> Polish instructor: *Yes - the discussion was really fruitful. But I mentioned social bonding and they gave very nice examples of how it works in their groups and how simple questions or greetings can lead to very warm conversations. In general, I'm very pleased with them. They are in the eye-opening phase now :-) They start seeing their own agency (DE18: ICH-12/04/17).*

Instructors supported this process of discovery by focusing on students' LP in the reflective phases. They did this in the same way as in the second phase, challenging students' CP by reflecting on the negotiation processes in the groups. In this phase, they often went a step further, making the learning curve steeper and challenging students' CP since, at this point, they had quite some experience with virtual exchange group processes and task design. They went to a more meta-level by having students reflect about issues of task design and competence distribution. In the last iteration, for example, the German instructor asks students if they see a way of dealing with the different distribution of TBLL experience and technology competences in the international CoIs. While he suggested establishing expert roles in the group or having students teach each other, the students had other ideas, leading to distributed teaching.

> Veronika: *I could imagine that it's great when we use our field of knowledge to teach somebody else.*

Because through teaching we would evaluate our knowledge in a different way. (...) Maybe for the next students, we could teach the students in Poland some things about the task design before. Because I had the feeling that this is what happened in between already, if we start with that earlier. And if they teach us Weebly earlier we would have a higher competence sooner

(...)

Dilara: *I think the reason of this project is learn from each other. So if I just learn and apply my knowledge of things that I already know (...). As one of the most important things which one can do before starting this project, for example, (...) is to let them design a task as they have learned, and we also do the same, so that we can analyse the different approaches and then start to do it together.*

Instructor: *Good point, very good point. I really like this. One could do this with the second task (DE19: RG-12/18/17).*

This discussion in the local CoI shows the potential of strengthening students' co-regulation in terms of teaching presence, thus facilitating their competence as co-researchers to develop the CoI.

While this was more pronounced in the German CoI than in the Polish one, the Polish CoI also progressed in terms of LP, the instructor having succeeded in making students feel more comfortable in this complex learning environment. This was also supported by more evenly distributed CP, since most of the Polish students had the competence for creating Weebly websites, while the German students faced major challenges in this area. The fact that CP was evened out had a positive impact on the international CoI, circumventing the problems of a competence imbalance that had arisen in phase two and leading to a better distribution of workload.

Pia: *We split the work, I think in the task before I was so frustrated with the outcome of the task. So, they said I will do the task and you will do the Weebly because you have more pre-knowledge, and I didn't (DE20: RG-12/18/17).*

Dilara: *I think all members of the Polish groups they have already created a Weebly page and they were all very active this time (...) (DE21: RG-12/18/17).*

Flavi: *Yeah, it was pretty good in our group this time. I think they realized that we were a bit frustrated the last task. So, they participated and the girl with the language problems, she did nearly everything in the Weebly. So, it was her time to shine, I guess. It was really good this time (DE22: RG-12/18/17).*

In their reflections, German students stressed the technical support they received from their partners:

Vanessa: *One of our Polish partners really led me through everything (...) and she was really patient, really, really patient, after the same questions all the time (...). At the end of like... I was really dumb, but she was really competent with that. So (...) I first really learned how to create a Weebly website, that was nice (DE23: RG-01/29/18).*

When teachers did connect and intervene directly, problems were often solved. This again necessitated a safe learning environment and strong SP in the local CoI since students had to trust the teacher to deal with the partner (through the partner teacher) in a very diplomatic way. This was achieved by instructors' modelling in action and their transparency about mutual collaboration (see Phase 1, DE4).

Discussion

This study has looked at the role of TP in multiple overlapping CoIs in the different phases of three virtual exchanges. A specific focus was on the facilitation of LP as a condition for learners' professional success in blended online contexts (Shea et al., 2012; Pool et al., 2017). We examined data coming from the teachers' interaction in local and international CoIs (Anderson et al., 2001). Our investigation confirms that the blended format intensifies teaching mediation and opens up room for a variety of instructional interventions impacting learners' online activity (Shea & Bidjerano, 2010 Pool et al., 2017).

We focused on two research questions.

1. How does teaching presence impact SP, CP and LP in communities of inquiry in a virtual exchange blended learning format?
2. Which pedagogical interventions do course instructors use in various phases of a blended virtual exchange to affect the development of LP?

Regarding the first question, qualitative data analysis demonstrated instructors' intense, multi-layered teaching mediation, affecting the different CoIs on the CP, SP and LP levels and providing a productive learning environment. Depending on the task phase and the challenges that local CoIs faced, instructors used TP to facilitate LP by strengthening either SP or CP. Especially in the first phase, SP was targeted to support group formation; whereas, in Phases 2 and 3, CP was fostered, triggered by intense collaboration and the resulting impact of different educational cultural backgrounds. Locally, instructors autonomously tailored the type and ratio of interactional moves to suit the requirements of their local CoI and provided support in response to students' needs. For example, when CP was weaker, as in the Polish CoI in the second phase, the instructor had to put more emphasis on SP to alleviate stress (see DE10). In the latter phases of the project, which required intense cognitive engagement, task negotiation, and handling related tensions, instructors exercised TP to facilitate critical reflection in the F2F phases and, by doing so, supported students in progressing in their inquiry of intercultural issues through to resolution (see DE9). This also strengthened students' LP, especially in the third phase of the virtual exchange. Students' increased self- and co-regulation was manifested through occasional attempts at distributed teaching, in which future teachers served as agents of educational influence, supporting others in the learning process (Coll et al., 2009).

As could be observed, instructors' participation in action research resulted in their growing sensitivity to dynamic contextual parameters, such as group composition or participants' profile, which also led to modifications in instructional design from one iteration to another. For example, their recognition of SP as a counterbalance to students' cognitive and emotional challenges was manifested in design and organisation of additional social tasks (T4, T8, T9, T10, T12) and in the choice of technologies supporting multimodal rather than textual communication (Padlet, Zoom). These modifications had a clear impact on the positive development of the international CoIs.

Data analysis identified instructional interventions at all three levels of TP, namely instructional design (through the design of social tasks or by working with technologies supporting collaboration and communication), facilitating discourse (by sustaining a safe learning atmosphere), and through direct instruction (by intervening in group processes). In particular, supporting sociability in the course by switching from textual to multimodal tools (T1, T3, T4, T7-10, T12) strengthened SP in the course and, with that, facilitated students' LP and collaborative knowledge construction (Shea et al., 2014).

Table 5 summarizes major pedagogical interventions performed within TP and their impact on facilitating SP, CP, and LP.

Table 5 *Pedagogical Interventions in CoI*

Type of Presence	Design and Organisation	Facilitating Discourse	Direct Instruction
Social Presence	Establish climate for a community of inquiry (e.g., design social tasks)	Sustain a safe learning atmosphere through expression of group cohesion	Develop collaborative relationship
	Provide technologies to support communication and collaboration	Alleviate emotional load (e.g., give positive feedback, empathize, use humour, provide additional information on critical incidents)	Support collaboration and communication

Cognitive Presence	Establish critical reflection and discourse in support of systematic inquiry (e.g., integrate regular phases of reflection)	Encourage and support the progression of inquiry through to resolution Nurture ongoing reflection (e.g., pose reflective or probing questions) Offer a meta perspective or cognitive refinement (e.g., rephrase, reframe, link to literature or content knowledge, refocus)	Assure common understanding of tasks (e.g., provide additional instructions, situate task in context) Ensure that there is resolution and metacognitive development
Learning Presence	Delegate group management to the students (design tasks for establishing netiquette and solving communication problems) Activate additional competences to address competence imbalance (e.g., design tasks requiring strong technology mediation)	Make teacher-teacher collaboration transparent Provide direct modelling based on teacher's own experiences Help students develop a new perspective (e.g., by interpreting partners' motives or highlighting the role of cultural background) Encourage agency (e.g., involve the CoI in conflict resolution, facilitate discovery approach, develop students into co-researchers)	Offer choice (e.g., communication channels, group formation) Intervene directly Suggest remedial procedures Link students' experiences with their future professional fields

Another aspect addressed in question 2 of the study was the range and type of pedagogical interventions used in TP to facilitate LP. First of all, our analysis supports Shea et al.'s (2012) findings that "learning presence is more frequent in online preparatory areas where students must collaborate actively to be successful" (p. 91). Data analysis clearly shows that students' LP especially develops in the task design phases because they have to plan and organize the work with their partners and negotiate the intercultural fault lines of different teaching methodologies that appear in the process. As Pool et al. (2017) point out, a lack of self-regulation skills impedes this process and necessitates a stronger TP, something that we could show through triangulation of instructor chat data and data from the local CoIs' reflective phases.

Hence, in general, the study confirms Shea et al.'s (2012) claim that expanded TP supports LP and, with that, also other presences (see first research question). Instructors did so on all three levels of TP. For instance, through task design, some of the group management responsibilities were delegated to the students themselves, which helped them develop self- and co-regulatory behaviours of establishing rules of conduct (T3) or seeking solutions to in-group tensions or learning inequalities (T8).

In terms of facilitating discourse and direct instruction, data triangulation shows that the scope of LP exceeded the traditionally established indicators for self-and co-regulatory learning (Shea et al., 2012) in three ways. Facilitated by instructors' interventions, such as modelling in action (Kurek & Müller-Hartmann, 2018, DE3) or involving students in conflict resolution (DE17), students' LP was signalled by students:

- developing a new perspective on misunderstandings caused by different educational cultures

   (DE12);
- using critical incidents as learning opportunities (DE13);
- developing strategies for handling incompatibilities in their international CoIs (e.g., changing communication channels, distributing responsibilities) (DE11, DE19).

Instructors' modelling had yet another impact. In terms of students' TP, some participants invested in other group members from the first phase onwards by becoming instructors themselves, strategically developing SP through small talk (DE3) or providing cognitive support by, for example, referring partners to theoretical texts on TBLL. These findings partially counter Shea et al.'s (2014) conclusion that "the [CoI] model might overstate the contribution of the instructional role of students".

On a third level, through instructors' constant focus on developing students' LP, instructors turned students into researchers themselves in the local CoIs, generating instances of important insight into possible solutions to major challenges in this intercultural virtual exchange. Including a comparison of different teaching approaches early in the project and having students negotiate conflict resolution are some examples of addressing challenges (see DE17). In doing so, students assume roles in a typical exploratory practice manner (Allwright & Hanks 2009), becoming true partners in research while developing their teaching competence.

Conclusion

By exploring the various aspects of TP in a blended-learning teacher training virtual exchange, this study has brought into focus a wide repertoire of instructional interventions that instructors employ in a CoI to assure a productive learning environment. As we have demonstrated, the interventions can support all three types of presence, with a particular role of LP, to counterbalance tensions and challenges, promote sociability, or stimulate cognitive engagement.

In general, instructional design and organization proved to be very productive in mediating SP. For instance, by introducing social tasks, instructors initiated community building processes and, in later phases of the project, could alleviate tensions resulting from intense task negotiation. Instructors' presence on the level of design was also used to activate new sets of competencies within CoIs, and thus change the previously established competence imbalance in international CoIs. In this sense, working within various overlapping CoIs, instructors become mediators who, in response to unique dynamics of CoIs, employ various instructional interventions to impact all the other presences in the course.

In teacher training contexts, TP serves the additional modelling-in-action role. In this study, it transpired on the micro level of skills through the conspicuous similarity of future teachers' tasks and choice of tools. On the level of attitudes and beliefs, it can be hoped that TP has affected students' perception of teacher and learner roles in a blended environment, although this requires longitudinal studies. Also, by witnessing instructional interventions, future teachers should become sensitive to the importance of trust building group cohesion, learning how to approach emerging challenges and contradictions.

Another theme which emerged in this study and which is underestimated in the literature, is the pivotal role of the professional interaction existing between instructors working towards course organization and task enactment (Hauck, 2010). It takes a long-term partnership to develop an understanding of partnering cultures and, with that, be able to a.) engage in action research to modify the iterations on the level of instructional design and organization; b.) provide adequate support to the local CoIs through facilitated discourse; and c.) develop a better understanding of students' motives, successfully navigating virtual exchange critical incidents.

There are a number of limitations to this study. While it looked at three iterations of the well-established progressive exchange model, it also focused on a specific content area of virtual exchange (i.e., task design in teacher education). Different content, such as a focus on language or intercultural learning might generate different results, since task design will be different and so will the role of TP to facilitate possibly cognitive

challenges. The focus on TP is warranted since it is so central to the CoI, but the emergence of LP in the CoI model requires future research on learners' perceptions of their own LP. One way to better understand learners' perspectives is through focus interviews or retrospective interviews of the F2F phases. Also, instructors did not really tackle the central, albeit institutionally based, fault line of different teaching methods in the two cultural contexts. While institutionally based concepts are difficult to navigate because they are deeply ingrained in students' teaching concepts and professional ideas of becoming foreign language teachers, this needs to be dealt with in future iterations of the project through further remodelling of project tasks.

Notes

1. All participants' names have been anonymized.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix A. List of abbreviations used in the text.

Abbreviation	Explanation
AR	Action Research

BL	Blended Learning
CoI	Community of Inquiry
CP	Cognitive Presence
DE	Data excerpt
F2F	Face-to-face
LP	Learning Presence
SP	Social Presence
TP	Teaching Presence
TBL	Task-Based Learning
T1-T2	Task coding (see Table 3)

Appendix B. List of data excerpts supporting data analysis.

Data Excerpts	Description
DE1	T4-17/18
DE2	T4-17/18
DE3	RP-11/6/17
DE4	RG-30/11/15
DE5	RG-11/6/17
DE6	PF-15/16
DE7	PF-15/16
DE8	RG-15/16
DE9	RP-01/25/16
DE10	RP-11/7/16
DE11	TCH-11/7/16
DE12	SCH 11/17/15
DE13	RP-11/23/15
DE14	RG 11/30/15
DE15	RP-11/13/17
DE16	RG-11/13/17
DE17	ICH-12/12/17
DE18	ICH-12/04/17
DE19	RG-12/18/17
DE20	RG-12/18/17
DE21	RG-12/18/17
DE22	RG-12/18/17
DE23	RG-01/29/18

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