



# Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education

Theories, Concepts and Practical Approaches of Virtual, Blended and Physical Mobility



**Annika Brück-Hübner, Ulrike Beate Müller, Anja Seifert (Eds.)**

# **Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education**

**Theories, Concepts and Practical Approaches  
of Virtual, Blended and Physical Mobility**

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# Preface from the Series Editors

We are pleased to present this latest volume of the dghd *Blickpunkt Hochschuldidaktik* series (*Educational Development in Focus*), which focuses on the theme of "(Virtual) Internationalization of Teacher Education". This volume emerges at a time when the global interconnectedness of education systems is more crucial than ever. Edited by Annika Brück-Hübner, Ulrike Beate Müller and Anja Seifert, the present volume integrates theories, concepts, and practical approaches to construct a future-oriented education of teachers, as its subtitle already points out.

In the context of educational development in higher education (*Hochschuldidaktik*, in German), the significance of internationalization cannot be overstated. In the tradition of the *Blickpunkt* series, the volumes aim at documenting and reflecting important discussions and developments. Being the official publication organ of the *German Association for Academic Development (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik, dghd)* the series contributes to the discourse, making research, efforts, and insights available to persons interested in higher education. While most of our publications are only available in German, we made the decision to publish this volume, with its focus on internationalization, in English to widen its accessibility. We would like to thank the editors for this achievement.

Internationalization in teacher education serves multiple vital functions. It equips future teachers with the intercultural competence necessary to navigate and thrive in increasingly diverse classrooms. Furthermore, it fosters a global outlook that encourages innovative teaching practices and cross-cultural understanding. The contributions in this volume illustrate how these objectives can be achieved through thoughtfully designed international exchange programs.

By integrating global perspectives into teacher education, we enhance the quality of teaching and learning processes. This integration not only broadens the academic and cultural horizons of students and future teachers alike but also fosters a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment. Embracing internationalization within educational development is essential for preparing future teachers to meet the challenges and opportunities of a globally interconnected world.

The chapters in this volume explore various formats and models of international exchange within teacher education programs. These include student and faculty mobility programs, collaborative online international learning (COIL) initiatives, international internships, and joint degree programs, among others. Each chapter provides insights into the practical implementation, benefits, and challenges of these formats, drawing from a wealth of case studies and empirical research. Meanwhile, more theoretical oriented chapters in the first part reflect on terms, theories and concepts to put these insights on a solid foundation.

As you engage with the content of this volume, we hope you will find inspiration and practical guidance for integrating international dimensions into your own teaching



and teacher education programs. The examples and experiences shared here are not only instructive but also serve as a testament to the transformative potential of internationalization in education.

Our big thanks to the editors and all the authors and reviewers who contributed to this volume. Their dedication and expertise have made this publication possible. We also thank the publishers at wbv Media for their ongoing support.

Dresden/Lüneburg, June 2024

Anja Centeno García & Laura Picht-Wiggering

Editorial Board *Blickpunkt Hochschuldidaktik*

# Preface

For a longer time our teaching in context of internationalization has inspired us to get in closer contact and discussions with other people who are engaged in processes of internationalization at our university and other institutions of higher education. Hence, we intended to have a closer look at the diversity of practice in the internationalization of teacher education and organized a panel on the topic during the DICE (Digitalization. Internationalization. Connection. Education) Conference at TU Braunschweig in November 2022, which we hosted as editors in cooperation with Wiebke Nierste from JLU (Justus Liebig University). The exchange during the panel – but also beyond – made it clear that, on the one hand, it may be that teacher education as a whole is still very much nationally oriented. On the other hand, however, it also became clear how many exciting approaches and projects that already exist in practice today could act as lighthouses and pave the way for a greater internationalization of teacher education. The exciting contributions from all over the world inspired us to create this anthology “Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education: Theories, Concepts and Practical Approaches of Virtual, Blended and Physical Mobility”.

The aim of the volume is to provide a theoretical and conceptual framework and, above all, to illustrate the practice of internationalization in teacher education in order to create inspiration that can have an impact far beyond teacher education. We have invested a lot of time and effort in publishing this volume. However, without the participation of the authors, the project would not have been possible. We would therefore like to thank all contributors for their participation, the constructive and beneficial exchange and their trust and willingness to contribute to this book.

Our special thanks also go to the German Association for University Didactics (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Hochschuldidaktik, short: dghd) – especially the editorial team – for their support and constructive assistance in the realization of our anthology project.

We would also like to thank JLU Giessen, especially the Giessen Graduate Centre for Social Sciences, Business, Economics and Law (GGS) and the JLU publication fund, for the financial support for the publication in the open access procedure.

Finally, we hope that by reading and reflecting on the central questions posed in these articles, all readers will gain insight into what internationalization in teacher education already is and how it can be further developed in higher education didactics in the future.

The editor-team,

Annika Brück-Hübner, Ulrike Beate Müller and Anja Seifert  
(Justus Liebig University Giessen)



# Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education: Introduction

ANNIKA BRÜCK-HÜBNER, ULRIKE BEATE MÜLLER, ANJA SEIFERT

Keywords: internationalization, teacher education, virtual mobility, blended mobility, physical mobility

## Introduction

Since the middle of the last century, the internationalization of higher education has become increasingly important. While initially the primary goal was to promote awareness and understanding of intercultural similarities and differences through the internationalization of higher education and thus to advance society (cf. Liu & Gao, 2022, p. 13), since the 1980s processes of commercialization (“export of educational goods”) and processes of elite formation (e. g. global rankings of universities with regard to the number of international students and researchers) have become increasingly important. However, these processes of commercialization and elite formation are at odds with the original intention of internationalization, which creates a field of tension: on the one hand, (international) cooperation and (intercultural) exchange should be promoted, on the other hand, the institutions of higher education and all actors involved are in competition with each other (see de Wit et al., 2015, pp. 289–290).

In view of current crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine war and climate change, there are repeated calls to put economic interests in the background and focus more on the original ideas of internationalization (see e. g. Rizvi, 2020; de Wit & Altbach, 2021). The background to this is the thesis that the major global problems and challenges of our century can only be overcome jointly, with the close cooperation of international partners (de Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 44). To do this, all these partners need global knowledge, diverse (intercultural) skills, openness to the world and an awareness and understanding of intercultural similarities and differences (cf. Osakwe et al., 2022, p. 25). Central to the discussion is the call for “internationalization for all”: it is important to give as many students as possible access to internationalized courses and intercultural exchange (cf. International Education Association of South Africa, 2014, p. 2; de Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 44).

Nationally and internationally, the importance of internationalization applies in particular to teacher education. What constitutes professional teaching and a professional teacher in a changing society differs across countries and national traditions. Thus, there are similarities and differences in teacher education internationally. Based on the competence-oriented professional theory (c. f. Baumert & Kunter, 2013), it is assumed in a relevant area of international professional research that teachers have to

distinguish between subject-specific and subject-didactic knowledge, between didactic knowledge and profession-related convictions. Within the last years, internationalization has become an important topic, particularly in teacher training and teacher education. On the one hand, this relates to the fact that there is little mobility overall and teacher education is nationally orientated. On the other hand, the aims and advantages of internationalization, particularly in teacher education, are also clearly stated (Falkenhagen et al., 2019; Kricke & Kürten, 2015). Today teachers not only have to deal productively with the increasing heterogeneity of the student body in schools, they also have the task of adequately preparing students for life in a heterogeneous society and – in the sense of global citizenship – of developing them into responsible, tolerant and interculturally competent adults. This shall also be considered in teacher education in higher education.

While there is agreement on the importance of greater internationalization of teacher education, there are also very different concepts and approaches as to how exactly internationalization can be implemented in teacher education. The term internationalization hereby is used in many different ways. In the context of higher education, it is often equated with “mobility”. However, a closer look shows that the term “internationalization” has become a diversified umbrella term that covers numerous dimensions, elements, approaches and activities: from various forms of mobility (e. g. for the acquisition of credit points and degrees) to the development of curricula and syllabi to the establishment of franchises and campus branches (in reference to de Wit et al., 2015, p. 41). It is therefore necessary to make further conceptual distinctions between the central forms of internationalization in higher education at this point. The term mobility is certainly the most obvious for the discussion on internationalization. In the context of the internationalization of higher education teaching, physical mobility means the journey of one or more people to another country in order to participate in courses or other learning and exchange formats in presence (face-to-face) (“internationalization abroad”, de Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 29).

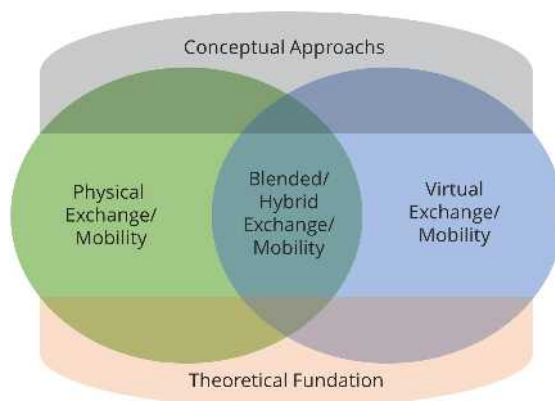
In contrast to physical mobility, virtual mobility (“virtual exchange”) does not require the actors involved to physically move around or spend time abroad. Students and/or teachers can take part in courses or other learning and exchange formats digitally from their home university or from home. For this reason, this is also referred to as “internationalization at home” (cf. e. g. Stallivieri, 2020). The design of virtual mobility can vary greatly – starting with individual synchronous seminar sessions to which international lecturers and/or students are invited, through asynchronous online learning environments (e. g. MOOCs) to completely digital (distance) international learning courses. Of course, there are also mixed forms of physical and virtual mobility: face-to-face and virtual offerings can be sensibly linked. In hybrid settings, it is possible for at least part of the group to meet in person, while others join in digitally. In blended settings, digital exchanges are linked with direct exchanges on site (physical mobility). This results in a wide variety of possible variants and forms of internationalization.

However, virtual mobility and “internationalization at home” are not the same thing, as the latter is not limited to digital exchange (cf. de Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 29). Another variant of internationalization efforts is curricular internationalization. These

are processes of targeted integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curricula of regular domestic degree programs (cf. Beelen & Jones, 2015). Teaching in a foreign language, i. e. in a language that is not the official national language, is also considered another form of “internationalization at home”. In the area of “internationalization at home”, a further trend is currently emerging: more and more universities are offering their courses not only on their home campus or online, but also at international branch campuses. These campus offshoots (“off-shore campuses”) often bear the name of well-known universities as a trademark (franchise) and are marketed commercially. In contrast to the other forms of internationalization, there is no international mobility on the part of the students. Rather, it is a physical presence of international higher education institutions abroad (cf. Kleibert et al., 2020, p. 6).

## Construction and Content of this Anthology

This anthology aims to make an important contribution to promoting the internationalization of teacher education. As it has already been made clear in the introductory remarks, there are theoretical, conceptional and practical levels on which the internationalization of teacher education can be considered. This anthology has been divided into two parts: While Part I “Theoretical and Conceptual Approaches” sets out the theoretical and presents conceptual frameworks, Part II “Reflected Practice” is devoted to the diverse practice and insights gained through the implementation of internationalization projects and events in teacher education in higher education. Although this division of the anthology into two parts suggests a clear separation of the different levels of internationalization, the contributions show impressively how theory, concept and practice are interwoven and form synergies (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Levels of internationalization in teacher education

In **Part I**, the focus is initially on the theoretical foundation of the internationalization of teacher education. The article by Anja Seifert titled “*(Elementary) Teacher Education and Internationalization*” shows why internationalization of teacher education is important, but also points out key challenges and questions that need to be considered. The article “*Internationalization and Teacher Education for Inclusion*” by Ulrike Beate Müller focuses on the relation of internationalization and teacher education for inclusion. Firstly, teachers’ competences for inclusive education and the supposed influence of internationalized teacher education on the development of students’ competences are dealt with. Secondly, research findings of studies on the relation of internationalization of teacher education and (future) teachers’ competences for inclusive education are analyzed. “*Strengthening the Internationalization of Teacher Education through Education for Sustainable Development*” is the title of the article by Magdalena Buddeberg, Vanessa Henke and Sabine Hornberg. The article examines how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can be integrated in teacher education in higher education and discusses possibilities for incorporating international perspectives into teacher education to broaden teacher education students’ views on global crises and sustainable development in education. The theoretical foundation part concludes with the aspect of intercultural reflexivity and learning. In her article “*Promoting Intercultural Reflexivity and Learning in Virtual International Learning Environments – Theoretical Suggestions and Didactical Implications*”, Annika Brück-Hübner discusses the thesis that the virtual internationalization of teacher education does not automatically contribute to greater intercultural reflexivity and intercultural learning and points out first implications of how internationalization measures could be designed to promote these factors.

In addition to theoretical considerations, conceptual approaches are essential to be dealt with, as they function as a kind of connecting element between theory and practical transformation. The conceptual approaches of this anthology therefore concentrate on the question of what requirements internationalization measures place on different higher education stakeholders and what support structures are necessary to promote internationalization. In her article “*How to Internationalize Teacher Training: Overview of Barriers and Approaches to Solutions*” Jelena Bloch provides an overview of barriers and obstacles associated with international and intercultural learning experiences in teacher training and how barriers are met on an individual, institutional and structural level within the framework of the program “Lehramt.International”. Annika Brück-Hübner and Wiebke Nierste analyze and discuss the challenges of virtual international teaching and the resulting requirements for the design of the framework and infrastructure of institutions of higher education in their article “*Needs for the Successful Implementation of Virtual International Teaching in Higher Education – A Reflection Based on Practical Experiences*”. Strategy papers form an important basis for the development of higher education institutions and provide a framework within which internationalization measures can be implemented. In her article “*A Spotlight: Strategy Papers on the Internationalization of Teacher Education*”, Wiebke Nierste not only outlines the important functions of strategy papers for the internationalization of teacher education, but also presents two examples of good practice. In the article “*A Step-by-step Model for Inter-*

*nationalization of Elementary School Teacher Education*", Maximilian Kopp, Anja Seifert, and Ulrike Beate Müller present an internationalization concept that was developed as part of the GloPEG project to promote the internationalization of elementary school teacher education in a strategic and long-term planned manner.

**Part II** will then focus on the many faces and possibilities of internationalizing teacher education. On the basis of various practical projects and their initial evaluations, the aim here is to provide insights into the reflected practice of how internationalization of teacher education can be realized in practice and what opportunities, but also limitations, are associated with the various practical examples. This part is introduced by the article "*Virtual Exchange in Teacher Training – An Overview of Four Formats Carried out at University of Education Weingarten*". In their article Gabriella von Lieres and Sabine Lang present different forms of virtual internationalization of teacher training and reflect on their respective opportunities and limitations. More virtual and also hybrid formats are displayed and evaluated in the article "*Teachers Education Students and Virtual Mobility Formats – Insights from a Student Survey on the Flexibilization of Internationalization*" by Kathrin Wild in context of the project "Partners in flex-mobility". In her article "*Teaching in a Global World: Internationalization in Pre-Service Teacher Training – The IPC Project*" Klaudia Schultheis deals with the topic of broadening intercultural perspectives through different methods and levels of internationalization activities.

Concrete elaborations and evaluations of single virtual international formats are presented in the following part. Annika Brück-Hübner, Ulrike Beate Müller, Tatiana Joseph, Maire Tuul, and Felicitas Licht present a concrete example of the implementation of collaborative virtual international teaching (COIL) in the context of teacher education between Justus Liebig University in Giessen/Germany, Tallinn University in Estonia and University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (USA) in their article "*VIEW: Virtual Intercultural Exchange Worldwide – A Seminar Concept for Intercultural Learning in Teacher Education*" and discuss its opportunities and limitations based on evaluation data. Another concrete example of a virtual seminar is given by Günter Renner in his article "*Virtual Exchange: A Comparative View of Teaching and Learning in Elementary Education*". This article gives an insight into a virtual exchange course, in which students in both Germany and Latvia worked together and investigated fundamental aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment at elementary schools. Lisa Sauer, Daniel Castner, and Agnes Pfrang provide and evaluate an example of an international virtual seminar on inclusive teaching between Germany and the USA, in the article called "*Teacher Education – Thinking Globally and Learning Internationally*". The opportunities and challenges of (virtual) summer schools as a form of internationalization of teacher education are discussed by Wiebke Nierste in her article "*Virtual International Summer School of the IMPACCT Project: Organization, Preparation, and Realization*" based on her own practical implementation experience. The question of how sustainable international cooperation between teachers in teacher education can be promoted and supported is discussed by Zina Morbach, Inga Steinbach, Sophie Bludau, Sven Page and



Annette Huppert in their article “*International and Sustainable?! Digital Pathways to Building International Cooperation in Teacher Education from a Management Perspective.*”

Formats of blended or physical cross-border mobility will follow in the next section. In their article “*Blended Mobility Format of Continuing Education Links School Teachers of German Schools Abroad and Students of Teacher Education of the University of Cologne*”, Katrin Kaiser and Christiane Biehl show how cooperation between student teachers and teachers at German schools abroad can be organized. In their article “*Breaking Down Barriers with MAPS – (How) Do Future Elementary School Teachers Use International Learning Opportunities?*” Frederike Bartels, Friederike-Sophie Maasch, Vera Willgosch, and Sarah Winkler describe a cooperative initiative between Estonia, Italy and Germany, which includes the structural integration of a study abroad program, an international summer school of teacher education, and expanded collaboration activities. The article “*Inclusion-related Professionalization of Ongoing Elementary School Teachers – Collaborative and Bilingual Teaching of the Subject Inclusive Education in a Multilingual Border Region*” of Simone Seitz and Heidrun Demo focuses on the specific conceptualization of bilingually (German/Italian) und multilingually (German, Italian, Ladin) joint courses and lectures in Italy/South Tyrol. The focus of Sandra Bellet’s article “*Elementary School Placements Worldwide: Austrian Student Teachers Engage with Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Through Hands-on Experience*” is on the demands of a globalized world and the need of cultural and linguistic competences and career development. The article describes collaborations and outlines a successful (research) project that was implemented and evaluated in Israel.

The close link between conceptual approaches and practice is particularly evident in two contributions: “*Discussing Transcultural Trainings in Video Conferences. Digital Teacher Education for an Inclusive World*” by Anke Redecker considers transcultural trainings in video conferences where prospective teachers are encouraged to get aware of problems and chances in diversity education with the aim of building an inclusive society, supported by dialogic didactics. The article “*Learning to See – The Mapping of Inclusion as a Tool for Internationalization of Teacher Education in the Area of Inclusion and Inclusivity*” by Michaela Vogt, Till Neuhaus, Marlene Pieper, Christoph Bierschwale, and Mark Schäffer-Trencsényi presents the Mapping of Inclusion (MoI) Project which provides students with possibilities to engage with internationally-oriented contents and also to partake in the endeavor of mapping the multiple and diverse understandings of inclusion.

The practical section ends with a look beyond the context of higher education. In form of an interview, the article “*Projects of Internationalization in Context of the German Association Lehrerinnen und Lehrer ohne Grenzen: An Interview with Wiebke Enders*” by Thomas Bürger and Wiebke Enders presents the organization “Teachers Without Borders” which strives to implement sustainable projects to give children and youth access to basic education. Through involving in such kind of projects, prospective teachers can gain a deeper insight into transcultural educational processes.

The anthology concludes with the final chapter “*Potentials and Barriers of (Virtual) Internationalization of Teacher Education*” written by the editors. Based on a survey of

the authors involved in the anthology and a review of the contributions, the central potentials but also limits of the (virtual) internationalization of teacher training will be examined in this conclusion.

In sum, this anthology presents an overview and a concrete insight into different levels of internationalization in teacher education – theoretical foundation, conceptual approaches and formats of physical, virtual, and blended mobility. Through such a structure and elaboration, the anthology aims to make an important contribution to promoting the internationalization of teacher education not only in Germany but also in other countries.

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## **Part I: Theoretical and Conceptual Approaches**



# **(Elementary) Teacher Education and Internationalization**

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## **Abstract**

The article deals with the topic of internationalization in (elementary) teacher education. In teacher education, the respective focus for school as well as for university is the national policy of education. In addition to this, cross-cutting issues in teacher education such as digital teaching and learning, dealing with heterogeneity, education for sustainable development and education for democracy are relevant topics in all educational systems and for teacher students in general. The claim of higher education for (elementary) teachers is based on the fact that students deal with the professional field of school academically, at a distance to practice, and that their own professional career does not directly go from school to school (again) but leads to a higher degree of professionalization through reflection, reviewing, and an academic examination in the educational field.

Keywords: elementary school, teacher education, digitalization, reform pedagogy didactics

## **Outline**

1. Higher Education and Elementary School Teacher Education
2. (Trans)national Perspectives for Teacher Education
3. National and International Elementary Education
4. Conclusion

## **1 Higher Education and Elementary School Teacher Education**

On the one hand, there is a strong national focus in teacher training, on the other hand, there is a strong demand for global education theory and research in and for schools and for transnational teacher education. First of all, it is not given as a simple fact that teacher education takes place in institutions of higher education. This is particularly true for elementary school teacher education, as this is the youngest discipline within teacher education and in many countries outside Germany elementary school teacher education has not been considered as a (full) university discipline yet. Also, nationally and internationally, teacher education searches for the appropriate “theory-practice re-

relationship” in teacher education (cf. e. g. Cramer et al., 2020). Especially, internationalization in elementary teacher education touches the fundamental question of what an elementary school is or could be, whether it is an independent school for young children for a couple of years or a comprehensive school for young and older children. Even though international teacher education research and school research is based on international approaches such as those of Lee Shulman (1986) or Donald Schön (1983) especially elementary school pedagogy tends to be a specific school pedagogy with own (national) discourses and structures of elementary teacher education which is the case in Germany.

In Germany, there are already major distinctions between the courses of studies and the various ways of becoming an elementary school teacher in the different federal states. While the majority of elementary school teacher education in Germany takes place at universities, and in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg at colleges of education (Pädagogische Hochschulen), in many cases the program is still not considered as fully academic and does not prepare for a possible doctoral degree or academic career. Nevertheless, teacher education consists of three phases in all sixteen federal states: teacher education, teacher traineeship and professional activity (cf. e. g. Herzmann & König, 2015), which in international terms is rather the exception and not the standard case of teacher education. Whereas the basic three-phase structure is common in all federal states in Germany, other German-speaking countries have a fundamentally different structure of teacher education. In Switzerland, for example, there is a single-phase of teacher education program and no civil servant status for teachers as in Germany. Students here just receive a diploma, although the contents of the study are very similar to Germany. In other countries, teachers change their profession after seven to ten years, which rarely happens in Germany because of the civil service status. In Germany, even with the majority conversion from state examinations to Bachelor/Master degrees, the two-phase training structure will be retained. In Germany as well as in other European countries, there are also progressive approaches to combine elementary school teaching programs with other similar courses of study (like early childhood education, special needs education), especially to take account of multiprofessional cooperation at school focussing on inclusive education and all-day schooling. Thus, in some European countries there is also no separate training in teacher education for early childhood education and the school sector, but a joint teacher program for childhood education and elementary education, e. g. in Italy (Bolzano), Switzerland and Poland, and partly in Sweden (cf. Griebel et al., 2013).

A transnational perspective in teacher and on schools is challenging. Internationally, most other countries do not have a diploma (as in Switzerland) or state examination (as e. g. in the state of Hesse) in elementary teacher education, but Bachelor and Master programs. However, this is part of the problem of internationalization in teacher education, that structures differ, and recognitions of certifications and changes are therefore difficult or even impossible for teacher students and their mobility. Transnational (teacher) education as well as internationally educated teachers and school systems hence represent international desiderata (cf. Terhart, 2021).

## 2 (Trans)national Perspectives for Teacher Education

In Germany, as in other countries, there have been various calls since the beginning of the 21st century for teacher education to become more international (cf. DAAD, 2013). However, there is also criticism that there are unrealistic expectations of these (cf. Rotter, 2014) and that internationalization in teacher education is just beginning. In national and international scientific discourses, the high importance of exchange experiences of students abroad is pointed out for all students (cf. Leutwyler, 2014), especially regarding competence development through the mobility stay (cf. Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2013), above all here regarding intercultural competences (cf. Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2016; Shaftel et al., 2007; Wolff, 2017). Justifications for the aim of internationalization in teacher training are beyond that multiple. Modern societies are characterized as migration societies. Migration and re-migration take place in most countries worldwide for various reasons (labor migration or war and flight). On the one hand, teacher education is required to deal intensively with the topic of migration and migration-specific heterogeneity in the classroom. On the other hand, the topic of teacher education in the migration society has hardly been dealt with politically and scientifically (cf. Schmidt et al., 2023) for a long time, especially with a reference to internalization. In addition, there is little mobility of teachers with an own immigration history to and from Germany. In this specific field of teacher research, there is hardly any work available except e. g. for the work of Terhart (2021) focussing on “teachers in transition” with a “biographical perspective on transnational professionalization of internationally educated teachers in Germany”. Here, the focus is also particularly on the role of language and linguistic and multilingual competencies of teachers with their own migration history. Also, the focus is on the importance of transition programs for teachers who were educated abroad and do not have a very high level of proficiency in German as an educational language (cf. Schmidt et al., 2023). Terhart and Rosen (2022) show not only that there is a “diversification of the teaching profession in Europe and beyond”, but that these are “ambivalences of recognition in the context of migration”. Ambivalence characterizes this new field of teacher education. Besides the shortage of elementary school teachers in Germany, the recognition of other certificates and degrees from teachers from abroad remains difficult. The respective education system is exclusive for externally trained and external applicants and remains a complex system. In addition to the already trained teachers from abroad (e. g. as a teacher for German as a foreign language), the large group of students in professionalization processes is a second group. Normally, one only deals with his or her own education system and there is no knowledge about it in other countries. Related to this target group, international seminars in teacher education as collaborative courses can be seen as an important opportunity in the first phase of teacher education to familiarize oneself with relevant international topics and to successively promote intercultural and linguistic competencies of prospective teachers.

What is needed is a common idea of teacher education, joint curriculum development activities within an academic network as a connecting point for joint online semi-



nar concepts and starting points for practical studies abroad. At the same time, this implies a high innovation potential for teaching and the conceptual development of the individual study contents and modules in national teacher education. Online and blended learning programs, as well as shorter practice residencies, will provide additional opportunities for further longer residencies and research from an international and a comparative perspective. For example, in addition to the possibility of a whole semester abroad (e.g. via Erasmus mobility), there is the possibility of a couple of weeks of practical school studies abroad and writing an internship report or even a thesis referring to these student experiences. Individual initiatives at German universities and colleges, such as the program “Lehramt International”<sup>1</sup> (for project examples see Morbach et al., 2024, in this anthology; Nierste, 2024, in this anthology...), also offers an opportunity to obtain an additional certificate for German schools abroad.

Students from partner universities (such as within the EUPeace-network universities<sup>2</sup>), who are given the opportunity to gain practical experiences in partner countries, e.g. in joint online events and online school visits or as part of a short stay abroad, can reflect on the gained intercultural experience and can integrate it into the teaching programs in their home countries. Reflection, especially in the context of internationalization activities, needs a professional setting, needs didactic support from the university to become part of pedagogical professionalization processes.

### 3 National and International Elementary Education

#### 3.1 Clarification of terms: elementary school

The field of internationalization in elementary teacher education has been addressed in recent years by individual activities of scholars working together or alone on comparative issues or on issues that have relevance in other countries. Here, topics of transfer are of particular interest (c.f. Müller et al., 2019). A challenging question is whether internationalization in elementary teacher education needs to be related to elementary school and if so, in which ways. The German educational system is special, and the structure invites comparison to other systems. When we talk about elementary school on an international level, hence, the first thing is to clarify the term elementary school: What kind of (common, inclusive, comprehensive) school is meant? How long is this joint schooling period for all children – 4 years, 6 years, 8 years, or 9 years? In Germany, the term “Grundschule” is used in most federal states for grade one to grade four, two federal states (Berlin and Brandenburg) have two years more. Normally, the children are between five and twelve years old. After only four years (six years) of elementary school, Germany has a “structurally anchored, early sorting of children into educational paths with different levels of challenge and prospects” (Kramer et al., 2009). In

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1 <https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/lehramtinternational/>

2 <https://www.eupeace.eu/>

many other countries in Europe or abroad there is a longer period of joint schooling in elementary school.

In Germany, elementary school structurally occupies a sandwich position between kindergarten and secondary schools (cf. Deckert-Peaceman & Seifert, 2013). This also corresponds to the discourse and questions about a basic education in elementary school, an education that can apply equally to all children (cf. Deckert-Peaceman & Seifert, 2019). It refers also to the specific regulation and support of the transitions of elementary school. Also, there is a specific orientation and alignment to the idea of different levels of didactics: Didactics of the elementary level as didactics of kindergarten, didactics of the primary level (or elementary level in American English), didactics of the secondary level. We have a tiered structure in the German education system, with several pillars in the secondary level which is difficult for outsiders from other educational systems to understand. In Germany, fourteen federal states already have the separation and transfer from elementary school to the secondary level after only four years. In addition, elementary school it is not a clear English term. It depends on whether one wants to express it in American English or in British English, whether one speaks of the transition from elementary to primary level with reference to the British educational system or from kindergarten or pre-school to elementary school with the reference to the Anglo-American tradition. In the context of internationalization of elementary school teacher education, this also raises the didactic question of how the various training programs can be compared with one another and how the relationship between subject, subject didactics, and pedagogy and didactics of the primary level is structured in each national case.

The question of didactics in higher education is accompanied by the question of the connections of elementary school/pre-school to school and the connection of elementary level didactics to secondary level didactics. With the beginning of elementary school teacher training, pedagogy takes on an important role and is strongly oriented towards reform pedagogy. While in other countries there is not always a high proportion of educational science content, the elementary school teacher training program, Germany continues to have high proportions of pedagogy courses and didactics courses, rather than focusing only on subjects and teaching subjects in elementary school. Internationally, students often study a subject (such as e. g. maths) and didactics in addition, but not with a focus on elementary school pedagogy.

Even though there are some studies (such as e. g. Huf, 2013; Rademacher, 2009) on enrollment from a comparative perspective, it still remains a German issue with a special focus on German traditions such as the preparation of paper cone (Schultüte) filled with pens, gifts, and candy and celebrating the school start as a family event. Doing difference plays a role right from the beginning, in Germany, starting school means to invest in the first school day (cone, school bag, gifts, the family event). This stages the existing social inequality and shows the unequal starting opportunities. Huf (2013) has done some work on the comparisons between England and Germany, Rademacher (2009) on school enrollment from a German-American perspective, and the critical view of different forms of school enrollment by Deckert-Peaceman and Scholz

(2016) is also relevant for the German discourse. It is interesting from transnational perspectives to look at the transitions of elementary school, especially from a comparative perspective. What exactly happens when institutions change, when children start school?

When the topic of school entry and transition is dealt with internationally, a clarification of the corresponding terms and approaches, which are different in the countries, is needed. There are specific terms and theoretical references that are used to work e. g. on the topic of the transition from pre-school or kindergarten to school. Colloquially, the term “school readiness” is used, which ties in with an old tradition that goes back to the 16th century. There are also winners and losers/underachievers often in connection with German as a second language or foreign language and the perception of linguistic-cultural differences (within the German educational system right from the beginning of school (c. f. e.g. Seifert & Wiedenhorn, 2018)). In consequence, the issue of educational inequality preoccupies German elementary school pedagogy in theory and research as well as educational planning. School enrollment takes place differently in different countries: In Russia, children start school without gifts for children, instead the children bring a bouquet of flowers for the class teacher. In many countries, unlike in Germany, there are no special celebrations. In African countries, there is also a right to education, but in sub-Saharan Africa about 20% of children are not enrolled in school and have to work. In France, as another example, children attend the *école maternelle* from the age of 3/4 and then only transfer from pre-school to the “large” school, *la grande école*, without great celebration of this change.

### 3.2 Digitization and elementary education

In Germany, there is a very differentiated and critical debate especially about media education in elementary school and elementary school teaching, particularly in the field of elementary school pedagogy and elementary school didactics (cf. Irion & Knoblauch, 2021; Peschel & Irion, 2016).

Digitization in learning and teaching is currently one of the most important topics in schools and teacher education, both internationally and nationally. Elementary school pedagogy deals with the topic of digitization here on two different levels – firstly regarding the work in classrooms with children in the lower grades of the respective school system; and secondly, it relates to the work with students who want to become teachers and therefore university didactics in teacher education in higher education. Teaching and learning with digital media and the further development of concepts and content belong together referring to both levels. Education and digitization always mean more than just the use of technology in education and technologization. It is critically addressed in the international discourse, especially with regard to didactic work with children in early and middle childhood, that the (additive) use of technology does not generate didactic added value and that the topic of digital teaching and learning belongs to the debates of professionalism and professionalization of teachers (cf. e. g. Arndt et al., 2018).

### 3.3 Cross-cutting issues in elementary teacher education

The topic of starting elementary school is one example for relevant topics of the internationalization of elementary school pedagogy, especially for bilateral or multilateral cooperation in teacher education. Other topics that need an international perspective in elementary school pedagogy are e. g. democracy education, dealing with heterogeneity, inclusion, difference, diversity, discrimination or education for sustainable development (ESD). Here we find a direct link and reference to important UN conventions (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) which have been signed by many states.

Human and children's rights education and the didactics of human and children's rights are a topic and of concern nationally and internationally for elementary schools (c. f. e.g. Seifert, 2023). In addition to property rights and funding rights, we have the large area of participation rights, which applies to all children beginning from early childhood in an inclusive manner. Hence, participation is nationally and internationally an important educational term which appears in curricula and in educational policy as well as scientific and practice-related publications.

Participation of children can be justified in different ways, referring to a legal point of view, a pedagogical point of view and a social point of view. The legal background of participation refers on an international level to UN conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Rights of Persons with disabilities. On a national level participation of children also refers to national laws, to school laws as well as to other laws as rights which regulate the participation and co-determination of children. The pedagogical background of participation of children is particularly important for an understanding of democratic participation which refers to an understanding of kindergarten and pre-school as children's spaces in an ethical and political way (cf. Moss & Petrie, 2002). From a pedagogical point of view, participation can be seen as a relevant part of everyday life in elementary school, because only through participation skills and competences can be acquired by the child him- or herself. The social dimension of the term participation refers to specific values of a (democratic) society and refers to social learning processes. Pre-school and school are hence regarded as a learning, living and socialization space for children and they are therefore the place where the foundation for social life takes place. Pre-school or school life socializes children and contributes to becoming a subject and a member of society.

In joint international seminars of teacher education, which mostly take place virtually, theoretical, and empirical work can be done on these global issues. What does participation in elementary schools mean in different educational systems? What understanding do we have in the different systems of inclusion/exclusion, of children's participation in school and teaching? Participation and democracy, participation and democratic learning therefore belong together. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been signed by almost all the countries in the world, the understanding of how to implement children's rights to protection, promotion, and participation differs internationally. While in many curricula of schools and teacher education there

is a direct reference to the term participation, the term does not appear in other curricula both in school and in university (e. g. Uganda, Estonia, Russia).

In (elementary) teacher education it is interesting, especially in international digital teaching formats, to work with students from different countries of origin to not only take one perspective on a topic like rights of the child and participation in elementary school, but also to consider different and other perspectives. There are many different cross-cutting issues like the mentioned transition from pre-school to school, digital teaching and learning, dealing with heterogeneity, education for sustainable development (ESD) and education for democracy. Children's rights and children's rights' didactics are also part of the ESD. This thematically engages elementary schools and elementary teacher education worldwide.

Education in democracies and children's rights also raises different questions referring to the nature of school and schooling and raises the question how school works (e. g. referring to children's participation) and could work in democratic societies (cf. Riddle et al., 2022). Contents from the field of ESD, which can be dealt with in the individual subject didactics (e. g. social and natural sciences, arts education, religious education) in an interdisciplinary and interdisciplinarily manner, are here climate change, poverty, flight, migration, the peace order. As learning objectives for the 21st century, the 5 Cs (creativity, communication, citizenship, critical thinking, and collaboration) are considered from international politics to be relevant for the 21st century: These goals follow the UNESCO's goals for Education for Sustainable Development ESD as overall tasks of education in all countries (cf. e. g. UNESCO, 2023; see also Buddeberg, Henke & Hornberg 2024, in this anthology). Philosophizing with children in elementary school represents an important teaching principle and method that relates to children's participation and questioning in classrooms. Philosophizing with children e. g. in social science lessons is an important principle here, which refers to the children's questions and makes asking questions and thinking an important principle.

Michalik (2023) links the method of "philosophizing with children" to the idea of "learning to live with uncertainty as a condition of human life". Thus, philosophy with children is meant to strengthen the idea of critical thinking and an exchange of different perspectives. International work has also been done on philosophy with children with publications in English, German, Spanish and other languages (e. g. Cassidy, 2017; Cassidy et al., 2019; Rojas Chavez, 2017).

## 4 Conclusion

A main question, which is not easy to answer, is when and in which way elementary education is national elementary education or internationally oriented. Some universities have maintained intensive bilateral or multilateral cooperations with other universities for decades. Likewise, some researchers from the discipline of elementary education work intensively in international projects, networked with colleagues from abroad and present the results of joint research at international conferences such as EECERA

(European Early Childhood Research Association) or ECER (European Educational Research Association) or IPIC (International Council of Inquiry with Children). Besides the joint work on the level of research and teaching through joint seminar concepts such as the COIL concepts (for an example of a COIL seminar see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology), there are also low-threshold activities of internationalization such as an (online) visit of a conference at a foreign university or the translation of German research results and publication in an English-language journal in order to reach a larger target group (a step-by-step model for internationalization is presented in Kopp et al., 2024, in this anthology). Precisely because teacher education as well as educational and school policy, practice and theory are nationally oriented there is a strong demand for global education theory and research in and for (elementary) schools and also for transnational (elementary school) teacher training.

It still remains to be clarified for elementary school pedagogy in an international orientation: Is there primary school pedagogy related to a specific school form (“Grundschule”), related to the work with the specific age group (children between 5 and 12 years), related to transitions (from pre-school or kindergarten to school, from primary to secondary school), related to the idea of an inclusive and democratic school for all, etc.? The clarification of concepts and referring to different theoretical and empirical approaches is hence a co-constructive process in elementary education of the teachers and the learners and a field of didactics in higher education. In international (digital) course the experience can be made, how can new knowledge can be connected to old knowledge, how can the individual academic as well as my professional and biographical perspectives be broadened? The example of the topic of transitions makes it clear that internationalization in elementary school pedagogy means more and something different than an additional offer and a reference to international contacts of one’s own university or department of school education.

The relevant questions of didactics and university didactics about which contents should be dealt with in international courses of elementary education and how this should be done methodically need an examination of the whole concept of education and the question of the goal of education in contemporary society. The mentioned topics and tasks are not limited to one nation but are global and universal in their orientation and treatment. Internationalization of elementary school pedagogy can hence be seen as an ongoing changing process, also in terms of contents, concepts and professional relationships. It includes more than partially attending international events, including, or referring to English texts. It is also about the question of how and in which way international cooperation can take place on different levels of research and teaching and how references can be made to each other in a long-term and profound manner: Both by individual actors in teacher education, e.g. through student or teacher mobility, and through a conceptually based and long-term cooperation between institutions.

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# Internationalization and Teacher Education for Inclusion

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## Abstract

In 2020 the Council of the European Union highlighted that prospective and practicing teachers and trainers should be supported to effectively work with learners from a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. To develop social and intercultural competences, the council maintains cross-border mobility – either virtual, blended or physical – as a valuable opportunity and a powerful learning experience for prospective and practicing teachers and trainers (p. 5). This article focuses on the relation of internationalization and teacher education for inclusion. After a clarification of the terms internationalization and inclusion, teachers' competences for inclusive education and the supposed influence of internationalized teacher education on the development of students' competences are dealt with. Finally, research findings of studies on the relation of internationalization of teacher education and (future) teachers' competences for inclusive education are analyzed.

Keywords: inclusive education, teachers' competences, intercultural competences, influence of internationalization

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Terms: Internationalization, Intercultural Competences and Inclusion
3. Development of Teachers' Inclusive Competences
4. Internationalization and Teachers' Competences for Inclusive Education
5. Conclusion

## 1 Introduction

Originally, European universities in medieval times attracted students and talents from many different countries and thus were international institutions (Altbach & Knight, 2007). In times after the Protestant Reformation academe turned inward due to the rise of the nation-state and nationalism. Now, in times of an integrated world economy, information technology and rising mobility for students, academe has found an international direction again (ibid., p. 302 ff). In 2010, Quezada stated that the internationalization of teacher education programs is necessary "so that teacher educators may lead the way in developing partnerships and creating international training programs for

prospective teacher (...) candidates, so they may become more cosmopolitan educators” (p. 1). In 2020 the Council of the European Union stated in its official journal that prospective and practicing teachers and trainers should be supported to effectively respond to challenges such as “working in linguistically and culturally diverse classrooms and learning environments, with learners from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, with different needs, including special education needs and safeguarding inclusiveness” (p. 2). To develop social, intercultural, multilingual, and interpersonal competences, the council maintains cross-border mobility – either virtual, blended or physical – as a valuable opportunity and a powerful learning experience for prospective and practicing teachers and trainers (p. 5).

According to De Wit and Altbach (2021), current and future processes of internationalization should integrate efforts to develop a more inclusive internationalization and to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, United Nations, 2015). For the education of children, Goal 4 *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* is central. Ainscow (2020) states that in international context inclusive education is increasingly seen as a broad concept – encompassing aspects of gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, and ability – rather than as a narrow concept only addressing children with disabilities.

This article intends to have a closer look on the relation of internationalization and teacher education for inclusion. Consciously, this article does not only focus on intercultural competences, which are frequently mentioned to be addressed by the internationalization of teacher education (HRK, 2017; DAAD, 2013). In terms of a broad concept of inclusion, teacher education for coping with cultural but also with other kinds of diversity shall be addressed. At first, the terms of internationalization and inclusion are clarified. Afterwards, teachers’ competences for inclusive education will be dealt with. Finally, the influence of internationalization on (future) teachers’ competences for inclusive education is concentrated on.

## 2 Terms: Internationalization, Intercultural Competence and Inclusion

### 2.1 Internationalization and Intercultural Competences

The term of internationalization can be defined in different ways. Altbach and Knight (2007) emphasize that internationalization and globalization are connected but that they are not the same thing. While globalization sets the context of academic and economic trends, internationalization has to deal with the global academic environment and encompasses the practices and policies of academic institutions and systems (ibid., p. 290). The motivation of traditional nonprofit universities for academic internationalization can be seen in advancing research, knowledge, and cultural understanding. The motivation of the for-profit sector for academic internationalization is to earn money (ibid., p. 293). De Wit and Altbach characterize internationalization in tertiary education in the past 30 decades by using the following descriptions: less focus on internationalization at home than on internationalization abroad, policies of universities and

government being less strategic, comprehensive, and central than ad hoc, fragmented, and marginal, less for global and intercultural outcomes for all than benefiting a small, elite group of students and institutions, and a rising commercialization and engagement of for-profit companies (De Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 34). For future internationalization, De Wit and Altbach (2021) present the following definition to intentionally support quality improvement and benefit for more students:

“The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (De Wit and Altbach, 2021, p. 35).

Based on the Nelson Mandela Bay Global Dialogue Declaration on the Future of Internationalization of Higher Education, De Wit and Altbach constitute that internationalization processes should focus on a global learning for all members of the academic community. These should be implemented through internationalizing the curriculum, collaborative online international learning (COIL), teacher education and foreign language education, through integrating efforts to reach the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs, United Nations, 2015; for further reading referring to sustainability in context of internationalization see Buddeberg et al., 2024, in this anthology, and Morbach et al., 2024, in this anthology), through global citizenship education and addressing intercultural competences (De Wit and Altbach, 2021, p. 44). Wolff offers a definition of cultural competences, which in its core is scientifically accepted in many disciplines: “A complex of abilities needed to perform effectively and appropriately when interacting with others who are linguistically and culturally different from oneself” (Wolff, 2017, p. 11).

Another aspect, de Wit and Altbach (2021) regard as being necessary for the process of internationalization, is developing a more inclusive and social internationalization (ibid.; for further reading towards inclusive education in context of internationalization see Seitz & Demo, 2024, and Vogt et al., 2024, both in this anthology).

## 2.2 Inclusion and Inclusive Education

The demand for a more inclusive internationalization leads to the term of inclusion. Ainscow (2020, p. 8 ff) highlights that – based on an understanding of inclusive education as a basic human right – inclusion and inclusive education are regarded as a broad concept which promotes diversity amongst all learners. Diversity encompasses aspects of gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, and ability. The aim of inclusive education is seen in the elimination of social exclusion by identifying and removing barriers, which hinder any kind of students from being present, from participating or achieving (ibid.).

A framework for promoting inclusive education is presented by Ainscow (2020, p. 8 ff.). It puts school development in the middle while four other interrelated factors contribute to school development: inclusion and equity as principles, use of evidence, community involvement, and administration. The principles of inclusion and equity shall be discussed by all stakeholders involved to come to a wider and shared understanding. Evidence shall be collected in such a way that it relates to the aspects of pres-

ence, participation and achievement especially for students at risk. The wider community such as the family, school-to-school collaboration and administrative departments are important components of inclusive education (ibid.).

The Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO et al., 2015) accentuated teachers as being of outstanding importance to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 4 of quality education (ibid., p. 54). Indicative strategies to educate teachers properly are to improve teacher training, especially “on how to address challenges of pupils with special education needs” (ibid., p. 55). Thus, teachers’ development of competences to deal with special educational needs is concentrated on in the following section.

### 3 Development of Teachers’ Inclusive Competences

In this part, the COACTIV model of teachers’ professional competences is presented and enlarged (Baumert & Kunter, 2013; Schmengler, 2022) and teachers’ competences for inclusive education are presented (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2022).

#### 3.1 The COACTIV Model of Teachers’ Professional Competence

The COACTIV model of teachers’ professional competences describes aspects of professional competences for the context of teaching (Baumert & Kunter, 2013, p. 25 ff). On the one hand, beliefs/values/goals, motivational orientations and self-regulation, on the other hand professional knowledge characterizes professional competences. Different domains of knowledge are specified: content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical/psychological knowledge, organizational knowledge, and counseling knowledge (ibid.).

Schmengler (2021; 2022) developed a model of teachers’ professional competences, which specifies the model of Baumert & Kunter (2013) for intercultural competences. Professional knowledge is particularized by knowledge about migration movements, knowledge about religious and cultural minorities, language prerequisites of students with migration background. To address beliefs and values, Schmengler itemizes values, which support learning in equal learning conditions, consider cultural backgrounds in learning processes and deal with these efficiently. The active integration of intercultural situations at school can be seen as motivational orientation. Schmengler also refers to self-regulation to deal with challenges in intercultural contexts (Schmengler, 2022, p. 203). To put emphasis on the development of competences as a process, Schmengler distinguishes between components of knowledge, beliefs and values, and agency.

#### 3.2 Teachers’ Professional Competences for Inclusive Education

Based on a 2012 version, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2022) has further developed the profile for inclusive teacher professional learning, which aims to support all educational professionals. The profile’s core values are: *Valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with others, and personal and col-*

*laborative professional development* (ibid., p. 21). These core values are illustrated in Figure 1, where areas of competences are described in detail by underpinning attitudes and beliefs, essential knowledge, and crucial skills. The aspects, which have been chosen for the summary of the core values in Table 1 (ibid., p. 22 ff), concentrate on educators’ dealing with cultural diversity as the context of international experiences – as one focus of this article – might especially promote intercultural competences.

UNESCO (2017, p. 35) refers to these four core values (in their 2012 version) and suggests they be embedded in teacher education programs.

After dealing with (future) teachers’ competences, which different frameworks suggest, the following section intends to concentrate on teachers’ competences in context of internationalization.

**Table 1:** Outline of the Profile for Inclusive Teacher Professional Learning: Core Values with Areas of Competences, focused on cultural diversity (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2022, p. 22 ff.)

Profile’s core value: Valuing learner diversity		
<p><b>Conceptions of inclusion and equity</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> A belief in equality; real participation of all learners, a commitment to every learner’s belonging, achievement, well-being and mental health</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Inclusive education as an approach to make schools welcoming, supportive and challenging for all learners</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Critically examining one’s own beliefs; being empathetic to learners’ diverse strength and needs</p>	<p><b>Professionals’ views of learner difference</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> Variability in human development is natural; teacher is a key influence on learner’s self-esteem</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> It is <i>normal to be different</i>; learners learn in different ways</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Identifying the most appropriate ways of responding to diversity in all situations; intercultural dialogue, mediation and peace education to create cohesive classroom communities; offering guidance among colleagues</p>	
Profile’s core value: Supporting all learners		
<p><b>Promoting all learner’s learning (academic, practical, social and emotional)</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> Learning is primarily a social activity</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Different models of learning</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Effective verbal and non-verbal communication</p>	<p><b>Supporting all learners’ well-being</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> The importance of being sensitive to learners’ emotional needs</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Positive behavior and classroom management approaches</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Removing social barriers in group arrangements</p>	<p><b>Effective teaching approaches and flexible organization of support</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> Effective teaching seeks to represent all learners</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Culturally responsive pedagogies and differentiation of curriculum content</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Working with individual learners as well as heterogeneous groups</p>



(Continuing Table 1)

Profile's core value: Working with others		
<p><b>Giving learners a true voice</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> Learners' personal dreams, goals and fears matter and must be heard, particularly those learners with complex needs or who belong to vulnerable and hard-to-reach groups</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> The risk of marginalization of particular groups of learners</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Considering learners' views and acknowledging them as an equal and integral part in discussions</p>	<p><b>Working with parents and families</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> Respect for parents' and families' cultural and social backgrounds and perspectives</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> the importance of issues of identity, representation and self-advocacy of marginalized groups</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> communicating effectively with parents and family members of different cultural, ethnic, linguistic and social backgrounds</p>	<p><b>Working with a range of education professionals</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> Awareness of colleagues' professional backgrounds, experience and perspectives</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Multi-agency working models, where teachers in inclusive classrooms cooperate with other experts and staff</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> Collaborative problem-solving among all education professionals</p>
Profile's core value: Personal and collaborative professional development		
<p><b>Professionals as members of an inclusive learning community</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> teaching requires on-going and systematic planning &amp; reflection</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> Problem-solving strategies</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> critically examining one's own beliefs</p>	<p><b>Professional Learning for inclusion builds on initial education</b></p> <p><u>Attitudes and beliefs:</u> An educator cannot be an expert in all questions related to inclusive education</p> <p><u>Knowledge:</u> the educational law and the legal context</p> <p><u>Skills:</u> flexibility in teaching strategies that promote innovation and personal learning</p>	

## 4 Internationalization and Teachers' Competences for Inclusive Education

This paragraph focuses on the influence of internationalization of teacher education on (future) teachers' competences for inclusive education. Firstly, the supposed development of (future) teachers' competences and secondly, studies, which have examined the influence of internationalization on (future) teachers' competences, are concentrated on.

### 4.1 Internationalization and the Supposed Development of Students' Competences

According to the German Rectors' Conference (HRK, 2017) students shall be equipped "adequately to practice responsible global citizenship" (ibid., p. 3). By formulating some objectives of the internationalization of curricula, they refer to the development of students' intercultural competences, intercultural communication and critical reflection of their own perspective. By achieving these goals, students shall be equipped to participate in a multicultural, democratic society. Above that, students shall be enabled

to work interdisciplinary, in international teams, and their language abilities shall be improved. Additionally, students shall be provided with subject-related knowledge from international perspectives so that they achieve a global understanding of their studied disciplines and their future professions (ibid., p. 4 ff.).

Referring to the education of teachers, about 150 experts of teacher education met in Berlin and formulated a resolution for internationalization of teacher education in Germany in 2013. Appealing to the (future) national government, to the governments of the federal states, to the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs and to the German Rector's Conference, they emphasized the importance of experiences in foreign countries and the acquisition of intercultural competences. To be able to use the diversity in classrooms, to get to know other cultures and to be able to serve as role models for transnational learning, the conditions of teacher education should be changed (DAAD, 2013).

Pachler & Redondo (2015) describe different competences which internationalization of teacher education should address. They speak about intercultural communicative competences (ICC) so that students are able to interact with native speakers and to really understand what the other person intends to say (ibid., p. 23). In reference to Zeichner they speak about "socio-cultural consciousness" (ibid., p. 26) so that students learn about histories and cultures of the world, can position their own views of the world, develop intercultural competences, and a sense of social justice.

In context of the DAAD (DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service) program *Lehramt.International*<sup>1</sup> Rakhkochkine emphasized that a stay abroad is meant to develop students' personality, their awareness of international dimensions of their subjects and their knowledge for international education (Janert, 2022).

## 4.2 Influence of Internationalization on (Future) Teachers' Inclusive Competences

International and national studies analyzed effects of internationalization on students' competences. Firstly, this section focuses on intercultural competences. Afterwards, professional knowledge and abilities, and personal competences are dealt with.

One aspect, which is often stated to be an important aim of internationalization in higher education, is that of intercultural competences. Yet, studies are based on different definitions of intercultural competences and intercultural learning so that their results are only comparable in a limited way (Gerlach & Lüke, 2021; Wolff, 2017). In the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study former Erasmus+ students reported improvements in intercultural competences (European Union, 2019). In the first benchmark report of international students' mobility (DAAD, 2023b) 62 % of the German students stated cultural experiences as being an essential result of their stay abroad, with regard to teacher education students as many as 70 %. Referring to teacher education, 94 % of the students who spent time abroad in the context of the German DAAD-

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1 Since 2019 the DAAD (DAAD, German Academic Exchange Service) has been running the program *Lehramt.International* (in English: teacher education international) to offer students more opportunities of intercultural experiences (Janert, 2022; for project examples in context of *Lehramt.International* see Nierste, 2024, and Morbach et al., 2024, both in this anthology).

program *Lehramt.International* in 2022 reported that their intercultural abilities have improved and 87% stated that they felt prepared for multicultural classrooms in a better way (Janert, 2022). In a meta-analysis of 33 international studies Kercher & Schifferings found intercultural competences and cultural sensitivity as effects of study-related stays abroad (2019).

Some studies also analyzed conditions for the development of intercultural competences. Gerlach and Lüke (2021) refer to several studies, which empirically found evidence for a fostering of intercultural competences through a stay abroad, yet the students' company and reflection are important to intensify intercultural learning and to prevent a reproduction of prejudices. In their meta-analysis Kercher and Schifferings (2019) identified time as a positive contributor: the longer students stayed abroad, the more distinctive the effects were. Yet, positive effects of a short stay abroad were already observed on intercultural competences and cultural sensitivity (*ibid.*). Kercher and Schifferings also detected company as an important positive factor through direct exchange with domestic people and in well-directed conversation about intercultural communalities and differences (*ibid.*). In his online survey with more than 250 students Wolff (2017) also identified a rise of intercultural competences through stays abroad after three months. Neither the form, organization or culture nor the attributes of openness for experiences, extraversion or general self-efficacy of students before their stay abroad seemed to be determiners of intercultural competences (*ibid.*).

Another aspect is knowledge and abilities. 35% of German students who stayed abroad reported a gain of in-depth knowledges (DAAD, 2023b). The meta-analysis of Kercher and Schifferings (2019) found students' improvement in in-depth knowledges as well. 54% of German students stated an improvement of language abilities through a stay abroad (DAAD, 2023b), which Kercher and Schifferings (2019) identified in their meta-analysis as well.

Students' personal competences were also effects of internationalization. The meta-analysis of Kercher and Schifferings (2019) refers to self-reflection of teaching competences, self-confidence in teaching abilities, and a rise of pedagogical self-efficacy. About 25% of German students regarded practical experiences as being an effect of their stay abroad (DAAD, 2023b). Further personal competences were also discovered in research. The first benchmark report of international students' mobility and the Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study found that students state largest improvements for self-confidence through a stay abroad (DAAD, 2023b; European Union, 2019). A lot of German students (77%) see a positive effect of their stay abroad for their personal development. The development of personal competences was named by more students who stayed abroad in more distant regions in contrast to students who stayed in neighboring countries (DAAD, 2023b). Baedorf (2015) refers to studies, which discovered higher rates of openness for experiences and compatibility and lower rates of neuroticism, which is seen in connection to teacher's perception of stress, through stays abroad.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

The UNESCO et al. (2015) highlighted the importance of teachers and teacher education for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 of quality education. Internationalization is meant to promote (future) teachers' competences to cope with special educational needs in diverse classrooms (Council of the European, 2020; Janert, 2022; HRK, 2017; Pachler & Redondo, 2015; DAAD, 2013). As presented in this article, the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2022) has developed a profile for inclusive teacher professional learning. This article has summarized studies which analyzed the influence of internationalization on teachers' competences. Research findings, especially on students' stays abroad, show that students improve their intercultural competences (European Union, 2019; DAAD, 2023b; Janert, 2022; Kercher & Schifferings, 2019), while time, company and reflection seem to be positive contributors (Gerlach & Lüke, 2021; Kercher & Schifferings, 2019; for further reading towards intercultural reflexivity see Brück-Hübner, 2024, in this anthology). Effects of internationalization on in-depth knowledges and language abilities were reported as well (DAAD, 2023b; Kercher & Schifferings, 2019; DAAD, 2023b). Largest improvements through stays abroad were stated by students in regard of their self-confidence (DAAD, 2023b; European Union, 2019). Personal teaching competences such as professional self-reflection, self-confidence in teaching abilities, and rise of pedagogical self-efficacy were found to be influenced positively as well (Kercher & Schifferings, 2019). All these findings on students' development can be seen in relation to the profile for inclusive teacher professional learning, as intercultural competences, in-depth knowledges, language abilities and personal competences could be important components of the profile for inclusive teacher professional learning (see Table 1). The four core values of this profile, which the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (2022) has proven to be important for the professionalization of teachers for inclusive education, should be aimed at more intensively and concretely by research (for further reading: Müller, 2024), as the core values *Valuing learner diversity, supporting all learners, working with others, and personal and collaborative professional development* refer to a broad understanding of inclusion and inclusive education.

Internationalization of teacher education in Germany is implemented extensively and holistically in comparison to other European countries (DAAD, 2021; for primary school education: Müller, Seifert, Brück-Hübner, et al., 2024). Yet, there is a lack of research findings, especially of (longitudinal) empirical studies, which focus on different formats of internationalization measures and which address competences such as (future) teacher's professional identity and knowledge of experiences (Gerlach & Lüke, 2021). Ainscow underpins the importance of the use of evidence as "evidence is the lifeblood of inclusive development", as it requires care "what kinds of evidence to collect and how to use it", "since, within education systems, *what gets measured gets done*" (2020, p. 10). He highlights evidence to be "such a potent lever for change" (ibid.) and this potent lever should be used to improve inclusive education.

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# Strengthening the Internationalization of Teacher Education through Education for Sustainable Development

MAGDALENA BUDDEBERG, VANESSA HENKE & SABINE HORNBERG

## Abstract

Higher education teacher education aims to equip future teachers with the skills needed to facilitate competent engagement among students in an increasingly globalized world. Due to a narrow, national perspective on the education system in Germany, teacher education has to a large extent remained domestically focused. This is evident in the low percentage of student teachers planning to engage in international experiences. Against this background, in what follows we examine how Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) can be integrated into teacher education in higher education and contribute to shifting the professional mindset of student teachers towards an international outlook on teaching and learning in schools. This, we will outline and also discuss possibilities for incorporating international perspectives into teacher education to broaden teacher education students' views on global crises and sustainable development in education.

Keywords: education for sustainable development, teacher professionalization, internationalization

## Outline

1. Internationalization of the Education System
2. Internationalization in Teacher Education
3. ESD as a Way to Internationalize Teacher Education
4. Outlook

## 1 Internationalization of the Education System

The establishment of the modern school and modern school systems is closely linked to the spread of the modern nation-state model, beginning with the French Revolution in 1789 in the old core of Europe and from there on worldwide (Adick, 1992), as the following data show: In 1940, the number of nation states worldwide was 65, today there are 193 (as of 2023). This considerable increase can be explained, among other things, by the dissolution of large political entities such as the Soviet Union, the transformation of colonial countries into nation states, particularly on the African continent, and the creation of new nation states resulting of wars. As a rule, nation-states set up

institutions that are typical for them, such as a legal, health or education systems. Today every nation-state also has its own school system (Meyer, Kamens & Benavot, 1992). This is a first form of internationalization of the modern school and modern school systems: their worldwide spread. A second form are the striking similarities of these school systems, particularly in terms of their organization, but increasingly also in view of their curricula. This is evidenced e. g. by international school performance studies such as PISA, PIRLS and TIMSS. A third form of the internationalization of the school system is represented by schools that are genuinely international, such as IB World Schools and European Schools, or schools that have adopted an international profile such as UNESCO Project Schools, ECO Schools or Europe Schools (Hornberg, 2010). Finally, a fourth form of internationalization of school systems and schools is the ethnic and language diversity of students due to worldwide processes of migrations (Mecheril, et al., 2016).

## 2 Internationalization in Teacher Education

Our presence is characterized by overlapping processes of (re)nationalization, internationalization, Europeanisation, transnationalization and globalization (Hornberg & Szakács-Behling, in press) and associated phenomena such as world trade, global migration and climate change. The “German Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs” (German: Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK) takes these developments into account in recommendations such as “European education in schools” (KMK, 2020), “Intercultural education and training in schools” (2013) or the joint recommendation of the KMK and the German UNESCO Commission (DUK): “Education for sustainable development in schools” (2007). On the one hand, these recommendations represent political intentions and position statements, on the other hand, they are intended to provide schools and teachers with initial guidance.

Although the internationalization of teacher education has gained increased attention in recent years (HRK, 2018), the learning processes of student teachers in higher education still tend to focus more on nationally oriented dimensions than other fields of study (Barsch & Dziak-Mahler, 2015). Wernisch explains this by noting that the everyday life of student teachers is rarely international (Wernisch, 2017, p.10) with them being less mobile, except those studying a foreign language, and less represented in programs such as Erasmus (3.1%) (Wernisch, 2016). Their study environment is characterized by a low international appeal, and a perceived lack of relevance of international experiences (ibid.). This tendency is especially pronounced for student teachers aspiring to teach at elementary schools, where internationally oriented teaching offerings are less prevalent compared to other fields (Müller et al., 2023; Radhoff & Ruberg, 2020). However, efforts have been made to establish internationalization strategies in elementary school teacher education, with the quality and intensity of internationalization depending on the university location. The overarching goal is to enable elementary school students teachers to gain experience within an international context. At a conceptual level, the current focus lies on the professionalization processes involving other

cultures, educational systems, and teaching/learning opportunities (Kricke & Kürten, 2015). Christoforatu (2015) identifies the challenge of creating authentic occasions that establish an international context for the professionalization process of student teachers. One approach to address this challenge is through the cross-cutting task of “Education for Sustainable Development” (ESD), which inherently carries an international focus.

### 3 ESD as a Way to Internationalize Teacher Education

The aim of higher education for prospective teachers is to enable them to teach students in a way that equips them with the skills to competently navigate in an increasingly globalized world. The goal is to equip young learners with an international or global perspective, empowering them to proactively address the challenges and opportunities associated with globalization (cf. Ekanayake et al., 2020). ESD seeks to embed an engagement with the dynamically changing world, facing a continuous series of challenging events. The concept of ESD aims to enable individuals to engage in societal learning, comprehend, and influence processes for sustainable development, facilitate the implementation of the SDGs, and thereby foster the “Great Transformation” (Rieckmann, 2021, p. 13). This includes educational processes that can be situated within the aforementioned forms of internationalization of the education system, providing student teachers with opportunities to engage with them throughout their university teacher education. A critical and reflective analysis of global issues is central to ESD, so that it can encourage students to reflect on their own values and norms and contribute to an overarching discourse on values (Rieckmann, 2018). Following forms of internationalization as mentioned above, ESD is also about acquiring a “system competence” in order to understand relations and interactions in complex systems, such as education systems in nation states (Bollmann-Zuberbühler et al., 2016). Conversely, in the context of the internationalization of teacher education, sustainability skills are also coming into focus, as they involve a critical and reflective examination of other cultures, education systems and teaching/learning methods in order to question attitudes and values for one’s own role as a teacher (Kricke & Kürten, 2015). To promote sustainability skills such as critical thinking and systems thinking among student teachers, pedagogical approaches to ESD (elaborated in Rieckmann, 2018) are particularly beneficial in the context of the internationalization of teacher education, as they are participatory in character and enable the exchange of national and global perspectives. As a result, prospective teachers can experience being part of the world and being able to make a difference in the process of their own professionalization (Lang-Wojtasik et al., 2022). The shared focus on intercultural and global learning, promotion of systemic and critical thinking (Gregersen-Hermans, 2021), aligns the goals of both, ESD and internationalization, in teacher education. However, it is essential to provide prospective teachers, particularly those preparing for elementary schools, with practical methods and support (see e.g. Bürger & Enders, 2024, in this anthology; Morbach et al., 2024, in this anthology).

## 4 Outlook

Linking the concepts of “Internationalization of Teacher Education” and of “Education for Sustainable Development” can contribute to strengthening internationalization within teacher education. Thus, two lines of synergies can be identified, which in turn are considered together. On a content-related level, it is about the selection of central, global (educational) topics on which the student teachers enter into discourse with each other and which are simultaneously perceived by them as important for their own professionalization process. Linked to this, on a profession-orientated level, it is about promoting competencies that are closely linked to both concepts (see “critical thinking” and “systems thinking” above) and that are embedded in complex global contexts. The potential of both concepts lies in linking them by identifying overlaps and utilizing them for the development of internationally oriented ESD seminars. It is important to make these overlaps transparent to student teachers so that they can recognize possible links and adapt them for their own activities at school.

Access to international networks and cooperation is strengthened by a common focus on ESD content, which all potential partners worldwide are confronted with. Initiating international exchange can be supported by programs such as Erasmus+. Especially in the current program period 2021–2027, funded by the EU with 26 billion euros, various priorities such as “Environment and Climate Change” and “Digital Transformation” (Deutsche Nationale Agenturen im EU-Bildungsprogramm Erasmus+, 2023) are highlighted, closely related to ESD, offering opportunities for linking ESD and internationalization. This simultaneously builds a bridge to practical implementation in schools, as this program can be utilized both in higher education within teacher education and as exchange programs within schools.

As a first step, it is essential for instructors to engage with ESD and critically examine and reflect on their own global and intercultural perspectives in this context. This includes addressing their own prejudices, values, and assumptions, as emphasized by Gregersen-Hermans (2021). Networks currently emerging and growing at higher education focusing on ESD and the internationalization of teacher education offer a high potential. Connecting these networks could strengthen the implementation of both concepts within teacher education and, furthermore, increase their outreach. The integration of both concepts has the potential to not only incorporate yet another concept at university (in higher education) or school level but to become more deeply involved with what has already been developed.

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# Promoting Intercultural Reflexivity and Learning in Virtual International Learning Environments – Theoretical Suggestions and Didactical Implications

ANNIKA BRÜCK-HÜBNER

## Abstract

The implementation of virtual international courses in teacher education is often associated with the claim to promote students' intercultural learning. Based on a closer examination of the constructs of "culture" and "(inter)cultural learning", this article argues that virtual international courses do not automatically lead to intercultural learning and reflectivity. Based on a theoretical analysis, didactic implications are presented that can promote intercultural learning in the context of virtual international courses.

Keywords: intercultural learning, intercultural reflexivity, reflexivity, virtual internationalization

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Culture
3. (Inter-)Cultural Learning
4. Experiences and Reflexivity as Key for Intercultural Learning
5. The Role of Physical and Virtual International Exchange in Teacher Education
6. Didactical Implications for the Design of (Virtual) International Teaching
7. Conclusion

## 1 Introduction

Internationalization has become a core topic of higher education. Compared to other courses of study, teacher education has a strong local focus, as its genuine task is to qualify future teachers for specific national contexts (Leutwyler et al., 2017, pp. 66–67). However, as a result of globalization, increasing migration and the multiculturalism of societies, teachers need a "global" understanding, international experience and intercultural skills in order to be able to deal with diversity in the classroom and serve as role models. In this context it is interesting to examine how pedagogical approaches can

help to deal with the growing socio-cultural complexity in education. Research on teacher education shows that the attitudes that prospective teachers bring with them are very static. In order to achieve change, these must be actively addressed, e. g. by reflecting on new experiences with regard to diversity and inclusion in teacher education (e. g. Heinrich et al., 2013). It can be deduced from this that there is a need for increased forms of internationalization and international and intercultural exchange in teacher education. In recent years, virtual forms of internationalization have become increasingly important. However, this raises the question of whether these are a suitable format for promoting intercultural learning among students. This is where the following article takes up. This paper focuses on the question of how virtual international learning environments need to be designed to promote intercultural reflexivity and intercultural learning. To answer this question, the paper discusses the terms “culture” (section 2) and (inter)cultural learning (section 3) and emphasizes the central importance of experience and reflexivity (section 4) as well as (physical and virtual) international exchange for intercultural learning. It concludes with didactic implications (section 6) and a brief summary (section 7).

## 2 Culture

In order to analyze the prerequisites for intercultural learning, it is first important to analyze what culture is. In a general understanding of the term, “culture” can be understood as the opposite of “nature”. In this sense, culture comprises all products, forms of production, lifestyles, behaviors and leading ideas of a community that are formed in a collective context of meaning (Arnold & Schüßler, 1998, p. 3; Fuchs, 2008, p. 12). For the respective community, culture assumes many important functions: it establishes rules and standards that are necessary for a meaningful life in the community and thus also creates expectations. These expectations facilitate living together, because they make behavior, interactions, reactions and other activities predictable. Consequently, the members of a community receive orientation through the shared culture. This counteracts permanent pressure to make decisions and creates commitment. In this sense, culture fulfills an important orientation function that simplifies and enables life in communities (Brück-Hübner, 2020, pp. 25–27; Kleber & Stein, 2001, p. 7; Lüddemann, 2010, pp. 13–16).

Cultures are complex. In addition to “visible” and “observable” elements (such as behavior, actions, words and body language), there are also parts of cultures that are difficult to access. These include, for example, perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values and much more (Kohls & Knight, 2007). The vitality of a culture is in tension between repetition and innovation: culture is directly tied to its practice. For a culture, only those components with practical relevance are of importance. In order to persist, the relevant practices have to be passed on and continued, but at the same time they should be adapted to new conditions and contexts. Practices that have become obsolete must be discarded (Brück-Hübner, 2020, pp. 26–27; Kleber & Stein, 2001, p. 9; Lüddemann, 2010, p. 14).

In summary, culture is a network of shared meanings and activities of a community. It defines rules and standards for living together and creates obligations and commitments. Culture, however, is not a monument but a dynamic, self-evolving construct. This leads to the question of how cultural learning occurs.

### 3 (Inter-)Cultural Learning

Members usually “grow” into the culture through active participation and processes of social and communicative practices. When people grow up in a culture, they are socialized accordingly. People usually unconsciously adopt the dominant ways of acting, expectations, traditions, beliefs, attitudes, habits and much more in their environment. Besides social participation, the communicative transfer of culture is very important for cultural learning (Brück-Hübner, 2020, pp. 26–27; Dewey, 2000/1919, pp. 19–21; Lüddemann, 2010, p. 14). In this context, media (e. g. spoken and body language, books, films and today also social media) play a central role. They serve to transmit, store and secure information and make it transferable to other people and situations (Reich et al., 2005, pp. 1–2). However, media are not an exact representation of reality. Symbols are used for the transmission of information, which are shaped by social, cultural and linguistic conventions and inevitably also contain omissions, values and individual interpretations (Hall, 1997, pp. 119–124). Culture is therefore always a matter of negotiation and is also influenced by (new) members.

People are often not aware of how much the culture in which they grow up shapes their thinking, attitudes and actions. This is due to the genuine function of culture: It is supposed to relieve us of the burden of living together and, in this sense, support us in not always having to reflect on, question and challenge everything (Brück-Hübner, 2020, pp. 25–26). However, when we meet people from other cultures, it can happen that our expectations are disappointed: unexpected actions, different communication habits and new symbol systems lead to experiences of strangeness (see e. g. Hall, 1997; Redecker, 2021).

And this is where intercultural learning comes within. The goal of intercultural learning is to impart knowledge and skills that enable learners not only to understand other cultures, but also to interact (successfully) with people from other cultures (Lane, 2012). For that it is important that not only the “visible” and “observable” elements are taught (e. g. the acquisition of a foreign language). Successful intercultural understanding also requires knowledge and insight into the “hidden” cultural backgrounds (see section 2). However, precisely these elements of a culture (values, expectations, beliefs, etc.) are often difficult to “explain” and “communicate”. In this article, the thesis is put forward that those elements of a culture can primarily be developed through processes of experience of intercultural exchange and their reflection – and thus, through learning processes that are most similar to “natural” cultural learning.

## 4 Experiences and Reflexivity as Key for Intercultural Learning

Culture shapes our thoughts and actions and therefore becomes visible above all in social practice. It is in social practice or exchange with people from other cultures that we become aware of certain differences in the first place. However, the perception of differences alone does not automatically lead to intercultural learning and thus to the promotion of intercultural understanding. Experiencing foreignness can also lead to stigmatization and discrimination, especially if the different cultures are not considered in the processes and one's own cultural values are used as an unshakeable norm. But how can such social processes of experiencing foreignness be used productively for learning?

Following Dewey (2000/1919, pp. 187–203), processes of experience consist of an active and a passive element: When we experience something, we act on something, we try something out, we make experiences (actively), but at the same time the subject acts back on us, we suffer the consequences of our actions, i. e. the change brought about by our actions acts back on us and thus brings about a change in us (passively). In order for a “meaningful” experience to be gathered, the active and passive elements of the experience have to be put in relation to each other by thinking. Dewey understands “thinking” in this context as seeing a problem, observing given facts, and drawing an obvious conclusion that must be worked out and tested by action. According to Dewey, it is only by experiencing the consequences of our actions, reflecting on them and testing the consequences that we gain experience and, as a result, learn.

Dewey consequently emphasizes that problems or disappointments of previous assumptions or expectations can activate learning processes. Mitgutsch (2009, pp. 184–187) agrees with this, emphasizing that experiences (disappointments, resistances and irritations) are indispensable for learning and expanding the horizon. He emphasizes that it is precisely through the failure of one's own expectations and ideas, as well as by disclosing gaps in knowledge and irritations, that new perspectives are opened up, which can lead to learning processes. However, in order to use these situations productively, a proactive attitude on the part of the individuals involved is necessary. It is not a matter of merely experiencing and “suffering” the situations, but rather of understanding them through processes of reflection based on action and experience, of striving for understanding, and of deriving consequences for one's own actions (Brück-Hübner, 2020, pp. 15–18; Dieckmann, 1994, pp. 102–108).

Transferred to the processes of intercultural learning, this means that intercultural learning has a learning potential through situations in which the actual (culturally shaped) expectations are disappointed by the counterpart and as a result disappointments, resistances or irritations occur. To unlock this potential, it is important to connect reflective processes that not only analyze the situation and identify the cause of the problem or irritation, but also derive actionable consequences that can be tested in new social or intercultural practices.

The analysis of what exactly initiated the problem or irritation is difficult, especially when deep cultural imprints implicitly influence the action, of which the actors are not aware. Here, communication – i. e. the mutual negotiation of the meaning of the situation and also the intentions and reasons behind a certain action – is essential. Through such intercultural communication processes, different ways of thinking and perspectives can be revealed and thus become “accessible”. In the process, not only the situation itself is reflected upon, but also one’s own culturally influenced viewpoint as well as the culturally influenced viewpoint of the counterpart. One example of this is “eye contact” during communication. While in some cultures it is considered impolite not to look the other person in the eye during a conversation, in other cultures it is an expression of respect. This can lead to misinterpretations of behavior if there is no exchange of different understandings

The understanding of intercultural learning, including a diversity of perspectives and a process of broaden horizons and in consequence an “detachment of the self” (Dewey, 2000/1919, p. 198) can help (future) teachers in their processes of professionalization.

“Only those who transcend the narrowness, randomness and provinciality of their own horizon of experience and view the world from a greater distance can adequately assess a matter or a situation. Those who remain caught up in their own subjectively limited view of reality run the risk of remaining biased” (Duncker, 2005, p. 11, translated by author).

The previous explanations show that intercultural learning is more than just the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Above all, it is also about reflexivity. Intercultural learning, as described here, is characterized by processes of estrangement, assimilation and emergence and leads to a “resubjectification of culture” (Plöger, 2009, p. 82, translated by author), which involves not only the appropriation of culture, but also transformation. This names central factors that form the core of the understanding of “Bildung” (Duncker, 2004; Plöger, 2009; Vogt et al., 2024, in this anthology).

## 5 The Role of Physical and Virtual International Exchange in Teacher Education

The previous explanations lead to the thesis that intercultural learning, which goes beyond the “knowledge level” and above all also refers to the understanding of different social practices and a change of behavior, cannot simply be “taught” theoretically. Successful intercultural communication or intercultural social practices requires not only knowledge about the cultural imprint of peoples (own) thinking and acting, but also a variety of competencies, such as reflective skills, empathy and the ability for intercultural understanding and negotiation. In this consequence, it can be assumed that intercultural learning also requires intercultural exchange (see e.g. also Vromans et al., 2023): It is important to create social situations that are as authentic as possible, in which (culture based) disappointments, resistances and irritations are provoked on the

part of the prospective teachers, which give the opportunity to mutual intercultural reflection, negotiation and understanding, and thus make intercultural learning possible – and this is where the international exchange occurs.

There are various forms of intercultural exchange. In this article, two forms will be considered as examples, which are of particular importance in the current internationalization discussion: the physical and the virtual international exchange. In the following, a “physical international exchange” is understood as a stay abroad of a student, whereas the virtual international exchange does not require physical mobility, but only takes place based on communication of international students’ groups via digital media.

Particularly in the context of virtual international teaching, the question arises as to whether it is possible to create the social situations that are necessary for intercultural learning processes that go beyond the mere transfer of knowledge. This aspect has not yet been explored in depth in previous research. Nevertheless, there is initial evidence to suggest that it is more difficult to promote intercultural exchange and intercultural learning in such virtual international settings (see e.g. O’Dowd et al., 2020, p. 147).

Even if the virtual space makes intercultural exchange and the creation of authentic experience situations more difficult, it is not impossible to promote this. However, this requires an appropriate didactic design of a virtual international course.

## **6 Didactical Implications for the Design of (Virtual) International Teaching**

Whether physical or virtual exchange, one cannot assume that intercultural learning simply happens. As shown before, experiences and their reflection are important elements of intercultural learning. In this chapter some conclusions are drawn from what has been written so far that show what needs to be considered when designing (virtual) international courses and exchanges, so that they support intercultural learning.

### **6.1 Creating a climate of trust and promoting (formal and informal) exchange**

The central prerequisite for intercultural learning is the willingness of students to be open to other cultures and to approach people from other cultures with openness, sensitivity and empathy. For this reason, creating a climate of trust is essential. Especially in virtual international spaces, students need to get the chance to get to know each other better. Intercultural communication is not easy and misunderstandings and conflicts can quickly arise (Brück-Hübner, 2023, pp. 23–30; Hall, 1997). Students should be made sensitive to this from the beginning. Communication rules and the invitation to reflect together on feelings and interpretations in conflict situations can help students to communicate successfully with each other (“Meta-Communication”).

While students can immerse themselves in foreign cultures during a stay abroad, the virtual space is limited to communication. However, there are often very few opportunities for students to engage in informal exchange. For this reason, when designing virtual international teaching, care should be taken to integrate as many opportunities for communication and (formal and informal) exchange as possible. The theoretical explanations have stressed that intercultural learning benefits precisely from such exchanges and experiences gained during activities, but of course there must be a variety of opportunities for this.

## **6.2 Encourage irritations, inconsistencies and perspective changes**

Intercultural learning is primarily triggered by situations of estrangement, irritation and dissonance. Simply meeting international students does not automatically lead to such situations arising (see section 4). However, it can be facilitated by various factors. First and foremost, by students meeting in different ways and engaging in an intensive exchange with each other. The conception of challenging group tasks that can only be solved collaboratively and consequently promote close cooperation can also evoke intercultural conflict situations. In addition to “working together”, the content dealt with in the course can also influence the resulting experiences. Polarizing topics (e. g. death penalty) or culturally different practices (e. g. inclusion) are particularly suitable for demonstrating multi-perspectivity and demanding empathy and horizon-crossing. In order to enable all students to participate equally in this kind of experience, it is important that everyone feels invited and addressed to contribute and that everyone is also prepared to contribute their controversial views. This in turn points to the need for a climate of trust within the group, as described above.

However, if there are no major divergences within the group itself, these can also be stimulated by selecting suitable teaching and learning materials and authentic tasks. For example, participants can work together on case vignettes that deal with intercultural conflicts and discuss possible solution strategies. Here, too, it is important that every student is given the opportunity to play an active role and incorporate his or her own cultural perspective.

## **6.3 Encourage and require reflection**

As mentioned in Chapter 3, it is important that the experiences of others are not simply “suffered” or “tolerated”. There needs to be space for both individual and collective reflection. This can be stimulated and guided by reflection tasks, for example. It is important that the reflections are of the highest possible quality and are not limited to a descriptive description of the experience and the perceived (cultural) similarities and differences, but also include consequences for action and transfer ideas (Keller, 2015). The experiences and related reflections are characterized by a high degree of subjectivity. There is a risk that stigmatizing and generalizing conclusions about individual cultures will be drawn from individual reports. The conclusions drawn from these experiences – e. g. in relation to one’s own professional self-conception and the consequences of one’s own actions – should therefore always be collectively reflected upon, but also



contextualized by theory and research. Theory and research can help to take a more differentiated view of situations and can validate or relativize one's own subjective perception. In return practical experience can serve to correct, expand and develop pedagogical theories and concepts. In consequence, intercultural exchange can provide new impulses for theoretical considerations that differentiate or change one's own image of school and teaching.

## 7 Conclusion

This article showed that virtual international learning courses do not automatically promote processes of (inter)cultural learning and (inter)cultural reflexivity. The following key factors for promoting intercultural learning were identified: (1) the creation of a climate of trust, (2) the promotion of (formal and informal) exchange, (3) the evocation of irritating, estranging and controversial experiential situations, (4) their individual and collaborative reflection and (5) their linking back to theory and research. These considerations are initially based on theory and still require empirical validation.

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# How to Internationalize Teacher Training: Overview of Barriers and Approaches to Solutions

JELENA BLOCH

## Abstract

The internationalization of teacher training will enable future teachers to assess global developments and their impact on society against the background of their own experience and to communicate in an authentic manner. This is of great importance since they will then be able to prepare their future students in the best possible way for working, acting and living in global contexts. However, there are barriers and obstacles associated with the international orientation of teacher training. These are reduced in target group-specific programs such as “Lehramt.International” with measures at the individual, institutional and structural levels.

Keywords: mobility of future teachers, individual barriers, institutional and structural obstacles, good practice

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Barriers to Internationalization and Mobility in Teacher Training
3. Approaches Using the Example of Lehramt.International

## 1 Introduction

In German schools, linguistic and cultural diversity has increased in recent years: In the 2022/2023 school year, 14.4 percent of students at schools in Germany did not have German citizenship (Destatis, 2023), compared to 11.7 percent in the 2020/2021 school year (Destatis, 2022).<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, in the 2018 PISA survey, over 75 percent of teachers in Germany reported that teaching in a multicultural or multilingual environment was not included in their teacher training (Mang et al., 2021, p. 207). More than 50 % of the respondents saw a medium or high need for further training in this area (ibid., p. 226). Therefore, schools need teachers who can deal with cultural and linguistic diversity in such a way that all students can learn and develop in the best possible way.

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1 The figures refer exclusively to students who hold only foreign citizenship and no German citizenship.

During their time at school, young people should be prepared for the globally operating labor market and learn to act responsibly in global contexts. In addition, they should develop into capable and cosmopolitan global citizens. Therefore, teachers must be able to arrange global developments and their effects on society against the background of their own experience and to convey that authentically. Here, the intercultural and international orientation of teacher training can make a major contribution.

This article provides an overview of the barriers and obstacles associated with international and intercultural learning experiences in teacher training. Based on this, it will be shown how these target group-specific needs and barriers are met and reduced on an individual, institutional and structural level within the framework of the program “Lehramt.International”.

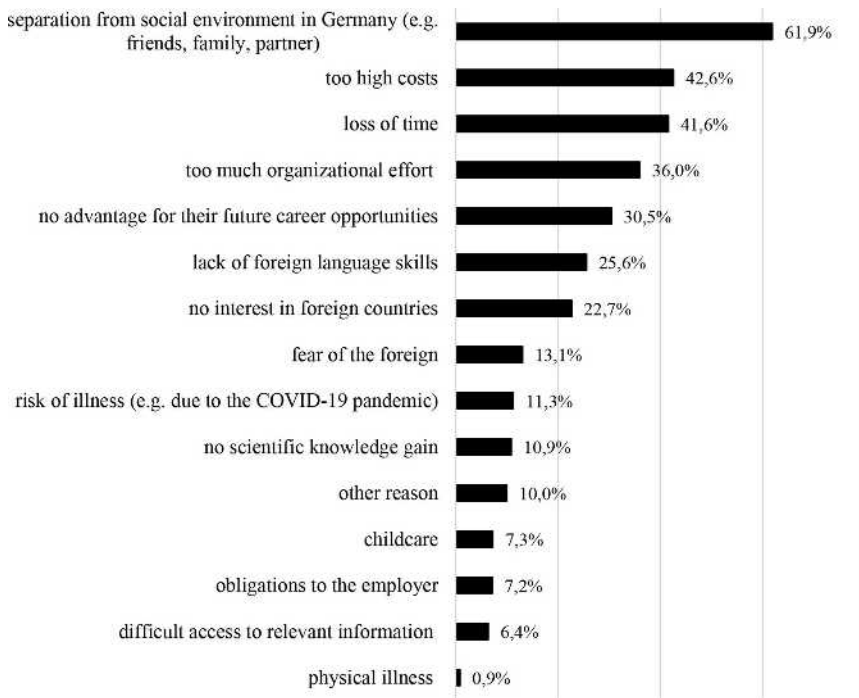
## 2 Barriers to Internationalization and Mobility in Teacher Training

The answers to the question “Why do student teachers decide against a study-related stay abroad?” provide a good starting point for addressing the difficulties and hurdles regarding the internationalization of teacher training. The teacher education-specific analysis of more than 10,000 data records from the 2020/2021 survey of the DAAD project “International University Benchmark” (BintHo) revealed that about 19 percent of the surveyed student teachers decided against a stay abroad.<sup>2</sup> Among the non-mobile student teachers surveyed, separation from the social environment in Germany was the most frequently cited reason for deciding against a study-related stay abroad (62 %), followed by too high costs (43 %), loss of time (42 %), too much organizational effort (36 %), and no advantage for their future career opportunities (31 %) (DAAD, 2023, pp. 29–30).

Whereas for 62 % of non-mobile student teachers the separation from family, friends and partner is the main reason for deciding against a stay abroad, only slightly more than half (51 %) of non-mobile university students without a teaching degree cite this as a reason (ibid., p. 31). There is also a significant difference between student teachers and other university students for the motivations of “lack of foreign language skills” (26 % to 18 %) and “childcare” (7 % to 4 %) (ibid.). These results make it clear that prospective teachers represent a student group with special needs on an individual level due to, among other things, special circumstances (childcare during their studies), characteristics or skills (low foreign language skills), values and attitudes (separation from social environment or no interest in foreign countries/fear of the foreign). However, the obstacles to mobility are not only rooted in the special nature of the target group, but also have their causes at the institutional and structural level.

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<sup>2</sup> A further 19 % of respondents had already completed a stay abroad, 18 % had definite plans to do so, 30 % would probably or possibly do so and 13 % had planned to do so but had abandoned their plans. A further 5 % of the student teachers surveyed had not yet considered it (DAAD, 2023, p. 11).



**Figure 1:** Reasons why non-mobile student teachers decided not to study abroad (multiple answers possible, n = 6,030)

Loss of time, which more non-mobile student teachers (42 %) than non-mobile other university students (36 %) also see as a reason for deciding against a stay abroad (ibid.), can be attributed to a combination of structural and institutional circumstances. The career path for teachers at public schools is one of the most highly regulated in Germany. This is why teacher training at HEIs is also characterized by many rules and guidelines, including those for the recognition of practical phases (abroad). As a result, existing structures in teacher training programs at HEIs make it difficult to integrate periods of study abroad into the curriculum, and the recognition of international experience is often difficult due to very specific and high requirements.

In Germany, teacher training requires students to study at least two subjects. In addition to the subject-specific sciences, the subject-specific didactics and educational sciences are also an integral part of teacher training – involving many different contacts and complex structures. These peculiarities of the German teacher training may also be reasons why there are not enough international teaching related cooperation partners and why there is a lack of information, counseling and support services for study abroad stays for student teachers.

The fact that neither incentives nor appreciation for gaining intercultural and international learning experiences for one’s professional career exist on a structural level also has negative consequences. On the one hand, this has a negative impact on the

importance of the international dimension of teacher training in HEIs – teacher education is rarely mentioned in the internationalization strategies – and on the other hand, on the motivation of prospective teachers to gain study-related experiences abroad. 31% of the non-mobile student teachers justify their decision against a stay abroad, among other things, by the lack of the expected positive effect on their future career as a teacher, among the non-mobile other university students it is significantly less (12%) (ibid.).

### 3 Approaches Using the Example of Lehramt.International

The DAAD launched the Lehramt.International program, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, in 2019 to prepare prospective teachers in Germany for successful teaching in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous classrooms (for an example in context of a Lehramt.International project see Nierste, 2024, in this anthology). The future teachers acquire the international and intercultural knowledge and competencies required for this by advancing the internationalization of teacher education within the framework of the program at the individual, institutional, and structural impact levels.

Student teachers and pre-service graduates from all HEIs in Germany can apply for a full scholarship to conduct 1- to 12-month self-organized school internships abroad – a program measure that primarily targets the individual impact level. Since 2019, 5,322 student teachers and pre-service graduates have applied for a Lehramt.International scholarship and 2,539 scholarships have been awarded for school placements in 92 different countries. The awarding of the individual scholarships is accompanied by a target group-specific information and marketing campaign. Experience reports of prospective teachers are published on the campaign website to further interest in a peer-approach, and relevant information is prepared in a way that is suitable for the target group.

At the institutional level, the program provides German HEIs with financial support for up to six years to implement model projects in teacher training to establish international cooperation and promote internationalization at home. Currently, 36 model projects are being funded in 15 different federal states. Within these model projects, German HEIs cooperate with 233 cooperation partners in 37 countries. The measures implemented in the model projects, such as the establishment of teacher-training-related partnerships with a focus on multidisciplinary cooperation, the integration of mobility-windows into existing teacher-training, and the development or establishment of curricula with an internationalization focus, lead to the systematic recognition of international experience. This issue is of great importance in the context of the loss of time that many student teachers cite as a reason for deciding not to study abroad (see Fig. 1). In addition, the model projects lead to more visibility of teacher education within HEIs, especially in the context of the internationalization efforts of individual universities. In this way, structures are also established within the German

HEIs that ensure that teacher training is consistently involved in (future) internationalization measures.

In addition to the marketing campaign for prospective teachers, *Lehramt.International* also includes studies and events on internationalization needs and opportunities to advise representatives from politics and HEIs. Thus, this package of measures refers primarily to changes at the structural level. To this end, knowledge on the internationalization of teacher training is generated and disseminated. These findings are in turn used as background information in events such as the Policy Dialogue on structural and legal frameworks for internationally oriented teacher training. The special feature of this event format is that all relevant stakeholders from politics, ministries and HEIs participate and focus exclusively on the internationalization of teacher training in one federal state. Therefore, it is possible to discuss in detail the structural and legal obstacles to the internationalization of teacher training and to jointly explore the scope for alternative solutions.

An analysis of the teacher training laws and ordinances for the first state examination of the individual federal states serves as a basis for discussion for the Policy Dialogues. This analysis examines which intercultural learning opportunities are mentioned or anchored in the laws and ordinances. It becomes clear that in some federal states individual intercultural learning opportunities are not taken into account or at least not further specified. However, this does not automatically mean that there are no regulations and/or concretizations in these federal states. In some cases, the regulations on intercultural learning opportunities or their concretizations are found in the study and examination regulations for the teacher training programs at the individual HEIs. While this approach recognizes the principle of academic freedom for the HEIs, it also makes the political support for the implementation of internationalization measures specific to teacher training at the HEIs less visible. Based on the analysis of the teacher training laws and regulations for the first state examination, the following recommendations can be made for the removal of structural hurdles or obstacles. Some federal states may serve as examples of good practice:

- Dealing with (cultural) diversity<sup>3</sup> should not be mentioned exclusively as a basic competence in educational sciences and/or subject didactics but should be an integral part for all school types and subjects, combined with incentives like credit points. This has already been implemented in Berlin<sup>4</sup> and North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW)<sup>5</sup>.
- Dealing with multilingualism or the acquisition of knowledge and competencies in the area of German as a foreign and/or second language should be given greater relevance across all school types and subjects, for example through a fixed number of credit points. This is already done in North Rhine-Westphalia in the form of the Master's module "German for migrant pupils" with six credit points<sup>6</sup>.

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3 Due to the majority of non-precise terms heterogeneity and inclusion in the laws or regulations, it remains unclear whether the cultural dimension is included without explicitly listing it.

4 Senate Department for Justice and Consumer Protection Berlin, 2014, § 2 para. 3; § 3 para. 3; § 4 para. 3

5 Ministry of the Interior of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2016, § 1 para. 2

6 Ministry of the Interior of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2016, § 2 para. 1; § 3 para. 1; § 4 para. 1; § 5 para. 1; § 6 para. 1



- Study-related stays abroad with their importance in the professionalization process should be explicitly recommended and supported by incentives in the teacher training law or in the regulation for the first state examination. Mobility is mentioned as an option in almost all federal states, except for Bremen, Saxony-Anhalt and Schleswig-Holstein.
- The recognition of stays abroad in the form of credit points should be guaranteed regardless of school types and the subjects studied. In Hamburg, there is an individual study component in the Bachelor's program, which contributes, for example, to the better realization of a study abroad<sup>7</sup>.
- If there is a general obligation for student teachers in foreign languages to spend several months abroad, NRW<sup>8</sup> sets a good example of how to define exceptions. Good examples of softer formulations regarding to mobility are given by Brandenburg<sup>9</sup>, Rhineland-Palatinate<sup>10</sup> or Thuringia<sup>11</sup>. In this way, the disadvantage of certain groups due to severe mobility restrictions can be excluded.

Ultimately, the above illustrates that target group-specific programs such as Lehramt International, in which internationalization and mobility obstacles are addressed at the individual, institutional, and structural levels, are highly relevant to advancing the internationalization of teacher training in a long-term and sustainable manner. In general, internationalization should not be seen as another add-on in the catalog of requirements for teacher training. Rather, it is a quality feature of teacher training through which future-relevant topics such as digital teaching, inclusive learning, and democracy building can be addressed in an international context, thus enriching the discussion in Germany. Furthermore, internationally and interculturally oriented teacher education can also contribute to the current debate on education by making teacher training more attractive.

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7 Hamburg Parliament, 2018, p. 6

8 Ministry of Schools and Education of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, 2009, § 11 para. 10

9 Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the State of Brandenburg, 2013, § 5 para. 4

10 Ministry of Justice of Rhineland-Palatinate, 2007, § 5 para. 14

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# Needs for the Successful Implementation of Virtual International Teaching in Higher Education – A Reflection Based on Practical Experiences

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## Abstract

In recent years, forms of virtual mobility and virtual international teaching have become increasingly important. However, in addition to the numerous advantages, this not widespread innovative form of higher education teaching comes with numerous challenges. In this article, needs for and challenges of virtual international teaching are discussed based on practical experience in teaching and administration. Furthermore, initial implications for the development of supportive structures provided by institutions of higher education for virtual international teaching are outlined.

Keywords: virtual exchange, internationalization, higher education, internationalization strategy, institutional development

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Challenges for and Needs of Virtual International Teaching
3. Conclusion

## 1 Introduction

The internationalization of higher education programs is increasingly in demand. While physical mobility has dominated internationalization strategies at institutions of higher education for decades, virtual mobility established itself as a new, important element of the internationalization of universities in the course of the COVID-19 pandemic (Liu & Gao, 2022, 2, 11). In contrast to physical mobility, virtual mobility does not require the participants to travel or spend time abroad. Students and/or teachers can take part in courses or other learning and exchange formats digitally from campus or from home. In this article, virtual mobility is understood as an umbrella term for various scenarios. Starting with individual synchronous seminar sessions international lecturers and/or students are invited to, through asynchronous online learning environments (e.g. Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs)) to completely digital (dis-

tance) international learning courses. Mixed forms between virtual and physical mobility are also possible (“blended mobility”).

The manifold advantages of virtual internationalization have already been discussed (see e. g. Brück-Hübner, Müller, & Seifert, 2024a; Brück-Hübner, Müller, & Seifert, 2024c, in this anthology). Even if virtual mobility brings many advantages, it is also associated with disadvantages and numerous challenges. The successful initiation and implementation of virtual mobility in higher education places high demands on lecturers and students, but also on the administration and academic politics. Precisely these needs will be examined in more detail in this article that is based on practitioners’ experiences in the fields of higher education lecturing, didactics and administration<sup>1</sup>. The following explanations can provide an initial insight into the challenges, but do not claim to be complete or generally valid. Due to the variety of forms of virtual international teaching in particular, only a few key challenges and conclusions about the support structures required can be named.

## 2 Challenges for and Needs of Virtual International Teaching

Virtual international teaching has its very own needs and challenges on many different levels. As in any physical exchange, however, challenges like the academic calendars, the structure of study programs, or admission requirements remain and make innovative solutions necessary. Based on practical experience, the main part of the article reflects on challenges and needs of virtual international teaching from five different perspectives: lecturers, students, higher education didactics, the institution, and academic policy.

### 2.1 Challenges and Needs on the Level of Lecturers

The principle of freedom of research and teaching means that the decision to offer (virtual) international courses lies with the lecturers. Therefore, a key prerequisite is not only the willingness of lecturers to offer such a teaching format, but also that important basic requirements (e. g. language skills) do not pose an obstacle to participation. With reference to Wit et al. (2015, p. 298), a lack of commitment on the part of lecturers and a lack of recognition for lecturers are among the biggest obstacles to virtual international teaching. Therefore, it is essential that lecturers are not only aware of the basic possibilities of implementing virtual international teaching, but also that they are encouraged to offer such a new (or innovative kinds of) teaching concept(s) and are aware of the support structures of their own institution.

When lecturers plan a virtual international course, they are confronted with a wide range of possibilities and concepts (see e. g. Brück-Hübner, Müller, & Seifert, 2024a, in

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<sup>1</sup> Annika Brück-Hübner is not only a lecturer with experience in the implementation of virtual international courses, she is also a higher didactics coach who supports other active lecturers in the internationalization of their teaching and thus gains a variety of insights into the challenges they face. Wiebke Nierste works in the International Office, where she is responsible for the administrative support and supervision of the internationalization of teacher education.

this anthology). Advice from higher education didactics (see 2.3) or administration (see 2.4) as well as “good practice” examples can facilitate orientation and help lecturers find the most convincing concept. Each approach presents its own challenges for lecturers. Inviting guest lecturers, for example, requires primarily organizational effort and possibly financial support, more extensive concepts – such as Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (Rubin & Guth, 2017) – come with more far-reaching challenges. The more extensive the seminar concept and the more international partner institutions, lecturers and students are involved, the more coordination processes and considerations become necessary.

When lecturers plan a collaborative course, they need to find one or more suitable (international) partners. Besides aspects such as sympathy and similar teaching topics, many organizational questions need to be discussed. In particular, differences in semester times and time zones can be an insurmountable barrier. Differences in academic expectations as well as the requirements of the respective institutions must be compared and discussed. It is also important that the learning opportunities match the local curricula and that students receive credit points for their studies. In particular, the recognition of international students’ achievements by their home university can be associated with difficulties. Lecturers therefore have to take many factors into account; the preparation phase can be very time-consuming and exhausting (see e. g. Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology). Institutional support structures are very helpful in this process – not only in the processes of accreditation and organization, but also in the internationalization of curricula (see 2.3 and 2.4).

Along with the selection of suitable learning content that is equally relevant for all students and fits in with the respective curricula, teaching in a different language can also be challenging – especially with regard to concepts and terminology. Particularly in the field of teacher education, discourses are often very strongly nationally influenced and, as a consequence, terms are used very differently in different countries (e. g. elementary school, inclusion..., see e. g. Seifert, 2024, in this anthology). This has to be taken into account when designing the course. The use of such terms and the different concepts associated with them must be reflected and discussed to avoid misunderstandings. At the same time, this also offers great didactic potential.

However, the implementation of virtual international courses also involves very practical problems. Especially when working with lecturers from international partner universities, it is important to find a common platform that all parties can and are allowed to work with. This may mean that some lecturers (and their students) have to get acquainted with new systems and find their way around. However, university systems are usually highly protected and located on closed servers. In order to integrate external lecturers and students into a university system, it is often necessary to organize guest access by involving the IT department. The integration of virtual seminars into the daily university routine is also a challenge for on-site universities. If it is not possible to switch to off-peak hours, teaching and learning spaces must be organized where students can not only connect digitally, but are also able to participate actively without disturbing other students (e. g. in the library). This requires the development of hybrid

teaching or individual learning spaces. Organizing and delivering virtual international courses, therefore, requires not only a good (technical) infrastructure, but also lecturers with digital or hybrid teaching skills.

From experience, another challenge is recruiting enough students who are willing to participate in a seminar taught in a foreign language (see e. g. Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology). In addition, students are often unfamiliar with the concept of virtual international seminars, which can lead to fear of contact or scepticism. This means that lecturers have to enter into discussions with students. It is important to convince students and inform them about the seminar concept and the associated requirements and special features. Even if enough students could be recruited to take part in the seminar, there are still numerous other challenges awaiting the lecturers. Considering that student diversity goes far beyond the linguistic dimension, differences in culture and socialization in different educational systems lead to a great heterogeneity of students. For example, international and national students may differ not only in their (prior) knowledge, skills, and interests, but also in their different university socializations (for more details see Carroll, 2015, p. 18 and section 2.2). If all students are to benefit equally from the course, didactics and methodology should be adapted accordingly. Lecturers also need intercultural skills and openness to other cultures, customs and perspectives (Marchwacka, 2017). In addition, there is an increased need for planning and support – and thus an increased workload for lecturers. In order to ensure high quality international teaching, adequate support and relief for lecturers is therefore required (e. g. support from student assistants, development of a comprehensive range of support services for international students, training and advice on didactics of higher education).

The explanations show how complex the implementation of virtual international courses can be. Even if everything is planned in detail, there is no guarantee that the course will go exactly as planned. In intercultural interaction, new (problem) situations can always arise that need to be dealt with productively. In such cases, lecturers need not only flexibility and a willingness to compromise, but also perseverance and error tolerance.

Overall, the descriptions show that the implementation of virtual international teaching poses numerous challenges for lecturers and is associated with increased organizational and time expenditure. Since lecturers' capacities are limited, arrangements should be found to ensure that such services are also taken into account in supervision ratios and resource allocation. In addition, the best possible support structures should be created to actively assist lecturers with organizational, technical and didactical issues.

## **2.2 Challenges and Needs on the Level of Students**

Many of the challenges that lecturers face in the context of virtual international courses also apply to students. In this regard, the language of instruction is very important. Many students are afraid to communicate in a language other than their mother tongue and are concerned about how this will affect their learning and performance assessment. The majority of virtual international learning opportunities are conducted

in English. However, according to Wit et al. (2015, p. 302) and Stallivieri (2020), this situation needs to be critically analyzed. Even though “English” is considered the *lingua franca* in research and education, there are still many (local and international) students (and lecturers) who are not proficient in this language and are consequently excluded from these opportunities. In Europe alone, there are 24 different official languages. Given this diversity, internationalization efforts should not be limited to one language. Multilingualism, understood as “the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage [...] with more than one language in their day-to-day lives” (Katsarova, 2022, p. 2) is an important factor for inclusive internationalization. For this reason, international courses should also be offered in languages other than English if possible. In addition, value should also be placed on a language-sensitive design of teaching (Brück-Hübner, 2023, pp. 14–15).

In addition, an international – but also national – comparison of countries reveals large differences in digital infrastructure. Not every student has access to digital devices and a stable Internet connection at home (see Liu & Gao, 2022, p. 9). A lack of or low level of digital literacy (“digital gap”) also limits access (see Stallivieri, 2020). The latter refers not only to the basic availability of an Internet connection, but also to its stability. For example, international students might technically only be able to take part in the course if they turn their camera off, which in turn can have a negative impact on participation and ‘virtual presence’. A consequence is an exclusion of groups of students from virtual internationalization offers. There are different ways to enable such students to access virtual courses, e. g. by creating “learning spaces” with good equipment and internet connection at universities. At the same time, however, digital skills must also be promoted, e. g. in relation to the use of learning platforms that may be unfamiliar, but also digital learning, cooperation and communication in general.

In addition to language and technical barriers, many other factors can be challenging to students. Differences in academic socialization and, as a result, different teaching and learning styles and pedagogical cultures can make it difficult for students to fit in. They are likely to have to adapt to new teaching and learning methods and to a new ‘student role’. For example, not all students are used to self-directed or cooperative learning. There are also differences in the way of addressing lecturers and fellow students in different countries (e. g. addressing lecturers by title, first name or title and surname). Uncertainty in communication can discourage students from actively participating in virtual international courses, or make them afraid to contact the lecturer directly, e. g. to ask questions. As a result, students need support in finding their way around the new learning culture, the new requirements and their new role. On the one hand, lecturers are required to mediate between the different cultures and help students find their way around, while on the other hand, the administration can also initiate additional support services (Carroll, 2015, pp. 17–18; Brück-Hübner, 2023, pp. 16–20).

Education systems vary internationally, not only in their structure and design but also in the content and competencies taught to learners. In a diverse and intercultural classroom, it is reasonable to expect students to possess differing knowledge levels and



various skills, including academic competencies. If courses presume certain levels of knowledge and skills, this could discourage international students and lead to inequalities. Here too, lecturers are required to communicate openly with students about their questions and needs and to provide helpful feedback. In addition, other support services organized by lecturers or administrators can help students to succeed in their studies (e.g. tutoring, mentoring or workshops on topics like academic writing) (Carroll, 2015, pp. 17–18; Brück-Hübner, 2023, pp. 16–20).

In the digital space in particular, it is also more difficult for students to interact with other students and build relationships. The feeling of social inclusion is central to motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1993) and the feeling of social exclusion can discourage students. When designing virtual international courses, it is, therefore, important to support students getting to know each other and building relationships (e.g. by including parts of informal exchange or collaborative work). Additional networking opportunities help students engage in exchange and collaborate with each other (for further implications see Carroll, 2015, pp. 17–18; Brück-Hübner, 2023).

The challenges students face in the context of virtual international teaching are manifold. Therefore, international students typically need support and guidance to be able to participate successfully and actively in virtual international teaching offers. It is important for them to receive context-specific information and – if they have a lack of knowledge or competencies – additional skill training. Universities usually have special offers for students who are studying at their institution for a semester abroad. To ensure that international students who take part in virtual courses also benefit from such offers, they must be opened up to this group and adapted to their needs (e.g. take place virtually). It is also important that students are aware of support offers and know how to take part in them.

### **2.3 Challenges and Needs on the Level of Higher Education Didactics**

Designing and successfully implementing virtual international courses all students can benefit from equally, is by no means trivial. In addition to the heterogeneity of the students, their different needs and required support, the implementation of virtual seminars is challenging in itself. This is especially the case if the course aims at intensive (intercultural) exchange (see e.g. Brück-Hübner, 2024, in this anthology). Higher education didactic support is therefore an important component for the successful implementation, expansion and extension of virtual international courses. Universities need qualified staff who can provide lecturers with targeted advice and support for (digital) internationalization. In addition, information websites, good practice examples and networking events can also support lecturers in the internationalization of their teaching.

To ensure that competent and situation appropriate advice can be provided to lecturers, higher education didacticians do not only need comprehensive knowledge of the various forms and formats of virtual international courses. Above all, they need to address issues of successful digital teaching and learning, digital group and team building, intercultural exchange and communication, a pedagogy of diversity and much

more. For this reason, it is very important that higher education didacticists deal intensively with the topic and engage in further professional development (“train the trainer”). In addition, it is also helpful if the didacticists are familiar with the institutional support structures and can therefore provide lecturers with appropriate contacts for administrative or organizational questions.

Higher education didactics experts are also frequently involved in curriculum development processes. In this context, they can pay attention to a stronger internationalization of the curricula and thus make an important contribution to the integration of internationalization aspects into teaching. However, this requires an awareness of the necessity of such forms of internationalization as well as knowledge of how the internationalization of curricula can be advanced.

## 2.4 Challenges and Needs on the Institutional Level

The success of any (virtual) mobility offer depends on an intensive partnership between members of the institutions involved. Further prerequisites in virtual mobility should be innovative institutional policies in combination with innovative pedagogies (Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008, 13–14, p. 222). Especially in the case of virtual mobility, institutional conditions such as international partnerships and available infrastructure determine the way virtual mobility can be implemented or not (Stallivieri, 2020). Since physical mobility has been the standard for a very long time, the comprehensive introduction of virtual mobility is not without challenges on the institutional and administrative level. First and foremost, a series of administrative processes must be set up and implemented, which not only takes time, but also requires additional qualified personnel.

Partnerships, policies, and pedagogies (Starke-Meyerring & Wilson, 2008, 13–14, p. 222) require the engagement of three groups that have a major influence on the success of virtual exchange: international mobility officers, university management, and teaching faculty (see. 2.1; O’Dowd, 2021, p. 223). First, the position of university management must be clear and supportive towards allocating resources to the implementation and development of virtual mobility. Furthermore, in the sense of a whole institution approach virtual mobility needs to be integrated as a permanent strategic dimension of administration, research, and teaching into the institution’s policies (O’Dowd, 2022, pp. 132–133). This would require a general recognition of virtual teaching as being equally valuable as physical teaching. Universities might also need to find ways to compensate lecturers for the increased effort, for example by reduction of the overall teaching load (see 2.1). In order to promote the institutionalization of virtual mobility, O’Dowd (2022, p. 132) recommends to “collaborate with university management to link VE [virtual exchange] with teacher promotion and recognition of innovation (e. g. teaching time reduction, points for internal promotion, etc.)”. Second, the responsibility of administration must be handed over to a central unit, for instance the International Office (O’Dowd, 2022, pp. 129–137); due to its expertise in international cooperation, the International Office – if staffed accordingly – seems an obvious choice. O’Dowd (2021, p. 213) remarks:

“[...] in university education in general, VE had remained misunderstood and undervalued and, in many ways, it was lost between the different silos in which universities were organised. [...] For international mobility officers, it was seen as belonging to the domain of teachers, not international offices.”

O’Dowd states that there was uncertainty about responsibility, which in turn means that it must be assigned clearly if an institution strives to promote virtual mobility (cf. the guide for senior international officers published by the Stevens Initiative 2020). In that case, the International Office could be responsible for stakeholder management, could support in questions of accreditation or study program development. However, next to university management and International Office many other units need to be involved as well such as the central student service (e.g. enrollment of international students), the IT department (e.g. hosting guest accounts for lecturers, see 2.1), the dean’s offices at faculties, etc. This underlines that virtual mobility is a cross-sectional institutional task.

Taking on virtual mobility inevitably results in a variety of differentiated areas of responsibility comprising operations, communication, support of students and teaching staff, or further program development in combination with quality assurance through evaluation (cf. O’Dowd, 2023, p. 131 for a visualization). The operational level includes a long range of aspects among which are the creation of semester-by-semester course catalogs, the maintenance of the central information platform, the application management and following enrollment of students as well as the support of teaching staff. Communication entails networking with stakeholders, the target-group oriented preparation as well as distribution of information, or match-making. The communication effort should not be underestimated. The support of students and teaching staff can take different forms like the recruitment of student assistants who, for example, organize social interactions to bridge the distance, the organization of further training for lecturers, or the advice on funding opportunities for networking and initial planning. It is also important to bear in mind that the partner universities’ International Offices must be assigned similar responsibilities and staffing. Only this way they can function as a main distributor of information and supporter of own students and staff. Therefore, all universities involved need to build up structures and implement policies that allow fostering virtual mobility.

In the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, many universities settled spontaneously on virtual mobility to enable exchange at all. Quite a few of these reactionary initiatives have been implemented permanently in the meantime, at least in Germany. These initiatives show (for example JLU Giessen’s Virtual International Programme, Kiesler et al., 2021) that virtual mobility offers are in demand and oriented towards current needs in the education sector. Over the years, it was possible to identify champions extremely engaged in virtual mobility among faculty and partner universities. The impression is, however, that the number of active faculty is still comparatively low which not only has to do with a lack of support structures, a lack of digital as well as linguistic competencies, but also with the increased effort required for virtual exchange and collaboration (see 2.1).

## 2.5 Challenges and Needs on the Level of Academic Policies

After a brief look at institutional framework conditions, this section comments on the necessity of innovative policies to implement virtual mobility in higher education. In education, we are faced with a complex and hierarchically organized network reaching from the local to the regional to the (supra)national (see, for example, EU policy topics [https://commission.europa.eu/education/policy-educational-issues\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/education/policy-educational-issues_en)) to the international level. Negotiating policy bottom-up and top-down seems inevitable at this point. How education is structured and valued depends on historical, cultural, societal, economic, or political factors. Societal needs and interests can exert major influence on policies, for example when the recruitment of international students or experts to ensure economic competitiveness is concerned (Balch et al., 2012, p. 9). A negative side effect of this is the increasing privatization of education (Wit et al., 2015, p. 293). Virtual mobility can function as ‘gate-keeper’ for physical mobility especially in countries relying on high numbers of international students. Policies facilitating virtual mobility can be an important success factor here. In this sense, some universities have opened their virtual courses to students worldwide for a fee (e. g. Stanford: <https://online.stanford.edu/>). Others have opened up branches in other areas to reach more students (Kleibert et al., 2020).

If the education system is strongly oriented towards the physical presence of students, like in European countries, the implementation of new policies regarding virtual mobility poses huge challenges. In such a case, many directional decisions on different levels determine the acceptance among parties involved and the options of comprehensive implementation of virtual mobility. In teacher education in particular, a reworking of policy frameworks can focus on various aspects. They could include, for instance, the role of (virtual) internationalization in initial and further teacher education, the contents of curricula, required and future-oriented competencies, new ideas about teacher professionalism and professional development, life-long learning as well as a reviewed idea about the purposes and aims of school and university education (cf. Tonna & Madalinska-Michalak, 2018).

These sketchy explanations illustrate the complex interdependencies associated with internationalization efforts. It can be assumed that the development of sustainable policies will be a lengthy and dynamic process that requires great openness as well as a fundamental discussion about future-oriented education. For the time being, it seems sensible to build-up more communities of practice and to initiate joint projects.

## 3 Conclusion

This article outlines numerous challenges university stakeholders are confronted with when expanding virtual mobility in higher education. It also highlights the associated needs and implications for practice. It became clear how complex the expansion of forms of virtual internationalization is and that all stakeholders involved need to work hand in hand. The explanations are based on the personal experiences of the authors

and should be supported by empirical studies in future. Even though this article points out major challenges of virtual international teaching – especially in the initial phase –, it is not intended to discourage. Conducted projects illustrate how diverse the advantages of virtual international teaching are (see Brück-Hübner, Müller, & Seifert, 2024b) and that it is worth establishing targeted support structures at universities to attract more lecturers and students to virtual mobility.

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# A Spotlight: Strategy Papers on the Internationalization of Teacher Education

WIEBKE NIERSTE

## Abstract

For institutions of all kinds, the written fixation of strategies serves several purposes. Such papers provide, on the one hand, a framework for institutional development and, on the other hand, an orientation framework for the institution's members as well as external partners. Although significant progress in formulating essential fields of action and measures of the internationalization of teacher education as recommendations, resolutions, or working papers has been made, strategy papers focusing solely on the internationalization of teacher education are still a rarity. Two papers published by German higher education institutions, however, show different approaches to formulating such strategy papers.

Keywords: strategy paper, internationalization strategy, position paper, Germany

## Outline

1. Introduction: Strategy and Internationalization Strategies in Teacher Education
2. Strategy Papers: Two German Examples
3. Conclusion
4. References

## 1 Introduction: Strategy and Internationalization Strategies in Teacher Education

Although internationalization with its underlying political and economic interests has been problematized in the past (Binder, 2016), it has long been and is more and more becoming a pronounced focus of higher education institutions (for example de Wit & Deca, 2020; Teichler, 2007; Huisman & van der Wende, 2004). Strategy papers are, according to Bode, fundamental for internationalization because it relies in any case on planned action, time, personnel, and money (Bode, 2012, p. 7). According to Borgwardt, overarching internationalization strategies are also crucial to coordinate measures and use synergies, to raise an institutional profile, and to increase international visibility (Borgwardt, 2012, p. 33). They also define the institution's priorities and practices (O'Dowd 2023, p. 132).



Bode differentiates as two basic pillars of strategies the process and the content. No internationalization strategy, he states, should be isolated from the institution's mission statement. At the same time, a strategy should contain long-term objectives in combination with concrete actions, milestones, and calculation of resources. Finally, he claims, every strategy should be an intelligent mixture of central/university-wide and decentralized/individual initiatives (Bode, 2012, p. 9). Bode notes that internationalization strategies usually focus on student and (teaching) staff mobility, thematic implementation in teaching and research, working with strategic partners, and exporting study programs (Bode, 2012, p. 10). Regarding the internationalization of teacher education, Falkenhagen, Grimm & Volkmann (2019, 1) identify seven core topics which are also reflected in several strategy papers.

Naturally, strategies differ according to the institution's conditions (Bode, 2012, p. 7; cf. also Knight, 1994, pp. 10–11). This leads to internationalization strategies of universities being different from strategies issued by the federal government, national science organizations, or European/global organizations (Bode, 2012, pp. 7–12). In addition to universities, teacher education in southern Germany also takes place at University Colleges of Education (Pädagogische Hochschulen). With their profile in teacher education, any institutional internationalization strategy is simultaneously a strategy for internationalizing teacher education. At universities, however, internationalization strategies are always related to the institutional entirety. In this case, only a specified internationalization strategy can give visibility and importance to the internationalization of teacher education.

## 2 Strategy Papers: Two German Examples

An exploratory research has revealed a representative number of papers dealing with the internationalization of teacher education. It might just be a topic of single sections or the whole paper's focus. Those papers can be divided into two groups (see table 1 that in no way claims to be complete). One group (Position paper) provides positions and recommendations, or lays out priorities, measures, and development opportunities. Umbrella organizations or funding institutions like the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) are responsible for their creation.<sup>1</sup> These third-party papers do admittedly influence the discourse and are meant to be taken into account by policy makers as well as institutions involved in teacher education. Some also contain recommendations on strategic measures such as including the topic into the universities' internationalization strategies (Lower Saxony Network for Teacher Education, 2017, p. 4). Another group (Strategy paper) declares the institution's strategic focus. Two German examples of such strategy papers from higher education institutions – University of Potsdam (1) and Freiburg Advanced Center for Education (2) – are presented below as good practice. Both are based on German discourses about teacher education, which is

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<sup>1</sup> We can generally see that some universities involved in projects funded within the DAAD programme *Lehramt International* (see Bloch, 2024, in this anthology) are planning to prepare or are in the process of preparing university-wide concepts or strategies.

why contents may not necessarily be applicable to other contexts or one's own institution.

**Table 1:** Overview of exploratory research results<sup>2</sup>

	Title	Strategy paper	Position paper	Issued by	Year of publication
1	Internationalization strategies 2017–2019	x		University of Potsdam/Center for Teacher Training and Education Research	2017
2	Working paper on strategy development in the field of action “internationalization” from 2019–2023	x		Freiburg Advanced Center of Education/ School of Education	2020
3	Internationalization strategy University College of Teacher Education Heidelberg 2026	x		Heidelberg University of Education	2021
4	Short version internationalization strategy	x		Ludwigsburg University of Education	2022
5	Recommendations and catalog of measures to promote the internationalization of teacher education at universities in Lower Saxony		x	Lower Saxony Association for Teacher Education	2017
6	Recommendations for future-oriented teacher education		x	German U15	2023
7	Recommendations to federal and state governments on teacher education		x	Stifterverband	2023
8	Nizza resolution		x	DAAD, Franco-German University, Franco-German Youth Office	2019
9	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025		x	European Commission	2020
10	Berlin declaration		x	DAAD Teacher Education	2015/2022
11	Priorities, fields of development, and measures to internationalize teacher education		x	DAAD	2021
12	Resolution on the internationalization of teacher education		x	DAAD	2013
13	Recommendations on teacher education		x	HRK	2013

2 Translations into English by the author if no English translation was available.

## 2.1 University of Potsdam: Internationalisierungsstrategien 2017–2019

In their paper called *Internationalisierungsstrategien 2017–2019*, the University of Potsdam defines six packages of measures dedicated to the internationalization of teacher education alone:

1. Overall strategy
2. International partnership to increase outgoing student mobility
3. Reduction of barriers to mobility
4. Internationalization@home
5. International teaching degrees
6. Information, public relations, and marketing

The packages, it seems, draw on a profound analysis of the target group's special needs and their specific barriers to mobility. Package one (Overall strategy) names as overarching goal the implementation and permanent establishment of an overall internationalization strategy. At the beginning, the authors recognize that structural and human resources are essential to achieve this goal and to bundle, evaluate, and prioritize activities. The steering of the process, therefore, lies in the hand of a specialized officer in cooperation with the members of a working group (p. 1).

Strategic measures of packages two and three refer to the biggest mobility barriers for student teachers. Package two states that international partnerships in teacher education should be adapted more to conditions set by German teaching degrees (minimum of two subjects plus education sciences). To address the student teachers' biggest fear of an extension of their standard period of study (DAAD, 2021, p. 4), multi-subject contracts with partner universities specialized in teacher education are identified as one strategic dimension. Closely linked in terms of barriers is package three referring to curricular as well as organizational barriers resulting from the general study conditions. Strategic measures to counteract these are the identification of suitable mobility windows and a corresponding practice of recognition (pp. 1–2).

Packages four and six make specific reference to two common internationalization practices, internationalization@home and information/marketing (pp. 2–3/4–5). Both point out deficits often standing in the way of the internationalization of teacher education: rigid curricula with little room for the integration of international elements, the lack of knowledge about opportunities plus students' reservations about a study abroad period. Package four stresses that incoming students and lecturers play an important role in the internationalization@home as well. It names English as language of instruction or short-term mobility offers like summer schools (cf. Nierste, 2024, in this anthology) as means to increase the attractiveness for stays at German universities.

Indicating far-reaching ramifications of a holistic approach to the internationalization of teacher education is package five commenting on international teaching degrees (pp. 3–4). The strategy paper encourages focusing attention also on integrating teachers into the German school system who received their degrees in other countries. This relies on authorities outside the university to act, but can be a worthwhile field of action with regard to the teacher shortage not only Germany currently faces.

From a practitioner's perspective, the University of Potsdam addresses a number of important dimensions with these six packages. The paper reveals a strong awareness for the need to take into account the special nationally regulated study context, which is reflected in the design of curricula and which exerts significant influence on possible mobility periods or recognition opportunities. Responding to this situation in terms of internationalization requires not only targeted strategic measures, but also a change of mind set of student teachers as well as teacher educators. Administrative units like Centres for Teacher Education/Schools of Education or International Offices can fulfil a key role as administrative as well as strategic ambassadors for the internationalization of teacher education.

## **2.2 Strategy Paper of Freiburg Advanced Center of Education (FACE)**

The Freiburg Advanced Center of Education is a cross-university institution (University of Freiburg, University of Education Freiburg, Freiburg University of Music) with an overall focus on teacher education and qualification. The 2020 working paper on strategic development comments on goals, measures, and instruments of internationalization. The common strategy allows the perception of internationalization of teacher education as a cross-institutional task that shows an obvious connection to the single institutions' overarching internationalization strategies (p. 2). The paper defines two target areas. The area *Teaching and Curriculum Development* (pp. 3–5) addresses in particular students and teaching staff. The need for short-term mobility offers, intensive counseling, preparation, and follow-up for students is as acknowledged as the importance of further and continuing education of teaching staff. Teaching awards are supposed to function as incentives to include international elements into one's own teaching. Regarding curricula, recognition, and the integration of study abroad periods as mobility windows or as compulsory electives shall ensure a continuous engagement with international and intercultural elements. In addition to certificates, the paper mentions other prioritized measures like double/joint degrees with partner universities or subject-specific language courses to foster multilingualism. The second area, *Research* (p. 6), emphasizes the awareness that educators are also researchers. International networks focusing on empirical and educational research, international conferences, guest researchers, and support for internationally oriented research proposals are only a few measures mentioned in this field.

Taken together, the strategy papers set different priorities and show different approaches to the topic. The University of Potsdam paper subdivides the strategic measures into six sub-items making them more concrete at first glance; the FACE paper summarizes important measures under two overarching aspects. Both, however, clarify the complexity of the topic at hand by referring to the high diversity of stakeholders like administration, students, teacher educators, or researchers involved. They also show overlaps in areas such as subject-specific cooperation with partner universities, reduction of mobility barriers, or curriculum development. The re-appearing topic of the recognition of international teaching degrees illustrates an awareness of the importance of a holistic approach to the internationalization of teacher education.

### 3 Conclusion

This short article is the result of an exploratory research on strategy papers published by German higher education institutions dealing with the internationalization of teacher education. The overview in Table 1 demonstrates the broad range of academic and institutional approaches to the topic. All papers illustrate the need for goal-oriented positioning to navigate the subsequent implementation of internationalization measures at higher education institutions in Germany and worldwide. The two examples illustrate different ways to design such strategy papers against the background of institutional policies and contexts.

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# A Step-by-step Model for Internationalization of Elementary School Teacher Education

## *Pedagogical University Development Using the Example of the Giessen GloPEG Project*

MAXIMILIAN KOPP, ANJA SEIFERT, ULRIKE BEATE MÜLLER

### **Abstract**

Internationalization in the context of higher education can be seen as a gradual process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into higher education. Giessen's elementary<sup>1</sup> school teacher education meets the challenges of internationalization in teacher education with a step-by-step internationalization strategy. The goal of this strategy is to sustainably implement international components into the elementary school teacher education program and to enable students to gain international experience at a self-determined intensity and frequency. In the context of this conceptual contribution, the necessity of a multi-level, sequential, and gentle internationalization strategy is outlined, followed by the presentation and explanation of the step-by-step model.

Keywords: internationalization strategy, intercultural competences, internationalization of higher education

### **Outline**

1. Need for Internationalization in Elementary School Teacher Education
2. Step-by-step Model for Internationalization
3. Discussion

## **1 The Need for Internationalization in Elementary School Teacher Education**

Internationalization in the context of higher education can be defined as a “process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of higher education” (Knight, 2008, p. 21). Accordingly, it is a gradual process of integrating an international, intercultural, and global dimension into higher education. Internationally oriented higher education pursues the goal of improving

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<sup>1</sup> Elementary school in Giessen in the federal state of Hesse in Germany encompasses classes 1 to 4, which is obligatory for children to visit, starting at the age of 6.



teaching and making a contribution to society, for example, through an intercultural exchange (cf. de Wit et al., 2015, p. 29). In an internationally oriented teacher education, “dealing with diversity” becomes the guiding motive for action (cf. Barsch & Dziak-Mahler, 2015, p. 10). Elementary school, with its founding promise to be a “school for all” (Götz, 2019), is particularly committed to this motive for action. Accordingly, elementary school teacher education should also have an international orientation, since the university also has an international character. Compared to other disciplines, however, the teacher education program is considered to be separate in the higher education landscape (cf. Hedtke, 2020, p. 94). Consequently, it can be stated that elementary school teacher education is not very internationalized compared to other degree programs (see also Seifert, 2024, in this anthology). According to Brahm, Jennert, and Euler, disciplinary cultures have an impact on the design of teaching (cf. 2016, p. 6). This is visible in teacher education for elementary schools, where there are only few institutionally anchored, internationally oriented courses (Radhoff & Ruberg, 2020, p. 57). Above all, the study environment in the teaching education, apart from foreign language subjects, is perceived as having little international appeal (cf. Wernisch, 2017, p. 8).

In addition to the founding promise of the elementary school, the action motive “dealing with diversity” is activated by the demand of the German Rectors’ Conference to qualify future teachers for the perception of “global citizenship” (HRK, 2014, p. 94). Giessen’s elementary school teacher education meets these challenges with a step-by-step internationalization strategy. All measures that serve the internationalization of the Giessen elementary school teaching profession are combined under the umbrella of GloPEG. This stands for “Global Primary School Education Giessen” (cf. GloPEG, 2023). The goal of this strategy is to sustainably implement international components into the elementary school teacher education program and to enable teacher students to gain international experience at a self-determined intensity and frequency.

The group of elementary school teacher education students are predominantly first-generation students (cf. Miethé, 2014) who were the first in their family to take up higher education. First-generation students perceive their studies – even without international components – as challenging (cf. e. g. Lange-Vester, 2014). In order not to further complicate the already challenging studies by integrating international components, our step-by-step strategy, which is self-determined in scope and frequency, seems particularly appropriate for this special target group.

## 2 Step-by-step Model for Internationalization

In order to internationalize the study of elementary school teacher education in a target group-specific or diversity-sensitive way, Giessen’s elementary school teacher education pursues six (internationalization) stages, which are meant to be interdependent. This means that the stages can and should exist side by side and build on each other only to a limited extent. Accordingly, the model is metaphorically based on a Penrose staircase (always continuing staircase), not in that internationalization is impossible, but rather as interconnected steps that can be taken one after the other but do not have

to be. At first, we differentiate the model into two levels: “Internationalization abroad” and “Internationalization at home” (de Wit et al., 2015, p. 45). “Internationalization abroad” refers to all forms of mobility, e. g. stays abroad via Erasmus+. “Internationalization at home” refers to development processes on site that affect the curriculum – for example, through the integration of international comparative perspectives (cf. de Wit et al., 2015, p. 50).

**Table 1:** A step-by-step model for internationalization in elementary school teacher education

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
International learning situations	International seminar	Certificate	Internship	Semester abroad	International elementary school teacher training program
Internationalization at home			Internationalization abroad		

We classify the first three stages as measures of an “internationalization at home”, since the individual stages concern domestic seminar offers, which are to be assigned to the individual curriculum development. Step 1 “international learning situations” involves the curricular implementation of individual learning situations (English-language inputs, films, ...) or individual English-language sessions of the course in elementary school pedagogy courses. Step 2 “international seminar” is an English-language course (for an example see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology). All learning situations here are offered in English and are designed to promote “global citizenship” (HRK, 2014, p. 94)<sup>2</sup>. The third step comprises an elementary school education module or a certificate course within the framework of the elementary school teacher education program, which is designed to promote intercultural perspectives and “global citizenship”. Several courses with interrelated content are planned, the successful completion of which can either be credited to the elementary school teacher training program or honored with a certificate.

Steps 4 to 6 are measures of an “internationalization abroad”. Step 4 provides for an internship abroad. Here, different variants of the design are conceivable, e. g. internships abroad that are more research-related or teaching-related. Step 5 comprises a “classic” semester abroad, which is already common in some foreign-language-oriented degree programs. The sixth step provides for the implementation of an independent international elementary school teacher education program as a long-term perspective. Depending on the design, step 6 naturally contains both parts of an “internationalization abroad” and “internationalization at home”, since parts in the sense of the first three steps and mobility phases in the sense of steps 4 and 5 are integrated locally.

All in all, the goal is to sustainably implement international components in the national elementary school teacher education and to enable students to gain international experience in each case at a self-determined intensity and frequency.

<sup>2</sup> A step 1 course was conducted in Giessen from summer term 2021 to winter term 2022 (four semesters; Müller, Seifert, Kopp & Basedow 2023; Kopp et al. 2024) and step 2 courses have been conducted in Giessen since summer term 2023 (see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al. 2024, in this anthology).

In order to implement these strategic goals sustainably, various levels of the university must be taken into account (cf. Brahm, Jenert & Euler, 2016, p. 11). In the following, these levels are briefly unfolded and then discussed with regard to our strategy.

### 3 Discussion

In order to lead to the intended goal for such an internationalization strategy in the long term, it is necessary to go beyond changes in higher education didactics and also to pursue organizational development (cf. Brahm, Jenert and Euler 2016, p. 8). Overall, a change process according to the model of “pedagogical university development” takes place on three levels, which are oriented to overarching strategic goals for academic affairs. This includes the level of the learning environment, in which changes in higher education didactics are in the foreground. This is followed by the level of the study programs, where organizational decisions are made that need to be appropriately coordinated with the teaching staff. At the level of the organization, structural decisions are made, for example, about the personnel infrastructure that is provided to achieve the goals (cf. Brahm, Jenert & Euler, 2016, p.13 ff.).

The step-by-step model for the internationalization of elementary school teacher education in Giessen is based on strategic goals for studies and teaching at Giessen University. In particular, to the university’s development plan, which envisions a “further internationalization of teacher education” (Der Präsident der Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, 2020, p. 22). Our model is predominantly on the operational levels of the learning environment and the study programs. The first two steps can clearly be assigned to the level of learning environments, since they involve highly didactic changes of varying intensity of individual courses. The steps 3 to 5 comprise changes at the level of the study programs, since modules or certificate courses, internships abroad and semesters abroad are to be integrated into the curriculum here. Step 6 – the introduction of an international elementary school teacher education program – is also to be assigned to the level of study organization, but due to state legal requirements, an introduction would also affect the level of organization.

According to the model of “pedagogical university development”, change processes are always successful if they keep all three levels in view (cf. Brahm, Jenert & Euler, 2016, p.11). This can be exemplified by the developments in higher education didactics at Step 1 (cf. Müller et al., 2023), which also keeps an eye on the level of the study programs. Thus, after successful piloting of Step 1, international elements were integrated into the curriculum of the elementary school teacher education program in Giessen. The coordination and communication processes with the teachers, which represent an integral guarantee of success for Step 1, should also be emphasized here (cf. Müller et al., 2023, p. 417). With reference to Level 3, it can be seen that the Human Resource (HR) infrastructure is mainly financed by second- and third-party funds. Due to the volatility of these funds, the continued operation of the first step is always at risk. With regard to the inclusion of university development goals, which our step-by-step model

has translated into the practice of elementary school teacher education, there is thus no optimal correspondence between the levels of pedagogical university development. What is desirable here, for example, is stable staffing for a sustainable and successful implementation of the graduated model.

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## **Part II: Reflected Practice**



# Virtual Exchange in Teacher Training – An Overview of Four Formats Carried out at University of Education Weingarten

GABRIELLA VON LIERES, SABINE LANG

## Abstract

Teacher education aims to develop intercultural and digital competencies (e.g. UNESCO, 2023). Virtual exchange (VE) is a higher education didactic format designed for this purpose. In this context, VE includes various virtual intercultural learning opportunities (O’Dowd, 2023). This article outlines four VE formats developed for teacher students at the University of Education, Weingarten (UEW). In essence, it provides a practical account of experiences in organizing and implementing VE formats in teacher training. The article begins with a presentation of experiences and concludes with a commentary on factors beneficial for instructors and university organizations.

Keywords: higher education, teacher education, virtual exchange, teaching faculty

## Outline

1. Introduction – Virtual Exchange in Teacher Training
2. Overview – Four Examples of VE Formats in Teacher Training
3. Comments and Conclusion – Teaching Staff and University Organization

## 1 Introduction – Virtual Exchange in Teacher Training

Teachers are confronted with a wide range of challenges in everyday school life (e.g. Germany: KMK, 2000). These challenges encompass issues such as managing cultural diversity, overcoming language barriers, and addressing digitalization (e.g. Germany: KMK, 2004/2019). Teachers are called upon to guide pupils in acquiring essential skills including intercultural, linguistic and digital competencies (e.g. Bildungsplan BW, 2016). Teacher education programs should prepare teacher students for these challenges by incorporating such content into the curriculum as well as by utilizing diverse higher education didactic formats (Neuweg, 2018). Additionally, such programs should facilitate opportunities for international experiences.

When possibilities of internationalization in teacher education are addressed, this encompasses both “internationalization abroad” (i. e. engaging in academic pursuits at a foreign institution) and “internationalization at home” (i. e. accessing international



learning opportunities within the home university). The latter often involves VE, which should contribute to promoting intercultural, language, and digital competencies (Hauck, 2019). VE is used to refer to many different teaching formats. We follow a broad definition of VE as referring to numerous learning opportunities in which learners with different cultural backgrounds are guided to collaborate online through various methods (O’Dowd, 2023). Formats can range from brief online sessions to semester-long collaborations between educators from different institutions, developing online courses or modules. Some formats include physical visits, such as blended intensive programs (BIP).

Despite the acknowledged complexity of categorizing VEs (Stevens Initiative, 2021, p. 11), this overview article presents four specific VE formats that have been developed and implemented for teacher education at the UEW.

## 2 Overview – Four Examples of VE Formats

The four VE formats were developed at the UEW during the period of the pandemic (2020–2022). Some were part of internationalization projects, while others were individual initiatives by instructors. The VE formats were all implemented in teacher education programs.

To describe them, a straightforward categorization based on the level of cooperation between instructors and students is used. Starting with Format 1, which required minimal cooperation, the categorization concludes with Format 4, where a high level of cooperation was necessary.

### 2.1 The Four VE Formats

#### **Format 1: Virtual Exchange – Onboarding opportunity for international students in a pre-existing course**

This VE format is a possibility for future incoming international students to participate in suitable online courses at a host university. The goal of the onboarding VE is to offer them an opportunity to become acquainted with students, instructors, and university structures before physically attending the host university.

To integrate such a VE into an existing course, the course must meet specific criteria. An example of such a course was an online version of the course “Interactive Competence for School” regularly offered to UEW student teachers of English.

The course was held entirely online and involved active student participation, mostly in small groups, allowing student interactions to be supervised and facilitated by the instructor. The smaller course size of 25 students also allowed the lecturer more time to interact individually with students. The course’s main aim was to improve student teachers’ interactive English skills through various activities and projects that required active student collaboration, therefore it was well suited to integrate the incoming students.

The course was organized with the support of the International Office, which contacted the future incoming students from the PdT and provided them with provisional student ID numbers and email addresses. This allowed them to enroll in the course and register on the university's learning platform. Through the course, they established personal contacts and familiarized themselves with university procedures, which helped them in the following semester, when they also received credits for the course.

Overall, it is a low-demanding format in terms of organization for lecturers as pre-existing online courses are opened for international students and adjusted to integrate them more actively. However, in this format as well as the following formats didactic skills of the instructor for online teaching, and their intercultural sensitivity are critical for the success of the VE.

### **Format 2: Virtual Exchange – International online compact course**

The goal of this VE format is to offer all interested students (in the sense of inclusive internationalization) an opportunity to gain international and intercultural experience in a digital context.

The VE course was offered by a UEW lecturer for UEW student teachers as well as student teachers from Universidade de Santa Catarina (Brazil) who study German as a foreign language. The contact between the lecturers arose through a joint model project.<sup>1</sup> The UEW lecturer held the course and the lecturer from Universidade de Santa Catarina advertised the course, as well as ensuring accreditation for the Brazilian students. Both sides decided in advance which digital tools were to be used in accordance with respective data protection regulations. The Brazilian students also gained access to UEW's learning platform.

The focus of the course was on the joint collaboration of students on intercultural topics. Students were given an active role in the direction of activities and discussions. The lecturer created mixed learning opportunities, and encouraged the students to collaborate through activities and assignments. In addition to fostering subject knowledge, the goal was to promote key competencies such as digital literacy, communication, critical thinking and intercultural competence.

The course took place synchronously via video conference with asynchronous elements (e. g. literature review, assignments, exercises, etc.). To make synchronous participation possible during the semester, a short-term format was chosen, limited to a few dates (e. g. 3–5 dates of 4–5 hours each).

Overall, it was a medium-demanding format in terms of both collaboration in organization for the lecturers and student participation and collaboration requirements.

### **Format 3: Virtual Exchange – International, collaborative, online courses**

In this VE format, two or more instructors from different universities (and countries) work together to develop and integrate virtual, collaborative elements within their respective regular courses. An example is a VE that was implemented between UEW stu-

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<sup>1</sup> The project is a model project for the internationalization of teacher training (Lehramt.International), initiated and financed by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) (see Bloch, 2024, in this anthology).

dents in a Master's English language teaching course, and those studying English at the Universidad de Santa Caterina in Brazil.

The VE was characterized by successive online collaborative assignments carried out synchronously and asynchronously by intercultural student working groups meeting outside the regular seminar setting. In addition to promoting knowledge and the above-mentioned key competencies (Format 2), the aim here was to promote intercultural team skills and project-related work. The following task structure was implemented: Phase I: Forming groups and getting to know each other; Phase II: Comparing and analyzing cultural practices; Phase III: Working on and presenting a collaborative "product" which in this case was a lesson plan or video promoting a global issue.

Due to different semester times, the VE was limited to a period of seven weeks. Since the course was offered through the respective home university, both the participation requirements and the accreditation of the course were regulated according to the curricular requirements of the respective study programs.

Overall, it is a demanding VE format for both the instructors and students. The prerequisite is the establishment of cooperation between the instructors, organizational and didactic agreements, as well as intercultural and digital skills. Also, students must organize themselves to collaborate effectively and create a shared "product" while also taking intercultural factors into account in their interactions.

#### **Format 4: Blended Mobility – International, collaborative, online courses plus on-site visit**

This VE format is an extension of Format 3 with an additional "on-site visit". An example of such a VE was part of an international collaboration between the UEW, and two colleges in Israel: The Arab Sahknin College for Teacher Education in Sahknin and the mixed Jewish Kibbutzim College of Education in Tel Aviv. The instructors from these three universities have been carrying out a collaborative VE for several years and had the opportunity with additional funding to organize for 20 UEW students a visit to meet their VE partners in Israel. The visit took place during the actual virtual exchange allowing for in-depth engagement and greater cultural contact than the VE alone would have provided. The "on-site visit" enabled a supervised intercultural and professional experience, the benefit of which lay in the direct contact between the participants, leading to greater intercultural understanding and empathy.

Overall, this VE format is demanding, time-consuming, and labor-intensive for the instructors in terms of planning and implementation. In addition to the aspects already mentioned above, there is also the application for and processing of separate funding (e. g. BIP via Erasmus+) as well as intensive preparation and monitoring of the trip. This requires the cooperation of different stakeholders, including instructors, international offices, and university management. However, the impact that the visit had on the students justified the effort and confirmed the added value of a VE, as the depth of interaction between the students would not have been possible through a short physical exchange alone. The students feedback underscored this added impact:

“The tasks in the Virtual Exchange were easy for us to work on and I have already learned a lot about the working methods of students from Israel, especially their differences. However, this excursion has raised my understanding to another level and I now would probably take a different approach if I were to work with people from other countries or other cultures.” (student I, translated by authors)

“As part of the seminar at the university, we worked very intensively in small groups on various tasks with students from Israel during the semester. This exchange and the relationships have been further deepened by the trip, which makes the trip very valuable from this point of view. The exchange between the two study groups became much more intensive. This has greatly enhanced my ability to navigate such an environment. This skill will also benefit me in my professional life as a teacher.” (student II, translated by authors)

## 2.2 Reflection on the Four VE formats

As shown, various aspects play a role in the planning and implementation of VEs:

- organizational (e.g. cooperation partners, finances, university “infrastructure”, digital platforms and tools, academic recognition, etc.),
- temporal (e.g. semester times, times zones, preparation and follow-up times of the teachers, etc.),
- technical (e.g. tools that can be shared, data protection, etc.),
- learning framework (e.g. learning objectives, learners’ backgrounds, role of learners and instructors, etc.),
- didactic (synchronous: lecture/presentation, group work, discussion etc.) + (asynchronous: text work, tasks, projects etc.),
- language (L1 vs. L2, materials, etc.),
- content-related (e.g. one topic/one subject; one topic/different subjects etc.) and
- degree of collaboration (e.g. onboarding of international students corresponds to a low degree of collaboration...).

Moreover, these aspects are not to be considered independently of each other, but are closely interrelated. For example, time and technical requirements make didactic and learning approaches possible or impossible. In a VE such as Format 1 or 2, with mainly synchronous sessions using video conferencing tools and other collaboration tools, it is more appropriate to integrate discussions and group work with the aim of developing content and exchanging perspectives. VEs such as Format 3 or 4 with synchronous and asynchronous parts and the tools mentioned above are also well suited for project-based approaches, in which participants can learn to collaborate on project work in international teams.

Therefore, it is recommendable to coordinate organizational and temporal requirements, learning objectives, content, and didactic and technical possibilities for collaboration.

### 3 Comments & Conclusion – Teaching Staff & University Organization

As a summarizing commentary for instructors, we refer to the points presented under “2.2 Reflection”. Furthermore, it is critical to point out that instructors allow enough time for planning as the process is quite complex, and, if necessary, for training (linguistic and pedagogical-didactical for online teaching). It is especially helpful if one cooperation partner already has experience in carrying out a VE. Another critical aspect is to what extent the participating students receive accreditation.

At an organizational level certain factors have been found to be conducive to VE implementation (Rubin & Guth, 2022), some of which have been previously mentioned. These factors can make a great difference in the willingness of faculty to engage in VEs. Some factors include but are not limited to administrative support, available resources, technological infrastructure and support, professional development, faculty incentives, and international opportunities to network and travel. Herein lies great potential to attract faculty and staff to developing and implementing VEs within a university. In addition, some not-for-profit initiatives, such as COIL Connect<sup>2</sup> that promote VEs are also encouraging universities to establish coordination positions. Such a position can bundle information about VEs, initiate contacts to potential partners and, if available, secure financial resources for training, technology and suchlike. This can contribute to the university’s implementation of VEs and support internationalization efforts.

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2 For more information see: <https://coilconnect.org>

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# Teachers Education Students and Virtual Mobility Formats – Insights from a Student Survey on the Flexibilization of Internationalization

KATHRIN WILD

## Abstract

The project “Partners in Flex-Mobility” at Europa-Universität Flensburg in Germany aims to sustainably increase internationalization and foreign mobility in teacher education programs through integration and by enhancing the flexibility of foreign mobility options. To this end, we designed and evaluated different virtual and hybrid formats and carried out a quantitative study on the factors identified by educational science students as hindering their mobility abroad. Analysis of selected data on virtual mobility in general, and on specific virtual mobility formats, reveals that teacher education students are only mildly interested in doing a study-related mobility abroad, and that those who are not interested in going abroad show more interest in virtual mobility than those who are. Despite the challenges in engaging students with digital formats, the project continues to include them as part of the university’s mobility portfolio. This approach allows flexible mobility pathways for all students, especially for those who might not otherwise take any further steps to deepen their international awareness and engagement.

Keywords: internationalization of teacher education, virtual mobility, mobility formats, quantitative study, survey

## Outline

1. The Project “Partners in Flex-Mobility”
2. Offering and Evaluating Hybrid and Virtual Formats
3. Study on Mobility Formats
4. Conclusion and Perspectives on the Future Use of Virtual Formats

## 1 The Project “Partners in Flex-Mobility”

In recent years, Europa-Universität Flensburg (EUF) in Germany has increasingly internationalized its teacher education program. Among other measures, it introduced a fifth-semester mobility window in the B. A. program, adopted internationally compati-



ble semester times, professionalized its recognition processes, and refined its communication strategies to highlight the professional relevance of study/internship abroad. In 2017, EUF was awarded the “bologna hub” by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) for its innovative approaches and exemplary mobility promotion models. These measures have boosted student mobility at EUF and increased its use of internationally oriented class content and supervision models. Nevertheless, mobility among teacher education students continues to lag behind that of other degree programs – a trend, as studies by i. a. Ahlgrimm et al. (2019), Kercher/Schifferings (2019) and Schön/Sliwka (2014), and others have shown, that appears to extend to teacher education programs across Germany. Researchers on the topic (Ahlgrimm et al., 2019; Barsch & Dziak-Mahler, 2015; Kercher & Schifferings, 2019; Lörz, Netz, & Quast, 2016; Schön & Sliwka, 2014), the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD, 2019) and first-hand accounts from students who have gone abroad point to various possible reasons for this trend, including family or personal circumstances, language barriers, planning and financial uncertainties, or lack of recognition when entering the preparatory service. In short, teacher education students appear to face unique challenges when it comes to balancing their specific life situations with study abroad.

In response to these problems, the “Partners in Flex-Mobility” project, funded by the DAAD and the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) under the Lehramt.International funding program (see Bloch, 2024, in this anthology), aims to sustainably enhance internationalization and increase foreign mobility in teacher education programs. To achieve this, the project seeks to further integrate and increase the flexibility of foreign mobility formats at EUF. The project pursues the following key objectives:

1. To increase international mobility in the teaching profession by establishing sustainable structures, processes, and initiatives tailored to the interests and needs of students, partner universities, schools, and EUF employees
2. To integrate flexible mobility paths in degree programs, including semesters abroad and innovative combinations of short-term mobility and internationalization at home (in accordance with Nilsson’s original definition, 2003, p. 31), termed “flex-mobility”
3. To adapt and expand information, advice, and support services to students, lecturers, and service staff.

A central aspect of the project is the active participation of students, alongside partner universities, school, and internal stakeholders, as ‘partners in mobility’. Students are instrumental in identifying and providing feedback on the obstacles to their international mobility and their specific mobility needs, with a primary emphasis on B. A. students.

## 2 Offering and Evaluating Hybrid and Virtual Formats

The integration of flexible mobility paths in teacher education programs includes, besides semesters abroad, innovative combinations of short-term mobility and internationalization at home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the project was initially forced to rely exclusively on virtual formats. However, students continued to request video conference participation options even after in-person formats had become possible, and the project accommodated this demand. To maximize attendance, some events were also offered in hybrid form. The following sections present and evaluate various virtual and hybrid formats for internationalizing teacher education.

### 2.1 Virtual and Hybrid Formats

#### 2.1.1 Winter school

In Fall Semester 2020/2021, a one-day digital winter school focused on *Intercultural Education in a Nutshell* was organized. The target group were teacher education students, school teachers, and university staff. The winter school aimed to achieve the following objectives:

- Exchange a range of different perspectives on education
- Raise awareness of intercultural topics in education
- Train critical thinking skills
- Develop intercultural empathy.

Lecturers from EUF and the University of Jyväskylä (Finland) gave insights into various aspects of Dutch, German, and Finnish school education and the options for international school internships. Additionally, staff from different German universities involved in *Lehramt.International (Teaching. International)* projects met for a think tank to develop a Europe Module/European Certificate for teacher education. The winter school successfully engaged approximately 40 participants from Europe and Africa.

#### 2.1.2 Workshops

Since 2020, “Partners in Flex-Mobility” has offered EUF teacher education students online and, subsequently, hybrid workshops lasting two to four hours and refined its communication strategies to highlight the professional relevance of study/internship abroad. Taught by peer students and project staff from EUF, schoolteachers from Germany, and university lecturers from several different countries, the workshops include first-hand accounts of student experiences abroad under different mobility formats. During such sessions, the presenting students answered questions from their peers about how to plan, fund, and execute a stay abroad and helped alleviate worries by engaging in informal discussion with other students about financing and planning issues. Overall, the workshops aimed to familiarize students with different physical mobility formats and the added value of different mobility formats.

In other workshops, the students gained insight into different education systems, education policies and intercultural education in matters such as lifelong learning, dig-

italization, minority education, and multilingualism, in order to whet their appetite for stays abroad and international experiences in teacher education.

To further prepare them for study or an internship abroad, students also received introductory workshops on intercultural communication by university staff. These workshops aimed to give a very condensed overview of intercultural communication processes, covering the structural features of culture, values, and norms, and the phenomenon of culture shock. The broader goal was to stimulate reflection processes that students could continue to develop during their time abroad.

Together with the EUF's in-service training facility, internal and external university staff also offered workshops in which teacher education students could train with schoolteachers on language-sensitive teaching and plural approaches to foreign language teaching. These sessions provided ample opportunities for students to interact with teachers, offering insights into everyday teaching conditions in schools.

Finally, in-service schoolteachers from Germany and Hungary also offered workshops on everyday school life shaped by migration and interculturality. In these sessions, the teachers shared their experiences, discussed the problems posed by their pupils' increasing cultural and linguistic heterogeneity, and explored potential solutions, approaches, and coping strategies for authentic conflict situations. The aim was to demonstrate to the students the significance of their own intercultural experiences for their later professional roles. However, it was noted that many of these workshops failed to attract high levels of participation.

### 2.1.3 Lunchtime Lectures

During the spring semesters of 2021 and 2022, EUF organized a series of digital lunchtime lectures entitled *Current Challenges in Internationalising Teacher Training* and *Digitalisation of Education* respectively. The lecture series sought to achieve the following objectives:

- To raise awareness among students and lecturers on different topics within the internationalization of teacher education
- To contribute to teacher education students' internationalization by making them and university staff interested in different educational systems and views
- To connect staff and students across the universities
- To foster the exchange of ideas with scholars in different fields and with fellows
- To sharpen critical thinking, and
- To develop intercultural empathy.

Lecturers and/or students from all five project partner universities participated in 12 lectures per semester. Each lecture consisted of a 15-minute presentation followed by a 15-minute discussion in the first year, a 30-minute discussion in the second year, in response to audience requests for more time to discuss and connect with each other. Whereas in 2021 only lecturers and administrative staff gave talks, in 2022 also students contributed. We encouraged them to realize themselves as co-designers of digital education within the internationalization of teacher education. The lectures were moderated in turn by the participants to facilitate networking.

In 2021, the lunchtime lectures attracted between seven to thirty-five attendees per session. Although we had expected attendance rates in 2022 to rise due to a heightened focus on student participation, attendance actually dropped to between one and seven that year. This prompted us to change the lectures to a hybrid format, allowing both online participation and in-person on the EUF campus. Yet attendance rates still did not increase, suggesting that the low turnout was not due to the lectures' digital format.

### 2.1.4 International Seminar

Since 2021, Europa-Universität Flensburg and University College South Denmark have organized a joint international seminar every spring semester. Taught in English, the seminar engages several lecturers and 40 to 60 students from both institutions working in international teams. It is organised a bit differently every year, with the student projects, reports and films created during the seminar made available to all participants via the Padlet digital platform.

The 2021 seminar was planned as an in-person event, but was shifted to an online project week on short notice due to the pandemic. The topic *“The World Into the School – The School Into the World”* focused on the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly on SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality). In 2022, the seminar dealt with minority pedagogy, cultural identity, discrimination and intercultural pedagogy. In 2023, the seminar topic was *“Minorities as ‘Windows to the World’: Education and Diversity / Minderheiten als ‘Fenster zur Welt’: Pädagogik im Zeichen der Vielfalt / Mindretal som ‘vinduer til verden’: Pædagogik i mangfoldighedens tegn”*, covering philosophical, historical, social science, (language) pedagogical and didactic aspects of the selected topic. To promote multilingualism, classes were held in English, Danish, and German. Blended learning and flipped classroom methods prepared students for the attendance week, which included joint excursions to four different cities in the border region. The seminar aimed to provide a broad knowledge of the key factors underlying inclusive and culturally sensitive teaching in schools, preparing students to teach in (linguistically and culturally) heterogeneous contexts.

Starting in 2025, the international seminar is planned to take place as a yearly blended intensive program involving all project partners – Europa-Universität Flensburg in Germany, University College South Denmark in Denmark, Linköping University in Sweden, Jyväskylä University in Finland and Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary.

## 2.2 Evaluation

Despite its short preparation time, the winter school succeeded in reaching out to a significant number of participants. A supporting factor was certainly the pandemic situation, which limited mobility opportunities. On the other hand, the pandemic also made it difficult to actively engage staff from all project partner universities, as many were fully absorbed by the high demands of digital teaching.

Many workshops suffered from low attendance, which did not seem to only depend on the time slots, although evening workshops were less popular. Some topics

were not relevant for those not interested in mobility; in addition, some digital workshops were not as interactive as they probably would have been had they been held in person. This is especially true for the workshops on intercultural competence, which typically involve interactional activities like body positioning, avoiding/searching for eye contact, and group formation. Supporting factors include the relevance of the specific topics, the mandatory nature of some workshops, and the opportunity offered by other workshops to earn credits towards future in-service teacher training. Advancements in technology over time have made it easier to bridge the distance between participants in digital learning formats.

The lunchtime lecture series successfully engaged student and staff participants from all partner universities, as nobody had to travel. The cooperation between different universities expanded the range of topics, attracted more speakers, and broadened the audience, thereby potentially expanding the international network. In theory, greater student involvement could have been achieved by soliciting more student contributions; however, the timing of the lectures may still have deterred those who did not take the invitation to have lunch during the talks literally, so that attending such a lecture may have felt more like sacrificing one's lunch break. Due to the wide range of topics covered, the audience varied from lecture to lecture.

The international seminar consistently attracted a stable number of participants, most likely because it is a for-credit, compulsory elective module at both universities.

### 3 Study on Mobility Formats

As described above, the project carried out virtual and hybrid formats for teacher education students for the purpose of internationalizing their studies through flexible mobility pathways. In addition, a study was conducted on hindrances to mobility with the aim of designing tailor-made mobility formats. The following section reports on selected aspects of virtual forms of mobility from this survey.

#### 3.1 Objectives and Approach

The study aimed to identify the students' perceived barriers to international physical mobility, as well as their preferred internationalization formats and ways of communication. This analysis and identification of the expectations, conditions and needs of teacher education students serve as a basis for the further development of mobility formats. Flexible mobility paths within the student journey, ensuring foreign course recognition, shall be modelled and modularized. The data shall also allow to adapt and expand information and advisory services, and develop a target group-oriented communication strategy.

As "partners in mobility", the students participated in a quantitative study on their perceived obstacles to going abroad. Between Fall Semester 2020/21 and Fall Semester 2022/23, undergraduate students in EUF's BA in Educational Science program participated in annual online surveys. The survey questionnaire asked students about their

- Socio-demographic background
- Education, including languages learned in various contexts
- Choice of teacher education program and university, and the factors underlying this choice (university reputation, proximity to home, – possibility of undertaking a stay abroad within the degree program, etc.)
- Experiences abroad during and after school, including the types of activity undertaken and satisfaction levels
- Desired international interactions and exchanges within the teacher education program (current interest in studying abroad, interest in specific types of international encounter/virtual mobility and learning opportunities, etc.)
- Opinion on temporary stays abroad as a student, and the possible obstacles to this (agreement with given reasons for not currently considering a stay abroad, general views on temporary stays abroad as a student)
- Factors that would most likely increase the student's willingness to complete a study-related stay abroad
- Preferred types of collaboration with the "Partners in Flex-Mobility" project, such as workshops and training opportunities on topics such as intercultural communication, diversity in schools, and multilingual education, including preferred channels of communication.

The questionnaire contains approximately 430 items.

In the first year of the study, only first- and second-year students were surveyed. Although the aim was for the same students to complete the questionnaire three years in a row, this could not be reliably verified in practice. To boost the number of participants, all undergraduate students in the bachelor's degree program in Educational Science at EUF were asked to fill in the questionnaire during the second and third years of the study. As a result, the study was not strictly longitudinal, but can be considered a cross-sectional survey.

Written surveys are particularly suitable for evaluation studies (cf. Zydatiś, 2012, p. 116), as they eliminate interviewer influence (cf. Diekmann, 2004, p. 439) and allow for standardized (cf. Bortz & Döring, 2006, p. 237) and comparable data collection (cf. Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 94). Due to their anonymity, such surveys are also expected to yield more honest and thoughtful (but possibly also more superficial) responses than oral surveys (cf. Bortz & Döring, 2006, p. 237; Riemer & Settineri, 2010, p. 773). When a written survey takes the form of a questionnaire, a larger amount of data can be collected in a manageable way (cf. Riemer, 2016, p. 157).

In addition to multiple-choice answers, the survey collected data on experiences and attitudes using end-point Likert scales with five scale points. While five to nine scale points is generally recommended, it should be noted that more scale points can lead to less differentiated answers. The individual points were verbalized in each case. In principle, data obtained using Likert scales are not interval-scaled due to the lack of equal spacing between points (Riemer, 2016, p. 159).

The analysis of the collected data is quantitative. The evaluation of closed questions typically does not require any further categorization, and quantification takes place at the nominal, ordinal, or interval scale level.

### 3.2 Data analysis

In the first year of the survey, 505 students participated (male: 19 % (n = 96), female: 79.4.2 % (n = 401), diverse: 0.6 % (n = 3), no gender indication: 1 % (n = 5)). The mean for age at baseline was 20.54 years, the median age 20 (sd = 3.266). The age range was 17–21 years.

From the second year on, when all Educational Science undergraduates were included, participation increased to 918 students in the second survey (male: 14.9 % (n = 137), female: 83.4 % (n = 766), diverse: 0.9 % (n = 6), no gender indication: 0.8 % (n = 7)). The mean age at baseline was 20.64 years and the median age remained 20 (sd = 2.928). The age range expanded to 17–47 years.

In the third year, 747 students responded to the questionnaire (male: 18.2 % (n = 136), female: 80.6 % (n = 602), diverse: 1.1 % (n = 8), no gender indication: 0.1 % (n = 1)). The mean for age in years at baseline was 20.69 years and the median age was again 20 (sd = 3.165), with an age range of 17–41 years.

**Table 1:** Participants by year of study

Year of study	t1	t2	t3
1	57,8 %	33,1 %	31,9 %
2	35,9 %	30,4 %	31,8 %
3	5,8 %	35,1 %	35,3 %

The students were queried about their interest in a study abroad period, and those who responded affirmatively were offered a range of international encounters and exchanges, with different formats, in the teacher education program. If they indicated an interest in virtual mobility, they were then shown eight different formats (see Table 2), which they in turn could tick if they were interested.

In the first survey, 56.63 % (n = 286) out of 505 students expressed an interest in a study period abroad, whereas the rest of the cohort did not. Of these, 3.5 % (n = 10) were interested in virtual mobility. In the second survey, 55.66 % (n = 511) out of 918 students expressed interest in going abroad during their studies; of these, 0.7 % (n = 6) were interested in virtual mobility. In the third survey, 50.74 % (n = 379) out of 747 students reported their interest in study abroad, 1.85 % (n = 7) of whom expressed an interest in virtual mobility. As Table 2 shows, interest for all eight of the virtual format options remained low, ranging from 0 to 2.1 % across all survey dates.

**Table 2:** Student interest in virtual formats

Interest in virtual formats	t1	t2	t3
School internship abroad	2.1 %	0.39 %	1.58 %
International seminar	2.1 %	0.2 %	1.32 %
Courses in other languages	1.75 %	0 %	1.32 %
Virtual excursion	1.75 %	0 %	0.59 %
Study phase abroad	1.75 %	0.39 %	1.1 %
Lectures by scientists at foreign universities	1.4 %	0.2 %	1.1 %
Summer/winter school	1.4 %	0.2 %	0.59 %

All students in the survey were asked what would most likely increase their willingness to undertake a study-related stay abroad. Since this contribution focuses on virtual formats, in the following we only consider the data for the items ‘Virtual mobility formats’ and ‘Prior contact with students at the host university’. For the second item, it can be assumed that such contact would take place virtually.

**Table 3:** Formats that would increase the willingness to undertake a study-related stay abroad

Formats	t1	t2	t3
Virtual mobility formats instead of a stay abroad	7. %	14.81 %	5.4 %
Prior contact with students at the host university	35.2 %	56.88 %	21.8 %

As Table 3 shows, in the first survey, 7.5 % ( $n = 38$ ) of respondents reported their preference for virtual mobility formats over in-person stays abroad, while 35.2 % ( $n = 178$ ) indicated that prior contact with students at the host university would increase their willingness to undertake a study period abroad. In the second survey, the percentage of students interested in taking part in virtual mobility formats rose to 14.81 %, with 56.88 % wanting prior contact with students at the host university. However, student interest in both formats dropped sharply during the third survey, to 5.4 % and 21.8 %, respectively.

When comparing the responses of students who are and are not interested in going abroad, the picture changes. Here, we see that students not interested in going abroad show a stronger preference for virtual mobility formats (t1: 13.1 % vs. 4.5 %, t2: 9.1 % vs. 4.3 %, t3: 8.4 % vs. 2.6 %). Conversely, students who expressed an interest in going abroad expressed a stronger preference to establish contact with students at their host university before their stay (t1: 39.2 % vs. 28 %, t2: 29.2 % vs. 16.9 %, t3: 26.1 % vs. 17.3 %).



### 3.3 Discussion of Findings

Looking at the students' expressed interest in a period of study abroad, the first two surveys show relatively stable figures (with 56.63% and 55.66% of students expressing interest in such a prospect, respectively) followed by a decline to 50.74% in the third survey. This drop could be attributed to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have made students less inclined to seek a major change of location.

Only few students showed an interest in virtual mobility. On average, those interested in studying abroad were not significantly attracted to virtual formats.

When examining the factors that could increase the students' willingness to undertake a study-related stay abroad, we considered the figures for virtual formats and prior contact with students at their host university (assuming this would be conducted virtually). What is noticeable here is that students not interested in mobility showed a greater interest in virtual mobility formats than those who were interested in mobility. In turn, those interested in mobility were more attracted to the idea of establishing prior contact with students at their host institution than those not interested in mobility. This indicates a clear preference for this type of (presumably virtual) prior contact among students who are interested in physical mobility.

## 4 Conclusion and Perspectives on the Future Use of Virtual Formats

In conclusion, it can be stated that only about half of the teacher education students at Europa-Universität Flensburg are interested in mobility. Notably, those who are not interested in mobility show more interest in virtual mobility formats than those who are. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the "Partners in Flex-Mobility" project was forced to offer only virtual formats for the internationalization of teacher education during its initial stages. The number of participants attending these events varied greatly and workshop attendance was particularly low, suggesting that virtual formats in general, and virtual workshops in particular, are not attractive to teacher education students. Most participants registered for the international seminar and winter school in their digital formats, with the former being the most sustainable and eventually institutionalised format. The new Erasmus+ funding for the short-term mobilities in form of blended intensive programs will enable all five project partner institutions to participate in the future. The winter school's success may be attributed to its timing as the very first internationalization opportunity following the onset of the pandemic.

Despite the challenges in engaging students with digital formats, the project continues to include them as part of the university's mobility portfolio. This approach allows flexible mobility pathways for all students, especially for those who might not otherwise take any steps to deepen their own international awareness and engagement. In Fall semester 2023/24, the focus was on health for (future) teachers. In cooperation with Gdansk University, a digital lecture series on healthy teaching and learning of foreign languages was offered, workshops on mental health and study abroad in the

teacher education program as well as on self-management during such stays abroad. In addition, the program is exploring new physical short-term mobility options to offer a comprehensive range of internationalization opportunities for teacher education students.

To learn more about the perceived barriers that hinder teacher education students from going abroad, the survey referenced above will be complemented by qualitative interviews with immobile students in the BA program in Educational Science at EUF. These interviews will enable an in-depth study of those obstacles identified as most significant by students in the quantitative study.

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# Teaching in a Global World: Internationalization in Pre-Service Teacher Training – The IPC Project

KLAUDIA SCHULTHEIS

## Abstract

The International Project (IPC) was established in 2008 at the Chair of Elementary School Pedagogy and Elementary School Didactics at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt to promote the internationalization of teacher education. The website for the project is [www.ipcproject.de](http://www.ipcproject.de). An international network of universities from seven countries (Bulgaria, Germany, Japan, Poland, Sweden, Spain, and the USA) regularly organizes joint online courses and projects for their pre-service teacher students. This initiative realizes the concept of 'internationalization@home'. Collaborating in international groups and working on topics related to teacher education curriculum can promote transformative learning regarding cultural awareness and understanding for teacher students. This can also foster the development of appreciative intercultural attitudes that are essential for professional teaching in the classroom. The Internet and digital media facilitate personal online communication among students, thereby circumventing the various obstacles that research has shown to impede teacher education students from studying abroad. Evaluation and research in this context demonstrate that the IPC project assists students in recognizing and reflecting on diverse intercultural perspectives, as well as in considering the application of intercultural perspectives in their professional careers.

Keywords: internationalization@home, teacher education, intercultural competences, global education

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. The IPC Project: Background and Rationale
3. The Idea of Internationalization@home
4. Development and Concept of the IPC Project
5. An Insight into the IPC Project: Examples, Research and Evaluation
6. Conclusion

## 1 Introduction

Internationalizing teacher education is a topic that has been slow to gain traction in both research and teacher education programs. Teacher education is typically tailored to the dynamics of local cultures and national contexts in different countries (Koh et al., 2022). Implementing a universal solution for internationalizing teacher education in higher education programs is not feasible. Furthermore, initial teacher education places a strong emphasis on teaching methods and curriculum, often neglecting other important issues such as internationalization (Lingard et al., 2016). However, there is an increasing belief that international experiences can be transformative (Pittman & Gioia, 2019). There is a broad consensus that intercultural competences are increasingly important for teachers' professional practice (Cushner & Mahon, 2009; KMK, 2013; Göbel & Buchwald, 2017). This is due to the need to deal with heterogeneity in the classroom and to prepare students for a multicultural living environment in a globalized world, economy, and future (Busse & Göbel, 2017, p. 428). While the term 'globalization' may lack precision, there is agreement that the increased interconnectedness of the world presents new challenges for education and pre-service teacher training (Aydarova & Marquardt, 2016, p. 24). This article introduces an international teaching project (the IPC project) which is based on the simple fact and experience that teachers around the world ask similar questions, struggle with the same problems and concerns. As Goodwin (2010) notes: "in our separate countries we are dreaming up creative solutions to common problems and piloting innovative programs. There is much we can learn from each other and much we can discover and learn together. In today's global community, collective work and research must be the norm." So, how can we support our students (and ourselves) to leave the national educational provinces and think outside the box? The idea of the IPC project is to share and compare experiences by working and learning together and from each other with students from other countries and continents. The article explains the motivation and the theoretical background on which the International Project (IPC) was built. It describes the objectives, the concept and the didactic variants that have been developed since the start of the project at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in 2008. The final chapter gives an insight into the students' work and research in the context of the IPC project.

## 2 The IPC Project: Background and Motivation

### 2.1 Intercultural Attitudes of Teachers

There is an "underlying assumption that an intercultural experience such as the one offered by study abroad is by definition transformative" (Beaven & Borghetti, 2015). Research shows that teachers' attitudes and general beliefs influence their teaching (Baumert & Kunter, 2006). Therefore, it is important to consider intercultural attitudes as relevant to teaching. The DESI (Deutsch Englisch Schülerleistungen International) study found that over half of the participating teachers displayed ethnocentric attitudes.

Additionally, a correlation was discovered between teachers' intercultural attitudes and the intercultural quality of teaching (Göbel, 2007). As noted by Busse and Göbel (2017, p. 430), these findings suggest that teachers' positive intercultural attitudes are beneficial for lesson design. However, it cannot be assumed that teachers automatically possess these attitudes. Therefore, it is crucial to provide opportunities in teacher education that promote intercultural perspectives and competencies.

Research indicates that intercultural exposure can reduce prejudice, regardless of social class or age (Pettigrew & Troop, 2011). Studies have shown that teachers who live abroad for an extended period of time tend to have stronger ethno-relative attitudes. Therefore, it can be inferred that cultural contact experiences can promote appreciative intercultural attitudes (Busse & Göbel, 2017, p. 431). However, research has shown that promoting reflective skills and providing accompanying learning activities are necessary in addition to mere contact. This enables students to use misunderstandings or conflict situations as constructive learning opportunities and prevents intercultural experiences from contributing to the consolidation of cultural stereotypes (Paige & Vande Berg, 2012; cited in Busse & Göbel, 2017, p. 431).

In summary, research shows that promoting appreciative intercultural attitudes among teachers is necessary to avoid unfavorable practices, negative expectations, the 'Stereotype Threat' and deficit-oriented attributions of causes (Busse & Göbel, 2017, p. 432). Busse and Göbel (2017) recommend implementing relevant offerings in teacher training and increasing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of different forms of teaching intercultural competence (see also Brück-Hübner, 2024, in this anthology).

## 2.2 Transformative Learning in the IPC Project

The International Project (IPC) refers to a definition of intercultural learning as it was proposed by Milton J. Bennett (2009, p. 2):

"Acquiring increased awareness of subjective cultural context (world view), including one's own, and developing greater ability to interact sensitively and competently across cultural contexts as both an immediate and long-term effect of exchange".

Berger and Luckmann's classic analysis (1969/1987) distinguishes between the objective and subjective contexts of culture. In the IPC project, students from different countries share their perspectives on certain topics and compare their experiences, making the subjective aspect particularly relevant. However, dealing with the subjective context of culture is not typically included in study abroad programs and their curricula (Bennett, 2009, p. 3). Yet this is exactly what IPC students are confronted with. When students from diverse backgrounds, such as Japan, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Bulgaria, and the United States come together, it can lead to increased cultural self-awareness. This self-awareness is a necessary precursor to intercultural learning (Bennett, 2009, p. 4).

Experiences like these can initiate a transformative learning process towards greater cultural awareness and intercultural competence. The International Project

(IPC) bases its understanding of learning on Jack Mezirow's theory of transformative learning. Mezirow (2000, p. 7) defines transformative learning as the process of changing our taken-for-granted frames of reference, including our perspectives of meaning, habits of mind, and mind-sets, to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally changeable, and reflective. This process enables us to generate beliefs and opinions that are more accurate and justified, guiding our actions. According to Abraham and von Brömssen (2018), intercultural work and education require critical and reflective thinking about knowledge construction and use, with attention to asymmetrical power relations and distribution.

Drawing on Habermas' theory of communicative action (1981), Mezirow relates the transformative dimension of learning to the construction, validation, and reformulation of meaning. The result of the transformative process is that students begin to act on their own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings, as opposed to those they have uncritically assimilated from others. Bamber (2017) notes that this aligns with a constructivist perspective, where knowledge is derived from interpretations and experiences that result in new interpretations and experiences.

IPC students from each participating country are accustomed to group work in classes at their home universities. However, collaborating in an international group with peers from several other countries can be a unique experience. It has the potential to initiate transformative learning towards a more nuanced cultural awareness and understanding, not just by comparing facts and content, such as primary school organization in different countries. It can also promote the development of intercultural sensitivity through discussions and exposure to diverse approaches to project planning, organization, and problem-solving. According to Mezirow (2000), learning can occur in four ways: elaborating existing frames of reference, learning new frames of reference, transforming points of view, or transforming habits of mind (p. 19).

### 3 The Idea of Internationalization@home

Despite efforts made since 2013 to promote internationalization at German universities (GWK 2013; HRK 2013), teacher education programs have lower mobility rates compared to other fields of study. There is no mandatory integration of semesters or internships abroad, leaving the decision up to the students, such as participating in the ERASMUS+ program.

International mobility among student teachers varies considerably depending on the type of school. To maintain objectivity, it is important to note that this data is based on a comparison of mobility rates among different types of graduates. Specifically, 34 % of Gymnasium students have spent time abroad during their studies. The mobility rate among students studying to become teachers at the Gymnasium is significantly higher than that of graduates who intend to teach at Grundschulen und Hauptschulen (21 %), Realschulen (18 %), vocational schools (20 %), or special-needs schools (19 %) (Kercher & Schifferings, p. 239). If a state examination is required to complete a teacher educa-

tion program, international mobility is not only lower compared to bachelor's or master's degrees in teacher education, but also 10% lower compared to other programs with a state examination (*ibid.*, p. 240).

According to the DAAD/DZHW Mobility Study 2017 (DAAD/DZHW, 2019), student teachers are generally less satisfied with their international mobility than students in other fields of study. They also experience more problems and barriers. Specifically, 54% of mobile student teachers cite the loss of time in their academic studies as a relevant problem when embarking on a study-related stay abroad. Compared to 33% of other mobile students, this proportion is significantly higher (DAAD/DZHW, 2019, p. 93). One possible explanation for this finding is the significant differences in national teacher training programs (see also Seifert, 2024, in this anthology), which make it challenging to integrate study abroad seamlessly into the home program. Internationally mobile teacher students report higher levels of difficulty than other internationally mobile university students in meeting the content requirements (31% vs. 21%) and formal requirements (28% vs. 17%) of the curriculum, as well as in obtaining recognition for academic achievements abroad (28% vs. 20%) (DAAD/DZHW, 2019, p. 93). According to a study by DAAD/DZHW (2019), financing difficulties (87%), loss of study time (75%), difficulties in coordinating visits with curriculum requirements (71%), disproportionate organizational effort (70%), students' own lethargy (66%), and separation from family and partner (64%) are considered significant mobility barriers by the majority of teacher education students, preventing them from planning to study abroad.

The international mobility of teacher students has remained largely unchanged since the launch of the International Project (IPC) at the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in 2008. Recognizing that some students may not take advantage of opportunities offered by ERASMUS+, SCHULWÄRTS (DAAD), or organizations like AIESEC, we have considered other solutions to provide students with the chance to gain international experience. This is in line with our commitment to promoting global education and ensuring that all students have access to valuable learning experiences. The availability of stable internet connections and digital media devices has made it possible to plan online classes that allow teachers and students from multiple countries to participate and collaborate. The advantage of gaining international experience without traveling, at a low cost, and exchanging and comparing experiences in an international context, as well as learning and working together in an intercultural way, seemed convincing and motivating. This option provides students with international and intercultural experience 'at home'.

## 4 Development and Concept of the IPC Project

The IPC project originated from a seminar concept called 'Internet und Projektkompetenz' (IPC) developed by Jean Pol Martin in Germany in 2004. The concept was designed for various subjects and contents and was developed at the Catholic University



of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt. The concept was adapted for the teacher training curriculum in 2008 by Klaudia Schultheis from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt (Germany). It was first tested with Iliana Mirtschewa from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski (Bulgaria). The concept was further developed and evaluated in subsequent years with Leigh Ausband from the University of North Carolina Charlotte, USA (Ausband & Schultheis, 2010).

The IPC project involves partner universities from seven countries and three continents. The number of countries involved in the IPC courses varies according to each country's timetable and curriculum regulations. The following universities and professors are involved in this project: Shannon Saruwatashi from Junshin Catholic University Nagasaki (Japan); Yuri Ishii from Yamaguchi University (Japan); Nataliia Demeshkant from the Pedagogical University of Krakow; Anna Basinska from Adam Mickiewicz University Poznan; Isabel Rodriguez from the University of Granada (Spain); Valerie Margrain from Karlstad University (Sweden); Melinda Pierson and Janice Myck-Wayne from California State University Fullerton (USA).

International partners view global competencies, global awareness, and global understanding as goals to be developed through transformative learning in the IPC project. Participating students gain professional expertise on relevant topics in teacher education curricula by working together in international groups. Comparing educational systems and policies, teaching and instructional methods, curriculum, and children's activities broadens students' perspectives and fosters cross-cultural understanding. Developing project skills through teamwork, proactive communication in an international group, work planning, scheduling, and problem-solving is also emphasized. Students can enhance their Internet skills by utilizing modern information technology and web tools, such as learning platforms like Schoology and Canvas, discussion forums, wikis, Zoom, Padlet, Genially, Adobe Spark, Book Creator, Canva, Doodle, and online survey tools.

There are four main didactic variations that can be used depending on the experience and English level of the participating students: the IPC Basic, the IPC Research, the IPC Inclass and the IPC Global Discussion.

- The *IPC Basic* is a fully structured online course that focuses on a specific topic, such as 'What makes a good teacher' or 'The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on schools'. Students are provided with materials in both English and their native language. They are then required to search the internet for resources related to the topic and collaborate with international groups to discuss and work together. The groups prepare joint presentations, such as posters, PowerPoint presentations, e-books, websites, or blogs.
- The *IPC Research* is a full online class. It represents a research-oriented variation that allows teachers to suggest or students to choose their own topics. Students conduct small research projects in international groups and compare the results of participating countries. The class can be more or less pre-structured in terms of research topics, readings, assignments, work plan, and time frame, allowing for proactivity and autonomy in the learning process.

- The *IPC Inclass* is a condensed version that can be incorporated into regular classes and lasts approximately four weeks. During this time, students from two or more universities collaborate on a shared topic, analyze texts or other materials, and present their findings concisely.
- In an *IPC Global Discussion*, students from one country prepare a series of questions on a particular topic for students from one or more other countries. They then collect the answers and summarize them in a presentation for all participants. This option is flexible and can be easily added to regular classes.

## 5 An Insight into the IPC Project: Examples, Research and Evaluation

During the winter semester of 2020/2021, students from the Catholic University of Eichstätt-Ingolstadt in Germany and the Pedagogical University of Krakow in Poland conducted a joint research project with the following research question: ‘How can school leaders support children’s resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic?’ Educational institutions play a crucial role in ensuring the physical and emotional safety of children and others. Learning how schools can support children’s resilience during COVID-19 is crucial for global preparedness for future pandemics and our commitment to children’s well-being. Under the supervision of Nataliia Demeshkant and Klaudia Schultheis the students conducted, analyzed and compared qualitative interviews with school leaders from both countries as part of the online IPC Research course. The students used content analysis to examine the interviews. The purpose of the semi-structured interviews with principals was to explore their views on risks and supports for children’s resilience during COVID-19, including strategies that schools could engage in and recommendations for future pandemics. The results of this IPC research project indicate that promoting children’s resilience in crisis situations requires strengthening relationships, actively managing stress, improving home resources, including multi-professional support, and creating digital conditions for effective distance learning. School leaders emphasize the need for maximum autonomy in implementing their strategic interventions. The study highlights the significance of school leaders’ perspectives as they are crucial in implementing policies, strategies, and visions. The outcomes of this project have been published in an international research context (Demeshkant, Schultheis & Hiebl, 2022).

A robust network is crucial for successfully managing an online project with multiple international partner universities. As such, the IPC project partners convene annually to review results, assess and enhance the concept. Meetings have been held in various locations, including Eichstätt, Germany (2013 and 2017), Sofia, Bulgaria (2014 and 2018), Granada, Spain (2015), Poznan, Poland (2016), Fullerton, California (2019), and Karlstad, Sweden (2023). Students participate in joint projects, such as the DAAD-funded PAJAKO project between Germany and Japan in 2016/17, to develop a transfer-

able IPC basic course structure, or in 2020/21, to conduct a comparative study on cooperative learning.

Building and maintaining the international network of universities involved in the IPC project is a major part of the work. This may be the reason why the IPC project is still unique and has not found many imitators at other universities, although the concept could easily be transferred to other academic fields.

Since the beginning of the IPC project in 2008, a survey has been utilized to measure changes in students' cultural awareness. The survey used is an adapted version of the My Cultural Awareness Profile MyCAP Survey (NAFSA, 2011). Additionally, an online survey has been developed to evaluate the didactic approach of the IPC project. The students' feedback has been positive and encouraging, providing valuable insights for improving and adapting the concept to changing conditions. Several international research projects have analyzed the IPC project (Ausband & Schultheis, 2010; Suzuki et al., 2014, 2015; Margrain et al., 2020; Westa 2020). The studies have shown that online engagement is a sustainable and accessible strategy to enrich interculturality and promote global awareness and competences in teacher education.

In 2020, Margrain et al. conducted an analysis of an IPC Global Discussion among student teachers from Australia, Bulgaria, Germany, Japan, Spain, Sweden, and the United States. The students collaborated online to share intercultural perspectives and experiences on a range of topics relevant to education systems, policy, teacher education, and childhood. The students compiled the results of the comparisons in the form of posters that were shared with all the groups. The study analyzed and described how teacher students from different countries engaged in online intercultural discussions. The research questions focused on the demonstration of openness to different perspectives by the student teachers and the identification of intercultural positions in their online comments. The study evaluated a set of 675 student discussion posts among student teachers from seven participating countries. The analysis revealed that the discussions were not only an exchange of information, but also a search for both differences and commonalities.

The data analysis revealed three intercultural positions in the discussions: 'here', 'there', and 'sharing'. The 'here' position emphasizes the individual student and their own context, describing or reporting how things are in their own country. The 'there' position represents a focus on a different context. In this position, the student teachers actively sought new information from each other by asking probing questions and giving each other feedback. These conversations stimulated deeper discussions, identified points of comparison and contradiction, and indicated a desire on the part of the students to learn more from intercultural interactions. The third intercultural position identified was one in which the student teachers made explicit connections to the teaching profession. The student teachers in this intercultural position aimed to connect their learning about diverse cultural practices and perspectives to their future teaching. Upon recognizing the varying intercultural positions of the students, it became clear that the student teachers were individuals within the collective discussions. Some students participated in the project to share their cultural reality or point of view,

while others were more interested in learning about new cultural contexts and perspectives. The project shows that students can benefit from being exposed to various discourses and intercultural positions, as identified in this analysis. This exposure can help them recognize and reflect on different intercultural perspectives, and apply them to their professional careers with greater critical reflection.

## 6 Conclusion

The journey toward internationalizing teacher education has been a gradual one, facing challenges rooted in the localized nature of teacher training programs and the prevailing emphasis on methodological and curricular aspects. The need for cultivating intercultural competences among teachers has gained recognition, given the imperatives of a globalized world. The IPC project emerges as a pioneering initiative, breaking new ground by fostering international collaboration among students from diverse cultural backgrounds. It stands out for its commitment to transcending national educational boundaries and encouraging students to think beyond the conventional confines of their educational provinces. By sharing experiences and learning collaboratively with peers from different countries and continents, the project embodies the vision of a global community where collective work and research become the norm, as eloquently expressed by Goodwin (2010).

In essence, the IPC project embodies a forward-looking paradigm that bridges the gap between the imperative for internationalizing teacher education and the practical constraints faced by students. By fostering intercultural understanding, promoting transformative learning, and embracing the concept of internationalization@home, the project offers a blueprint for a more inclusive and globally connected teacher education landscape. As we navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing world, initiatives such as the IPC project remind us that collaboration, shared learning, and intercultural competence are indispensable elements in preparing educators for the challenges of the future.

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# VIEW: Virtual Intercultural Exchange Worldwide – A Seminar Concept for Intercultural Learning in Teacher Education

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FELICITAS LICHT

## Abstract

This article presents the seminar concept “VIEW: Virtual Intercultural Exchange Worldwide” which was developed at Justus Liebig University in 2022 as part of the “GloPEG: Global Primary School Education Giessen” project. This seminar concept aims to support the development of intercultural competencies among teacher education students by offering virtual international seminars. These seminars are led by both a German and an international lecturer and integrate students from all over the world. The seminar is based on the flipped classroom model and provides opportunities for both formal and informal exchange. Its aim is to teach students how to deal with intercultural diversity not only on a theoretical basis but also through intensive intercultural exchange. This article introduces the seminar concept and presents practical experience, evaluation data, and ‘lessons learned’ from two different practical implementations in the summer term of 2023. The seminars were conducted in cooperation with colleagues from the University of Talinn (Seminar 1) and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (Seminar 2).

Keywords: intercultural exchange, COIL, exchange, virtual exchange, internationalization, teacher education

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. The Seminar Concept
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## 1 Introduction

The internationalization of teacher education and especially of elementary school teacher education is becoming increasingly important. Unfortunately, many students in teacher education are unable to engage in internationalization efforts due to the low mo-



bility of student teachers, cost, local mandates and regulation in teacher preparation (DeCuir, 2017). As such, virtual forms of internationalization are becoming a popular alternative in teacher education (Brück-Hübner et al., 2024; Seifert, 2024, both in this anthology). This paper will present a seminar concept that was developed at Justus Liebig University Giessen (JLU) in 2021 as part of the project “GLOPEG: Global Primary School Education Giessen” and is based on the internationalization strategy of teacher education at JLU (Kopp et al., 2024, in this anthology): “VIEW: Virtual Intercultural Exchange Worldwide”. In addition to a description of the seminar concept, two practical implementations of the concept are presented below. Lastly, this paper will also highlight reflections of our experiences as the creators and instructors, evaluation results, strengths and limitations and lessons learned.

## 2 The Seminar Concept

“VIEW” is a completely virtual, international seminar in English, which aims to prepare students to work and support diversity in classrooms by providing them with basic theoretical knowledge, pedagogy and application from a “didactic double-decker”. In other words, this seminar provides an experiential space that encourages and promotes both German students and international students (who are connecting from all over the world) to engage in intercultural exchange and acquire intercultural competencies, which will become an important competency in teaching preparation.

The basic idea of the seminar concept is based on the COIL concept (Cooperative Online International Learning, see e. g. SUNY Coil Center; Brück-Hübner, 2023, p. 8; Rubin & Guth, 2017). In this sense, the seminar is led by two lecturers: A lecturer from JLU and a lecturer from an international partner university. Both lecturers work collaboratively in all phases of organization, planning, implementation, student support, assessment, and evaluation.

The student group is composed of students from the home universities of the two lecturers. In addition, the seminar is also open to interested international students from other partner universities. It is important to note that at Justus Liebig University Giessen, the VIP program provides a good administrative infra- and support structure to engage in partnership and collaboration with partner universities (Kiesler et al., 2021).

Structurally, the seminar is composed of five main elements: (1) Asynchronous self-learning phases, (2) Synchronous seminar sessions, (3) Synchronous “Wrap-up” sessions, (4) Group work and group project and (5) Formative ePortfolio-work (see Figure 1). These components will be explained in the following passages.

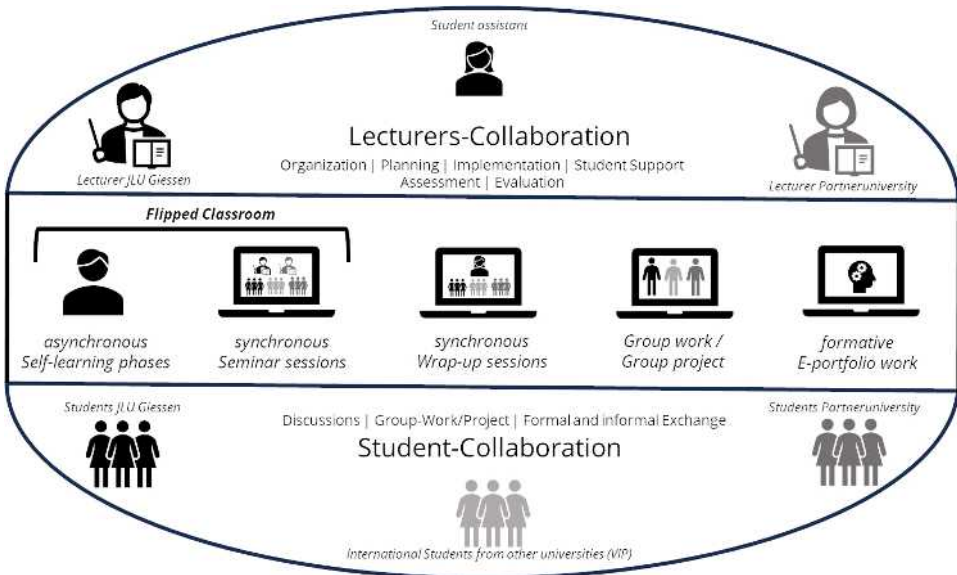


Figure 1: The VIEW-Concept

Since the aim of the seminar is to teach theoretical contents and to promote intercultural exchange and discussion, the seminar is structured using the "Flipped Classroom Model" (see e. g. Akçayır & Akçayır, 2018). This means that synchronous virtual seminar sessions are always prefaced by (1) asynchronous self-learning phases. For this, students receive concrete preparatory tasks and are provided with various learning materials (e. g. literature or videos) via the virtual learning environment "ILIAS". The content worked out by students then serves as the foundation for the (2) synchronous virtual seminar sessions, which are led by the instructors. The primary focus of the synchronous seminar sessions is to provide students the space for guided joint discussion and intercultural exchange related to the respective learning content and topic. In addition, students have the opportunity to ask for clarification, post open questions and lecturers can also provide short, in-depth content-related lectures.

A major disadvantage of virtual international courses is that informal exchanges usually come up short. In other words, the intercultural exchange is done once students log off from their course. This is different from a physical stay abroad, that provides students the opportunity to immerse themselves more intensively in another culture for an extended period of time. In addition, coming together in presence also provides repeated opportunities for students to exchange ideas informally and thus get to know each other better – whether in the form of small talk before and after seminar sessions, over lunch in the cafeteria, or during joint private excursions and experiences (Brück-Hübner, 2023, pp. 19–20). Such forms of exchange are difficult to implement virtually. Nevertheless, within the framework of our seminar concept, it was important for us to create spaces that enables students to engage in an informal exchange beyond the learning content for the purpose of improving the process of getting to know other

students and their cultures. For this reason, informal (3) Wrap-up sessions were also included in the seminar concept. These are not led by the lecturers, but by a student tutor. The Wrap-up sessions give students a variety of opportunities to exchange ideas about their lives and cultures and to get to know each other better. The Wrap-up sessions are at the core of our seminar concept.

Another important goal for students is to also improve competencies in intercultural communication. For this reason, they are divided into smaller, international groups at the beginning of the course and are given a common work assignment that they have to work on collaboratively. While we recognize that international virtual (4) group work is very challenging and can cause intercultural frictions and conflicts, we also know that this task helps to challenge students to learn and implement intercultural competencies to find a way to work together. Besides the synchronous and asynchronous responsibilities, students also complete a series of tasks to further promote the growth of intercultural competencies.

To promote the development of intercultural competencies and to initiate processes of professionalization, an individual reflection of the intercultural exchange processes is essential (Brück-Hübner, 2024, in this anthology). Students are therefore required to create a formative reflection (5) ePortfolio throughout the seminar timeframe. Following each seminar and Wrap-up session, students are given reflection assignments to complete and include in their ePortfolio.

### 3 “VIEW” in Practice

This basic theoretical concept was implemented in two different seminars during the summer semester of 2023 using the learning platform BigBlueButton (BBB) and the Learning Management Systems “ILIAS” and “STUD.IP”. In the process of planning and leading the seminars, slight modifications of the theoretical concept were made in both seminars.

#### 3.1 Seminar I: “Virtual International Exchange: Transition and Inclusion in Global Educational Contexts”

##### 3.1.1 The seminar design

Seminar 1 was led by Ulrike Beate Müller (JLU Giessen, Germany) and Maire Tuul (Tallinn University, Estonia). Ene Varik-Maasik (Tallinn University, Estonia) was an additional interlocutor for the Estonian students. The seminar was offered from April to June 2023. The content focused work was offered on Saturdays and the Wrap-up sessions on Wednesdays.

The seminar started with an opening session on 19th April to welcome all students. During this session, students were introduced to the lecturers and the student tutor. Also, students received an explanation of the course requirements. To provide students an opportunity to get to know each other, the strategy “speed dating” was used

in breakout sessions. Lastly, the lecturers gave a brief lecture on the topics of transition to school and inclusion.

This seminar included three days of intensive content work (6th May, 27th May and 10th June). Day 1 was meant as a basic day to exchange with students about basic issues of transition to school and inclusion. Day 2 focused on transition to school (led by Ulrike Beate Müller) and day 3 on inclusion (led by Maire Tuul). Based on the flipped-classroom concept, the students were asked to prepare material ahead of the three synchronous days. For day 1, the students had to prepare material for a first exchange about transition and inclusion. For day 2 and 3, the students had to prepare presentations in groups. As day 2 concentrated on transition, the group topics were “Multiple perspectives”, “Children’s perspective”, “Educators and teachers”, “Parents’ involvement” and “Successful transition”. Every group had to prepare one topic. The group topics of day 3 (inclusion) were: “Educational robotics”, “Telepresence robot”, “Teaching assistants”, “Teacher’s role in the inclusion”, “Teacher education”.

Both intensive days consisted of five topics. Each topic started with a short 10-minute group presentation followed by a short period of breakout discussion (7–8 minutes) with questions given by the specific group and a whole group discussion part in plenum afterwards (7–8 minutes). In the Wrap-up sessions all students had the opportunity to ask questions about organizational aspects and assessment. Phases for intercultural exchange in the Wrap-up sessions were organized addressing the topics of the seminar and informal communication.

In all synchronous sessions, there were group work phases of fixed groups to prepare the live presentations and phases of randomly organized group work. The class roster included 45 students (27 Germans, 14 Estonians, 4 internationals), so that 10 groups of about 4–5 students were created. For the ten fixed groups, the students were asked to enroll via StudIP at the beginning of the course. 2–3 German students per group were asked to enroll into the groups first, 1–2 Estonians afterwards and international students were asked to enroll last. Each group was assigned a certain day to enroll in a group (Germans on Friday, Estonians on Monday and internationals on Tuesday).

The assessment for this seminar consisted of the graded oral presentation and of an essay of 3–4 pages which was to be handed in at the end of the seminar. The presentations were graded in groups (criteria: content, structure, interaction, way of presenting) and the essays individually (criteria: relevant goal, discussion, argumentation, literature, structure, expression). Handing in the ePortfolio at the end of the course was obligatory as well but the ePortfolio was not graded.

In accordance with the opening session, a feedback session took place at the end of the course. This session was organized separately for Estonian and German students to provide students with the opportunity to use their primary language, which, it was hoped, would provide more direct and honest feedback. The international students were given the opportunity to provide feedback to the student tutor.

The same seminar was run in November and December 2023 again with different students.

### 3.1.2 Evaluation and Student Feedback

At the end of the seminar the students were asked to give feedback orally and in written form in an anonymous official course evaluation, in an online-survey and in the ePortfolio. In the following section, a summary of their responses is provided.

#### Atmosphere and exchange

The intercultural atmosphere and the intercultural exchange were aspects that were stated by many students as positive feedback. Exchange was described as open and culturally enriching. Many of the students highlighted the possibility of getting to know new and international people. In relation to students' nationality, one student shared that they would have liked to hear more about the experiences of students from different countries. Many students described the atmosphere created by the lecturers as being friendly, polite and supportive.

“Something else I really enjoyed about the seminar was hearing a lot of individual, personal stories and experiences from the other students and conversations.” (Student, ePortfolio, View I)

“To have the opportunity to communicate with students from other countries and get to know multiple different perspectives in these important topics. Also the many group discussions were really insightful.” (Student, course evaluation, View I)

“I liked the supportive space create(d) by the instructors, where I felt comfortable to share my opinions. I also liked hearing about the practices in different countries.” (Student, course evaluation, View I)

#### Technical realization

Especially at the beginning, some students from Estonia found the technical registration quite challenging because they had not anticipated having to create multiple accounts for course participation. However, once the necessary accounts were created and the initial acquaintance with the learning environments was established, the use of these learning platforms was perceived as straightforward rather than complicated.

Many students lacked prior experience in using the BigBlueButton conference platform, thus, for some, it took a little time to familiarize themselves with its capabilities during the initial stages of the course. Although the usage of BBB was learned relatively quickly, the digital system was frequently noted to be unstable and lacking technical reliability. Additionally, some students encountered microphone-related issues.

“It would be necessary to improve the technical connection for new students.” (Student, course evaluation, View I)

#### Group work and discussions

While exchanging and communicating with international students was mentioned as being a very positive element of the seminar, students shared ideas of how to improve group work and synchronous discussions. Some students criticized that others did not switch on their cameras. Other students shared that they repeatedly noticed students

who did not actively participate in breakout sessions. Students suggested that group work could be organized more often in “familiar” working groups and not in randomly built groups.

“Everything worked fine. We shared responsibilities, communicated with each other and everyone was cooperative.” (Student, Online-survey, View I)

“Maybe bigger groups in different rooms because (in) some group sessions only a few people were active.” (Student, course evaluation, View I)

### **Content work and presentations**

Students shared that the topics included were seen as relevant and that presentations in day 2 and 3 were regarded as interesting. Some students stated that they would have preferred to have more time to discuss aspects in plenum and one shared that they would have been interested in more input by the lecturers.

“Not enough time for the presentations/discussions.” (Student, course evaluation, View I)

### **3.1.3 Reflection and “Lessons Learned” of the Lecturers**

We lecturers continuously reflected and made notes in our personal e-Portfolio addressing own feelings, experiences, challenges and lessons learned. We commonly reflected about these impressions in a lecturers’ feedback talk with the two lecturers of the other View seminar and the student tutor after both courses had finished. In the following section, we highlight our reflections and lessons learned.

#### **Atmosphere and exchange**

We really liked the intercultural atmosphere. It was great to have our own intercultural exchanges as lecturers in preparations for the course and to have the intercultural exchange between lecturers and students during the course. In planning, collaborating and leading the seminar, we felt enriched by the other lecturers’ expertise and how they organized and taught their seminar session.

#### **Technical realization**

As stated by the students, BBB is not the best digital platform to house an international synchronous seminar. Our reality was that often people could not regularly get into the system and that sound or video functions did not work constantly for all students. We would have preferred to use another virtual platform such as Zoom. Zoom was not an option because the Zoom application for JLU staff did not provide breakout sessions or the option for students to register. Thus, we had to decide to use BBB instead.

#### **Group work and discussions**

Because we had many students enrolled in the seminar, we had to organize five groups for each intensive day. We recognize that this limited our active time for exchange on each topic. For the next time, we plan to have fewer students, especially fewer students from Germany. The enrollment into the groups via StudIP worked well for our semi-

nar. None of our students had problems with enrolling in a group. By enrolling themselves stepwise, the students were able to choose a topic and to choose other students as group mates to a certain extent. Like the students, we also noticed several students who did not switch on their camera. For next time, we want to be clearer at the beginning of the course and throughout the course about the expectation of keeping the camera on, especially in group work phases.

While Germans and Estonians remained in the course quite constantly, the dropout rate of international students was quite high – only 40 % completed the course. This phenomenon is normal with our VIP seminars. In many of our VIP seminars, the drop out of international students is high. To combat that, we had hoped that having two lecturers from two different countries would help to lower the dropout rate. Thus, it was good to have a constant group of German and Estonian students because one of their lecturers was the main lecturer.

Additionally, it was good to have a student tutor. The student tutor supported informal exchange with the students, handled all the organizational aspects such as helping students to get into the systems of JLU, answered questions and led content-related informal exchange about the seminar topic. This provided an additional person to support the students.

### **Content work and presentations**

Feedback from the students showed that they were interested in the topics and liked the way they were organized. Some students mentioned that they would have preferred to have less or less randomly organized group work. By giving the opportunity to work in groups frequently and randomly, we intended to give all students the chance to get to know and to talk to each other. For the next time, it is important for us to reflect on how to best use group work.

After the course had begun, we decided to change the structure of the intensive days. At intensive days 2 and 3, after each of the five presentations a breakout session and a plenum discussion was planned. Initially, discussions were meant to be led by the instructors but the oral participation of students at day 2 (transition) showed to be quite low. Thus, we decided that the groups who prepared the presentations for their topics had to lead the discussion part in plenum after the breakout sessions. We made this change of organization in day 3 and soon after that we noticed a higher degree of active participation of students.

Finally, we want to recognize the planning stage. A lot of hours of preparation in digital meetings were necessary for the lecturers to arrange all different aspects of the seminar: enrollment, systems used, methods and media, structure, material and tasks for content work etc. As the seminar is planned in a similar way in the following semester, we think that there will be less hours of common arrangement and planning necessary.

## 3.2 Seminar II: “Virtual International Exchange: Intercultural Communication and Inclusion in Global Educational Contexts”

### 3.2.1 The Seminar Design

The second VIEW Seminar with the title “Virtual International Exchange: Intercultural Communication and Inclusion in Global Education Contexts” was led by Annika Brück-Hübner (JLU Giessen, Germany) and Tatiana Joseph (UW-Milwaukee/Wisconsin, USA). This seminar was offered as an intensive course from May to July 2023. The content focused work was offered on Wednesdays and the Wrap-up sessions on Fridays.

The intensive seminar began with a kick-off event on 31st May, which was aimed at getting to know each other and clarifying organizational issues, and group formation. The four weekly synchronous seminar sessions were held from 21st June to 12th July.

As intended by the concept, we based our session design on the flipped-classroom model. The first seminar session (21st June) was held by Tatiana Joseph on “The Role of Intercultural Competencies in Education”. The students had to complete various preparatory tasks based on literature and video material, which were made available to them via our digital learning environment in ILIAS. The same applied to the second session, which was organized by Annika Brück-Hübner on the topic of “Intercultural Communication and Reflection” (28th June). In the sessions, our focus was clearly on intercultural exchange and discussion. The students were therefore repeatedly sent to break-out rooms in various constellations to work together on concrete tasks or to exchange ideas on discussion issues. The third session (5th July) focused on group work. In the last session (12th July), the topic of “inclusion” was discussed in greater depth. The focus here, however, was additionally on the joint discussion, reflection and evaluation of the seminar.

The group formation instructions were shared with students during the kick-off event. The students were asked to divide themselves into groups via the learning management platform Stud.IP. The lecturers gave the students a choice of different topics and the first task of the groups was to decide, independently and collaboratively, which topic they would like to work on. The students were then asked to discuss the topic from their individual cultural perspectives and create a joint video focusing on the differences and similarities of the different nations and cultures involved. One example was an analysis and comparison of textbooks from different countries in terms of the criterion “representation of diversity”. In addition, student groups designed a 30-minute “interactive lesson” that built on the video and engaged their peers and encouraged collaborative discussion and reflection. In preparation for the third seminar session, students were asked to watch the other groups’ videos and make video reflections on them. Accordingly, the implementation of the “interactive sessions” took place in the synchronous third seminar session. Here, too, the concept of the “flipped classroom” was stringently followed.



Between those synchronous seminar sessions there were also three weekly Wrap-up sessions led by a student tutor (23rd June, 30th June, 7th July). Here there were no guidelines from the lecturers, rather the student tutor was free to decide together with the students what they wanted to talk about. Despite its highly informal nature, attendance at the Wrap-up sessions was obligatory for the students.

At the end of the kick-off session, as well as each seminar and Wrap-up session, students were given reflection tasks to integrate into their ePortfolios. The ePortfolio also served as a documentation space for the assignments during the self-directed preparation phases.

### 3.2.2 Evaluation and Student Feedback

The evaluation of the seminar was conducted using an anonymous collection of feedback via an Edupad in the last seminar session, an online survey as well as through the ePortfolios of the students. Based on the evaluation and student feedback we can summarize the results as follows.

#### Atmosphere, exchange and learning success

The students enjoyed the seminar, especially the interactive design of the seminar sessions as well as the informal exchange during the Wrap-up sessions and reported that they learned a lot about others but at the same time also about their own culture. Students also shared that the seminar helped them to improve intercultural competencies as well as (intercultural) communication skills.

“There was definitely a lively exchange about similarities and differences, especially in the context of education. In addition, the wrap-up sessions allowed for an informal exchange on other topics, so that I was able to learn a lot about other countries and cultures. This also encouraged me to reflect on my own culture and to penetrate it even more. I have become more open to other cultures and have realized how important and useful intercultural exchange is in order to learn from each other. I now appreciate intercultural exchange all the more, as the seminar showed me how valuable it can be and that, despite some communication difficulties, you can benefit from it in any case, as it can broaden your own world view.” (Student, ePortfolio; VIEW II)

The students liked the very trustful and safe atmosphere of the sessions and the focus on collaborative learning – also from the side of the lecturers. Individual students also report that they use this approach as a model for themselves.

“This seminar taught me again how important it is as a teacher to be sensitive to all cultures in the classroom. In this seminar, too, people were always interested in the other cultures and there was a very respectful approach to the different cultures, and I would like to be able to create the same atmosphere in my classroom later on.” (Student, ePortfolio, VIEW II).

Overall, the feedback shows that the students enjoyed the virtual exchange. At the same time some of them requested to meet face-to-face at least for a few days, in one of the countries.

### Groupwork, workload and time shift

The students felt that this is a very innovative seminar concept, that should be kept but – of course – also improved in some parts. They mainly criticized the very high workload resulting from group work, self-preparation-tasks and ePortfolio-reflections – especially in the very short time (six weeks) and at the end of the summer term for the German students (that includes final exams in other courses at the same time).

“I felt very stressed during the seminar because of the immense workload. It was really hard. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the intercultural exchange to compare different countries and I loved meeting people from other countries.” (Student, Edupad, VIEW II)

They also reported different challenges in group work, e. g. a high drop out from the international students from other international partner universities as well as challenges of reaching out to the international students (more support from lecturers is required in regards to time and knowledge of platforms) and working together collaboratively when living in different time zones.

“[...] The time difference made it hard to work on tasks together. If we were all in one country, we could do a video chat and work on the task simultaneously. In this group work we split the tasks and worked separately on them [...].” (Student, Online-Survey, VIEW II)

Because of the time difference, the seminar was scheduled in the early evening for German/European students. As such, the German/European students said that the time of the seminar was too late for them. They shared that it was hard to communicate in English and keep up with the very intensive exchange in the evening (it was from 5–7 p. m. German time, which was 9–12 a. m. for the students from UWM). The students also asked for more and shorter sessions.

“Overall I enjoyed it, however I would change the timing to maybe even just an hour earlier, as 5–8 p. m. is quite late to still be actively thinking and participating, especially for those who had uni/work during the day!” (Student, Edupad, VIEW II)

### (Technical) Issues

International students shared that they had problems enrolling into our German learning environment systems.

“I felt great during the seminar! I was a little confused at times with the system and frustrated that things didn’t always work in terms of making ILIAS work but new apps are a bit tough for me” (Student, Edupad, VIEW II).

The students criticized the process of group building via Stud.IP. For them, it took too much time to finalize groups – time they should have used for working on group tasks.

“I would have been better to coordinate the allocation of the groups, so that it doesn’t take more than one week until everyone knows in which group he/she is.” (Student, Edupad, VIEW II)

### 3.2.3 Reflection and “Lessons Learned” from the Lecturers

As with Seminar 1, we lecturers also kept a portfolio of reflections parallel to our event and did a common discussion and reflection session after finishing the seminar. Our key conclusions are summarized below.

#### Organizational Issues and workload

During the joint planning, the main challenge was to find a suitable time period in which to offer the seminar. Our challenges came from the differences between the two universities in semester start/end dates, accommodating student internships and teaching roles and accommodating internships during the semester breaks of both countries. Unfortunately, the seminar could not be stretched over a semester as originally planned but had to be conducted as an intensive seminar. For us, six weeks is a very short time for the seminar concept. It would have been better to have weekly 2-hour sessions over a period of at least 10 weeks. For us it was hard to keep up with everything as well: The preparation, student support and feedback, assessment and all the other organizational tasks, and especially keeping up with attendance and ensuring that everyone was still “on board”.

Furthermore, we had too many elements for assessment: group-videos, interactive sessions, preparation tasks, reflective ePortfolios and attendance. We recognize that it would have been better to reduce that, even it did not fit perfectly to the guidelines from our universities. It would have been better to request an exception for assessment from our home universities and to create more “assessment free spaces”.

#### Participation and Exchange

We needed to deal with some challenges related to students’ participation. Among the international students who participated via the VIP program, there were some who regularly arrived late or left early, left their cameras off and did not participate in the plenary session or in the breakout rooms. We should have taken much more stringent action earlier, but again, we struggled with capacity and time.

Especially at the beginning, we had problems with engaging students in the plenary. We used the think-pair-share method to give students time to prepare for the plenary discussions (1. Think about the question on your own and take notes; 2. Go into break-out-rooms and discuss the question with your partner; 3. Present your results in the plenary). But in the first two sessions we recognized that the students were really engaged in discussing the topics in the break-out rooms (“safe-spaces”) but hardly participated in plenary. We encouraged them several times and underlined the fact that it was acceptable if their command of the language was less than perfect and mistakes were made. It took them some time to come to terms with this. We recognized a lot more student participation in plenary discussions in the last two sessions. As such, it is important to recognize that language plays a huge role. It took some time for our students to be confident enough to speak. Also, in that point of view, a longer seminar time would have helped to get a better group feeling and enhance communication and discussion in plenary.

### Differences in university cultures

Even if we have been aware of the fact that our students are socialized differently in relation to university work, we should have had a more open conversation and discussion about our expectations for group work in the first session. We prepared very detailed instructions about what the expectations of the product were but did not discuss how the different approaches in group work may affect the final product. While assessing students, we realized that some of the UW-Milwaukee students had been more focused on research while the German students wanted to do more practical related work. Still, there is some space for improvement of our advice before starting the group works.

### Conclusion

Both of us enjoyed the virtual international exchange, and we also learned a lot about other cultures and extended our own intercultural communication and teaching skills as well. It was hard work as the investment of time needed to organize a seminar like this is not comparable with a “regular” seminar. The high amount of work, resulting out of the close collaborative planning and organization, was energy-sapping. Also the huge time shift of six hours gave us limited chances to meet and exchange (we did meet very early for US-time or very late for German time). The accommodation of these times often stepped into our family life and free time, which created additional stress for us. But overall, it was a great adventure, and we are willing to give it another try in another semester.

### 3.3 Reflection and “lessons learned” of the student tutor

Similar to all lecturers, I also kept a portfolio for reflections parallel to both VIEW seminars. Generally, I found attending both seminars gave me the opportunity to try out different ideas and adjust my planning after seminar 1 according to the experiences I had previously made and the feedback I received. My main conclusions are summarized below:

1. Especially at the beginning, it was difficult to engage students in group and plenary discussions. In the planning phase of seminar 1, we considered groups of 4–5 students to be optimal for breakout-discussions, as this would provide the opportunity to compose groups of students from both partner universities as well as international students. However, due to different group work effects and technical issues, the exchange remained rather limited, even though it did increase compared to the first session. For the second seminar, I switched to smaller groups of 2–3 students from different cultural backgrounds. This led to improved engagement in both the group and plenary discussions.
2. The discussion topics and guiding questions I agreed upon with the lecturers in order to create an informal exchange amongst our students were initially too restricting. Although the students exchanged ideas with each other, they overall did not yet engage in a process of reflection on cultural similarities and differences. This could be improved by formulating the guiding questions more openly while prompting reflection processes, so that their exchange became more meaningful.

3. The role of the student tutor did not become clear to a number of international students, as this concept is understood very differently in the various teaching backgrounds. We should have made it clearer from the beginning which person to contact for which problem in order to avoid confusion and extra work for all.

All in all, I really enjoyed the virtual international exchange with students and lecturers from all over the world. It was a great opportunity to learn about other cultures, reflect on my own cultural background and improve my intercultural communicative competency. Nevertheless, I also had a heavy workload, due to the combination of the content and organizational aspects of both seminars while being a student myself.

## 4 Conclusion and Prospect

With the seminar concept “VIEW: Virtual Intercultural Exchange Worldwide” we want to promote intercultural exchange and discussions for as many students as possible in a virtual learning environment. In practice, this theoretical framework has certainly proven its worth. In our opinion, it is a very enriching experience for students as well as for lecturers. However, it is important to note that the practical implementation has also revealed numerous challenges.

The students enjoyed the virtual exchange. At the same time some of them enquired if there was a chance of additional face-to-face meetings for at least a few days in one of the countries. A blended mobility seminar could be a further improvement of that online seminar, but of course that is linked to some other challenges such as organizational issues (e.g. semester terms, funding), as well as the willingness and opportunity of the students to stay abroad for some time. Thus, in summer semester 2024 and winter semester 24/25 two blended seminars were planned.

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# Virtual Exchange: A Comparative View of Teaching and Learning in Elementary Education

GÜNTER RENNER

## Abstract

This article gives an insight into the virtual exchange course “A Comparative View of Teaching and Learning in Elementary Education”, in which students from Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) in Germany and students from the University of Latvia worked together on a range of topics over a period of 12 weeks in 2021 and 2022. The course provides participants with a comparative overview of elementary education in two countries; alongside experiencing the other country’s education system, participants investigate fundamental aspects of teaching, learning, and assessment at its elementary schools. Students tackle tasks together online in small groups, usually comprising six students (three from Germany and three from the other country), and engage in discussion, sharing views specific to their own national backgrounds.

The course was selected by the Innovation in Learning Institute at FAU as an example of good practice in online teaching<sup>1</sup> and nominated, in the context of the EU funded FRAMES project, as a positive scenario relating to the adoption and accreditation of virtual exchange programs in higher education across Europe<sup>2</sup>. It recently received an award for excellence in teaching from FAU’s Department of Education<sup>3</sup>.

Keywords: primary education, COIL, virtual exchange

## Outline

1. Initial Situation
2. Objectives, Target Group, Setting and Dates of the Course
3. Educational Approach of the Course
4. Course Design
5. Course Evaluation and Learnings
6. Points for Reflection: Criteria for the Success of the Course and Potential Improvements for the Next Iteration

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1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWmCuipIKAE>. Retrieved, August 8, 2023.

2 <https://frames-project.eu/outputs/scenarios/cases/>. Retrieved, August 8, 2023.

3 <https://www.phil.fau.de/studium/qualitaetsmanagement/qualitaetspolitik/lehrpreis/>. Retrieved, August 8, 2023.



## 1 Initial Situation

The German Rectors' Conference, a body representing the interests of Germany's higher education sector, has noted that "teaching staff are increasingly required to manage heterogeneous groups of learners characterized by cultural diversity – a task they will be better able to perform if they have acquired intercultural skills during their training. The internationalization of teacher education is therefore receiving ever greater attention [at the current time]." (Hochschulrektorenkonferenz, 2018, p. 3) Alongside traditional forms of internationalization in the higher education context, such as study abroad and student internships in other countries, institutions are increasingly emphasizing internationalization at home which centers on incorporating international and intercultural aspects of education into curricular content and teaching methodology. One practice which has emerged in this context is virtual exchange. The virtual exchange course "A Comparative View of Teaching and Learning in Elementary Education" picks up on this development. The web-based learning offered in the course gives students the opportunity to compare and reflect on key issues of elementary education while working with students from international partner universities.

## 2 Objectives, Target Group, Setting and Dates of the Course

The course was designed to achieve learning objectives as follows:

- Students are able to specify distinctive elements of education systems and of teaching, learning, and assessment in elementary schools in different countries.
- Students are able to use digital tools to collaborate effectively in transnational groups.
- Students are able to communicate effectively online in intercultural groups.
- Students have experienced a range of different perspectives and reflected on issues in their own culture and on similarities and differences among cultures.

The target group of the course is second- and third-year students in initial elementary teacher education. The course took place in collaboration with the University of Latvia in 2021 and 2022.

## 3 Educational Approach of the Course

The core underlying principles of this course are:

- A shared syllabus approach and the progressive exchange model for virtual exchange
- Facilitated online dialogue

### 3.1 Shared Syllabus Approach and Progressive Exchange Model in Virtual Exchange

The course is based on the shared syllabus approach (O’Dowd, 2018, p.7) of virtual exchange. Its aims are to enrich students’ degree courses with international points of view and to advance students’ digital and intercultural competencies.

It follows the established task sequence of the progressive exchange model (Müller-Hartmann, O’Dowd & colleagues from the EVALUATE Group, 2019, p. 9):

“Task 1: Information Exchange: Getting to Know Each Other.

Task 2: Comparing and Analyzing Cultural Practices.

Task 3: Working on a Collaborative Product.”

### 3.2 Facilitated Online Dialogue in Virtual Exchange

#### 3.2.1 Principal Objectives of Facilitated Online Dialogue in Virtual Exchange

Online intercultural dialogue in the context of virtual exchange supports the development of foreign language skills, intercultural competencies, and digital literacy. A dialogic approach to online intercultural exchange defines dialogue as a process involving critical thinking, with the aim of uncovering participants’ assumptions and biases and providing a space for their re-evaluation (Helm, 2016, pp.150–171). Facilitated online dialogue supports the exposure of learners to a range of divergent perspectives by engaging participants in dialogue with peers whose view of key issues differs from their own (Helm, 2016, p. 167).

#### 3.2.2 Key Principles of Facilitated Online Dialogue in Virtual Exchange.

The following principles of facilitated online dialogue are important in virtual exchange courses:

- Creating a friendly, safe space: Participants should feel welcome, comfortable, and safe, and that the environment is supportive and friendly.
- Supporting understanding: Participants may have varying levels of English proficiency and internet connections of differing quality. Both factors can lead to unequal levels of participation among the group. This underlines the importance of supporting participants’ understanding by, for instance, providing summaries of discussions and frequent “checking in” with participants to ensure they understand.
- Promoting interaction: Various types of activities can promote interaction among participants. They include icebreakers, asking questions or more structured activities. Facilitators can call on participants directly and encourage them to share their experiences (Helm, 2016, pp.156–166). The inclusion of a variety of activities, discussions, and group work in the course, in line with the key principles of facilitated online dialogue, can boost students’ active engagement with one another and the course content.

## 4 Course Design

### 4.1 Platform

The course is hosted on MS Teams, which combines synchronous and asynchronous tools and finds frequent use in university teaching as well as in schools. The use of various channels, for the course as a whole and small groups, and content tabs (such as WhoIsWho and tabs for each week) provide a clear structure to the course.

### 4.2 Timeframe and Group Size

Taking participant workload (self-study, collaboration in transnational teams, and synchronous components) and students' differing academic timetables into consideration, the course is designed for a 12-week period. Each course has places for approximately twelve students from each university, who then work together in four transnational groups.

The initial phase of the course entails an introduction to its structure and objectives, activities to help participants get to know one another, formation of small groups, and an introduction to the principles of intercultural and transnational communication and collaboration. After this, students work in their transnational "teams" (three students each from FAU and the partner university), on topics as follows:

- comparing education systems internationally,
- comparing teaching and learning in the elementary schools of the two countries involved in the course,
- comparing assessment procedures in elementary schools in the two countries.

### 4.3 Flipped Classroom

Following the widely known flipped classroom design approach (this approach was also used in Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology), participants first study key concepts in each topic on their own via interactive modules incorporating assignments that serve to deepen their understanding of the topic. All modules follow the same clear structure:

- ▼ ▶ -Week 3+4: Education Systems-
- ▶ ✓ 1 Introduction
- ▶ ▶ 2 Start
- ▶ ▶ 3 Information
- ▶ ✓ 4 Well done!
- ▶ ✓ 5 References
- ▶ ✓ 6 Back to the course start page

Figure 1: Example of a self-study module from the course

#### 4.4 Transnational Collaboration

The students then research key facts about elementary education in the other country, compile the results in their transnational group, and supplement their findings with important aspects of elementary education in their own country. As a collaborative product of the group work phases, each group creates a short PowerPoint presentation in MS Teams, on the topics of “education systems,” “teaching and learning,” and “assessment.” At the end of the course, the participants of each group merge their PowerPoint presentations to create a single, multimodal presentation.

#### 4.5 Asynchronous Discussions

After this, participants engage in an asynchronous discussion in their group forum on MS Teams. They consider aspects of education in the other country that they believe could serve their own country as inspiration for improvements in its systems and practices.

#### 4.6 Synchronous Meetings

Weekly synchronous meetings in MS Teams, lasting approximately 90 minutes and with all course participants in attendance, complement the course’s asynchronous components. At the meetings, participants reflect on the content of the self-study modules, the topics on which they are working together, and the process of collaboration. The aim of these discussions is to compare and contrast country-specific factors and practices and to enable individual participants to share their personal experience of the topics that arise and of working together in transnational settings. During the synchronous sessions, discussions take place involving all participants and in the small groups, building on the facilitated online dialogue model for virtual exchange as set out on [soliya.net](https://soliya.net)<sup>4</sup> (see above). Various activities, both including all participants and taking place in the small-group setting, help students to engage. Alongside the synchronous meetings, the lecturers meet once a week to reflect on the last synchronous session and plan and discuss the upcoming session in detail.

#### 4.7 Assessment, Final Presentation, and Course Credits

At the end of the course, each group gives their multimodal presentation to the other participants, who provide peer feedback online. Both participating universities award 4 ECTS credit points to their students for completion of the course. In the context of the EU funded FRAMES project<sup>5</sup>, the course has been nominated as a positive scenario relating to the adoption and accreditation of virtual exchange programs in higher education across Europe.

#### 4.8 Dissemination of Course Results to a Broader Audience

In 2021 and 2022, participants gave presentations on some results of the collaborative group work from the last two courses at the virtual International Students’ Research

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4 <https://soliya.net/>. Retrieved, August 8, 2023.

5 <https://frames-project.eu/outputs/scenarios/cases/>. Retrieved, August 8, 2023.

Conference in Riga<sup>6</sup>, on the gather.town platform<sup>7</sup>. This gave students the opportunity to engage with a broader audience. At the same time, the gather.town environment served as a student fair for students from the University of Latvia interested in spending an Erasmus+ semester at FAU and vice versa.

## 5 Course Evaluation and Learnings

The course team sought specific feedback from participants via questionnaires which are currently widely in use for the evaluation of virtual exchanges in teacher education. Evaluation took place qualitatively and quantitatively using a classic pretest-posttest design that sought to adopt the participants' perspective. Selected questionnaires were used, which were also part of the EVALUATE Project (Baroni et al., 2019). The evaluation found that participants showed an increase in pedagogical content knowledge and in intercultural communicative competencies.

Overall, it is apparent that participants benefited from the course's design and the manner of its implementation. Lecturers were able to track students' learning experience as they engaged in cross-institutional and transnational collaboration, via – to name an example – the weekly project meetings at which lecturers reflected on the previous sessions, updated the upcoming sessions, and finalized the planning.

Essentially, the lecturers considered their experience with this virtual exchange course to bear out key findings of the EVALUATE project, as follows:

- Virtual exchange acts as a driver of innovation and international learning in the university setting.
- Virtual exchange is a complex learning activity which requires incorporation into a formal educational framework and guidance from educators.
- The success of virtual exchange depends on person-to-person engagement.

## 6 Points for Reflection: Criteria for the Success of the Course and Potential Improvements for the Next Iteration

Reflection on the experience of teaching and learning that emerged from the course highlights the significance of commitment and engagement on the part of the lecturers, and of the student participants. Flexibility, composure, and good humor, likewise shown by lecturers and participants alike, appear similarly important.

Participant feedback has led to the planned adoption of improvements in the next iteration of the course, as follows:

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6 <https://www.isrc.lu.lv/en/>. Retrieved, August 8, 2023.

7 <https://gather.town>

- The course will use modified, more concise versions of the asynchronous self-study modules.
- Participants will have access to a best practice example of a multimodal presentation at the outset of the course to give them a clearer picture of what is expected of them in the final assessment.
- Participants will receive an additional two weeks to finalize their multimodal presentations.

Overall, the course was an unforgettable learning experience for both students and lecturers. With the modifications described above the next course should also be an exciting learning experience for everyone.

Its next run will be in collaboration with the Academic College Levinsky-Wingate in Tel Aviv, Israel.

Further details on the structure, content, and objectives of the course are available at <https://www.studon.fau.de/lm2922267.html><sup>8</sup>.

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# Teacher Education – Thinking Globally and Learning Internationally

LISA SAUER, DANIEL CASTNER, AGNES PFRANG

## Abstract

Using a form of qualitative inquiry called educational connoisseurship and criticism (Eisner, 1991; Urmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017), this short article examines the planning, implementation, and outcomes of an international seminar on inclusive teaching. It begins with a short theoretical outline followed by an overview of the seminar, including descriptions of the intended purposes, planned educational goals, and the general organization and activities of the seminar. Then, the meaning and significance of what the German and American pre-service teachers experienced in the seminar are interpreted. The article concludes with an appraisal of the obtained outcomes and challenges encountered during the international collaboration, evaluating possibilities for improving future cooperative endeavors, such as making assignments more flexible and thus transferable to other departments.

Keywords: international cooperation seminar, blended learning, inclusive education

## Outline

1. Theoretical Context
2. Seminar Overview
3. Pre-service Teachers' International Seminar Experience
4. Conclusion and Outlook

## 1 Theoretical Context

With the aim of meeting the increasing demands and challenges of the teaching profession in times of advancing globalization as well as increasing migration and multiculturalism, there is a trend towards internationalization in teacher education (Falkenhagen, Grimm & Volkmann, 2018; Quezada & Cordeiro, 2016). The focus is on teaching global as well as intercultural competencies — in the best case in an international teaching-learning setting. These competencies and international experiences are considered central for future teachers to broaden their own perspectives regarding global tasks and challenges (Scheunpflug, 2021). Among others within the pedagogical context, these concern inclusive education, which “internationally, [...] is increasingly seen as a principle that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners” (Ainscow,



2020, p. 124). The seminar presented in this article shows one possible adaptation of teacher education to those modern societal conditions and educational claims. It was developed as an international cooperation seminar on inclusive education in order to enhance the teaching in the context of both diversity in classrooms and learning across borders and thus the quality of teachers (Darling-Hammond & Branford, 2005; Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Sieber & Mantel, 2012). To evaluate this seminar a form of qualitative inquiry called educational connoisseurship and criticism was used (Eisner, 1991; Urmacher, Moroye, & Flinders, 2017). While connoisseurship heightens awareness, understanding, and appreciation of qualities of educational experiences, criticism discloses descriptions, interpretations, and appraisals of those qualities as the basis for judgment.

## 2 Seminar Overview

### 2.1 Intended Purposes and Planned Educational Goals

In order to improve the quality of teacher education in connection with globalization and internationalization, we developed an online course in which students from the University of Erfurt (Germany) and Indiana University-Bloomington (USA) collaboratively learn and work together on the not only curriculum- but also global socially relevant topic of inclusive education.<sup>1</sup> By observing, describing and reflecting together upon inclusive pedagogical settings we provided students with opportunities for cross-cultural experiences with less organizational effort, time, and financial expense than spending time abroad. The aim of our collaboration seminar was also to offer the chance of broadening students' perspective on teaching, the inner workings of schools, and systems of education beyond the national dimension by recognizing and discussing differences, similarities and commonalities. Thus, our educational goal was for students to acquire competencies on four levels: (1) collaborative and intercultural competencies<sup>2</sup> through e. g. international cooperation and communication, (2) professional competence regarding the curriculum, (3) competencies in dealing with modern media and communication technologies, and (4) global competence<sup>3</sup>.

### 2.2 General Organization and Activities

Generally, the seminar was organized in a blended learning format. On the one hand, this included units that took place mono-nationally on site at the universities in their respective countries. Those units outlined the theoretical foundations as well as the practical implementation of inclusive pedagogy within each national context, e. g. deal-

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1 The collaboration seminar has already been conducted in winter semester 2022 and summer semester 2023 under the joint leadership of the lecturers Lisa Sauer, University of Erfurt (Germany), and Daniel Castner, Indiana University-Bloomington (USA).

2 In our seminar context, intercultural competence is understood as the ability to work and communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds (Leung, Ang & Tan, 2014).

3 Based on the definition of PISA global competence is understood as the ability to "examine local, global and intercultural issues, understand and appreciate different perspectives and world views, interact successfully and respectfully with others" (OECD, 2018, p. 5).

ing with the heterogeneity dimensions of race, place of origin and ethnicity, as well as (dis-)ability. This served as a basis for the aim of the cooperation seminar of looking at inclusive teaching and learning settings from a transdisciplinary perspective in an international comparison between Germany and the USA (for another example of a seminar between Germany and the USA see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology). On the other hand, the seminar included units that were carried out digitally with international participation of the students from the USA and Germany. Besides an introductory and a final reflection session carried out in attendance of the lecturers, those international digital units most importantly consisted of international group meetings<sup>4</sup>. These meetings were self-organized by the students and took place without the lecturers. The choice of the digital platform (e. g. Zoom, Webex etc.) and of time and date for the international meetings was left to the students. The basis of these meetings were assignments to be worked on within the international groups in a given time frame. Those assignments, which were digitally accessible via Moodle, were located in a specific thematic complex in the context of inclusive education.<sup>5</sup> They included (1) a text assignment to be completed separately by the students from the U. S. and Germany *prior* to their group meetings. In doing so, the German and the American students each had to read a text given to them by their lecturers, which dealt with one specific thematic complex on educational inclusion from a national perspective. Furthermore, *during the group meeting*, students (2) were to give a brief overview of the text they have read. Then, based on the information gathered together they (3) were to have conversations, reflecting and discussing the focal topic of inclusion from a German-American comparative perspective. Guiding questions advised by the lecturers provided orientation for the international exchange. The results of this exchange (4) were to be documented, e. g. in the form of a mind map or a table.

### 3 Pre-service Teachers' International Seminar Experience

According to their own statements, most of the students in both nations experienced an expansion of their intercultural and global competencies.<sup>6</sup> The German students cited the broadening of their perspectives through international cooperation and exchange as the key factor, “as the international perspective is not found in other courses and the first-hand experience within other education systems is very valuable” (SS23\_Post\_2\_w). In some cases, the self-assessed increase in linguistic and social

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4 The grouping of the students is done by the lecturers beforehand, taking into account the equal distribution of German and American students within the international groups. The average number of groups is 5 with 6 students each in total from both countries.

5 Those specific thematic complexes concern e. g. inclusion as an ethical dilemma, race and origin-based discrimination or (dis-)ability and inclusion.

6 The data on the students' experiences are partial results of a self-assessment and reflection questionnaire survey in a pre-post design (n = 30) as well as guided interviews (n = 15). Both forms of data collection were conducted at the beginning of the seminar and afterwards. The questions asked included the estimated and actually experienced added value of an international cooperation seminar with regard to the acquisition of competencies as well as anticipated and actually faced challenges. The evaluation of the data collected was carried out using Mayring's qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010).

skills was also emphasized as the following quote shows: “I [...] also expanded my vocabulary [...] [and] learned to work with people I have never seen live before” (SS23\_Post\_6\_w). According to their assessments, the majority of students was also able to expand their professional competencies regarding inclusive education, not only in relation to the national context, but also to the international context (e.g. SS23\_Post\_6\_w). Students in the United States also appreciated the opportunity to be in dialogue with international peers. Many students with plans to study abroad in the future considered the online experience helpful for practising communication with international colleagues. They were particularly fascinated to learn about the two very different histories of special education in the two nations. In general, students in both nations were confident using technology, though some students also mentioned the increase in methodological competence, especially in dealing with modern media and communication technologies.

In addition to the mostly positive experiences regarding the self-assessed increase in competence, the students also experienced challenges. These mainly concern organizational barriers and barriers to cooperation. The time difference posed a central challenge for finding a date for the group meetings. Furthermore, differences in working methods and willingness to work also proved to be an obstacle in some cases. Here, the basic problem cited by the students was the university-specific differences in the examination requirements for the acquisition of ECTS credits in the respective seminars. Another challenge mentioned by some students was the subject-specific barriers due to differences in theoretical understanding and basic principles on inclusive education, and in some cases also language barriers (e.g. SS23\_Post\_1\_w). Though confident in their appraisals of their communication skills and understanding of inclusive education, a few students in the US experienced difficulty collaborating with their international teams and expressed misconceptions about subject-matter.

However, despite the experienced challenges, the majority of the students experienced the cooperation seminar in summary as an added value in general as well as regarding the topic of inclusive education compared to traditional mono-national seminars as the following quotation show in conclusion:

I personally found it totally exciting to discuss (lived) school inclusion on an international level. [...] [I] found it totally exciting to hear in conversation how they [the Americans] perceive inclusion. It was very close and also emotional because of personal/family experiences. It was good to use the English language in a relaxed exchange. Thank you for offering the seminar (SS23\_Post\_4\_w).

## 4 Conclusion and Outlook

In summary, the international seminar can be considered enriching for the students, despite the obstacles experienced, both in terms of content and in terms of collaboration. However, it must be noted here that this conclusion is based solely on the self-assessment and reflection of the seminar participants. To make statements about their

actual competency acquisition, additional forms of skills assessments would be necessary. Nevertheless, based on the students' statements the following seminar adaptations for improving future international cooperative endeavors addressing the challenges encountered should be kept in mind: (1) In order to minimize organizational barriers and barriers to cooperation, fixed time slots in addition to the flexible time schedule should be set for the international group meetings, at which the lecturers are also present to offer support in the event of difficulties of any kind. Furthermore, a digital platform should be provided to which all seminar participants have access (e. g. Open Document). (2) To equalize working methods and willingness to work, the alignments of the examination requirements for the acquisition of ECTS credits should be made more transparent including the standardization of the workload for all groups of international students. (3) In order to reduce subject-specific barriers, lecturers' conversations about the seminars topics could be recorded and provided to students as an example of cross-cultural dialogue. Accordingly, the seminar requires not only global thinking and international learning on the part of the students, but also on the part of the lecturers and their international cooperation at the academic level.

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# Virtual International Summer School of the IMPACCT Project: Organization, Preparation, and Realization

WIEBKE NIERSTE

## Abstract

*International – Intercultural – Interreligious: Perspectives on Islamic Religious Education from Austria, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey* was the title of a 2021 virtual summer school conducted by members of Justus Liebig University Giessen (JLU), Germany, in the framework of the Lehramt.International project IMPACCT. Students and lecturers from JLU and six partner universities in four countries participated in a three-day program including lectures, workshops, and social activities. Before outlining some aspects of organization, preparation, and realization of the summer school in question, brief introductory remarks comment on summer schools as instruments of internationalization. In the conclusion, the article takes a brief comparative look at a 2023 physical summer school held within the IMPACCT project as well.

Keywords: virtual summer school, virtual exchange, Lehramt.International, digital competencies

## Outline

1. Summer Schools as Instruments of Internationalization
2. Context: The IMPACCT Project
3. Virtual International Summer School: Organization, Preparation, and Realization
4. Conclusion and a Short Comparative Look at a Physical Summer School
5. References

## 1 Summer Schools as Instruments of Internationalization

Summer schools are block courses of up to four weeks offered during summer break to enable intensive work on a specific topic in a usually heterogeneous group (cf. Educational Network on Soil and Plant Ecology Management, 2017, for another example). In terms of internationalization, summer schools are an excellent opportunity to provide a short-term international experience, maybe even an international experience at home (cf. Nilsson, 2003; Beelen & Jones, 2015, p. 69). Because of comparatively low costs and shorter duration, they can be a low-threshold mobility alternative for students who do not have the opportunity to spend a longer period abroad (Erdei & Káplár-Kodácsy,

2020, pp. 35–37). In the best case, participation in a summer school motivates students to undertake an extended stay abroad (Kato & Suzuki, 2019) once they discover that they can find their way in an internationalized academic context. Compared to long-term mobilities, that one naturally assumes have stronger effects (DeLoach & Kurt, 2021), short-term mobilities can also have significant effects and educational value. These can include an increase in self-confidence and openness to collaboration with people from other cultural backgrounds as well as a reflection on and questioning of own cultural preconceptions, which in turn might lead to a rise of global awareness (Willard-Holt, 2001; Carley & Tudor, 2010; Kurt & Olitsky, 2013; Erdei & Káplár-Kodácsy, 2020, pp. 39–50; Hudson & Luke 2021, pp. 64–85). As is the case in any learning scenario, preparation, accompanying reflection, and follow-up activities can significantly influence the mobility's long-term effects (Erdei & Káplár-Kodácsy, 2020, pp. 37–38). In recent years, several studies have shown that also virtual exchanges (see O'Dowd, 2023, pp. 10–18 for definitions of virtual exchange and virtual mobility) promote the acquisition of intercultural competencies (Rawal & Deardorff, 2021, pp. 46–59; The Evaluate Group, 2019, pp. 26–43).

## 2 Context: The IMPACCT Project

In 2019, the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) launched a program called *Lehramt.International*.<sup>1</sup> With funds provided by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF), the program aimed at increasing the international mobility of student teachers (see Bloch, 2024, in this anthology). The Giessen project IMPACCT (International Mobility with Partners Abroad for Culturally Competent Teachers) was part of module A (model projects) in the two funding periods 2019–2022 and 2023–2024. Besides summer schools, study abroad semesters, guest lectureships, networking trips etc. belong to the eligible project measures. At the time of writing, the second funding period with the main aim of internationalization of primary and lower secondary education in the fields of Islamic, Catholic, and Protestant religion as well as Ethics with a specialized focus on interreligious dialogue is in progress.

## 3 Virtual International Summer School: Organization, Preparation, and Realization

The virtual summer school held in August 2021 was one official project measure within the first funding phase 2019–2022 (see for another brief comment Wild, Nierste, Kaiser, & Dasouqi, 2023, pp. 256–270). Students and lecturers from JLU and the six partner universities participated (University of Innsbruck, University College for Teacher Education Vienna/Krems, University of Stockholm, Université de Fribourg, Bursa Uludağ University, Marmara University). Since the target group of our internationali-

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<sup>1</sup> Find more information on *Lehramt.International* here: <https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/lehramtinternational/>

zation efforts at that time had been primary education students with the subject Islamic Religion, we agreed on the thematic focus: *International – Intercultural – Interreligious: Perspectives on Islamic Religious Education from Austria, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey*. The Lehramt.International program provided the primary learning goal: to enhance future teachers' intercultural competencies in order to prepare them for teaching in heterogeneous classrooms. The following section deals with some aspects of the organization, preparation, and realization of the virtual summer school and addresses some lessons learned.

### 3.1 Organization and Preparation

The organization of any event requires prior consideration of several stakeholder groups' expectations and interests. Project sponsors, organizers, lecturers, and students can have quite different opinions on the when, what, and why of an event such as a summer school. Being aware of and inquiring about these expectations and interests is crucial to ensure the event's success. With regard to the students, who are the main beneficiaries of a summer school, it is imperative to consider whether summer schools are part of the students' academic cultures. To ensure a reasonable number of participants, information material must be provided that gives a vivid impression of the educational benefits.

No matter if virtual or face-to-face, setting dates for an international summer school is always demanding. As everyone who works with partner universities worldwide is aware, term dates and academic years usually collide with one another. Summer is the time for well-deserved vacation, for internships in schools, or for fulfilling other academic obligations. The virtual summer school took place at the end of August, which against the background of upcoming semester starts in Sweden and Turkey was the only time possible.

For the IMPACCT summer school, the project description originally envisaged a five-day physical summer school in Giessen. It seemed more reasonable, despite the general preference for a physical summer school, to settle on a virtual format in light of the impossibility to assess the dynamics of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2021. Having experienced the ramifications of distance teaching and learning for two semesters, lecturers were especially sceptical about a virtual summer school's success. In retrospect, a virtual summer school can be a real alternative especially for students unable to finance upcoming costs. Organizers and lecturers, however, need the knowledge to guide virtual exchange properly. Profiting from the vast experience of all lecturers can be very helpful in program design.

Since the organization of a virtual summer school was new to the members of the project team, it became necessary for them to expand their knowledge about didactics of the virtual space and to learn more about online resources to facilitate interaction. Thus, members of the organizing team attended a number of expert led trainings. As one result, we set up the online whiteboard Conceptboard to use for check-in and check-out activities. Overall, the whiteboard functioned as a collaborative platform allowing us to share information, to document results of group work, and to engage in dialogue prior to as well as during the summer school.



### 3.2 Realization: Program Design and Student-Centered Approach

One week before the official start of the summer school, we offered an online meeting to familiarize the participants with the platform Cisco Webex. Breakout sessions allowed a first encounter. After this, the participants created short profiles on the Conceptboard answering questions such as: Which languages do you speak? What are your favorite hobbies? What is your cultural background? The event then started at noon on Wednesday and ended early afternoon on Friday. To guarantee attention, presentations given by lecturers lasted 20 minutes, a didactics workshop allowed collaborative work in mixed groups. Small activities gave students the opportunity to reflect on their learnings. Including regular short breaks or other activities was supposed to make online participation as pleasant as possible. On the first evening, we had a Meet and Greet to learn more about, for instance, each other's motivation to participate. Naturally, it was intended that especially students network to strengthen the feeling of belonging to a group of learners.

A secondary goal of the summer school was the promotion of semesters abroad at the partner universities. In their evaluation, seven students stated that the summer school motivated them to study abroad; one Turkish student afterwards did a semester abroad in Stockholm. Furthermore, the summer school was a perfect place to connect future outgoing students with members of prospective host universities. The students prepared university presentations, which should start conversation about university life in the different countries. Of course, everyone also had to get to know Giessen and Justus Liebig University, which is why we shared several brief videos. A highlight was an online concert given by an Austrian professor. One student in their evaluation called the musical interlude "a breath of fresh air".

In line with the objectives of the Lehramt.International program, the promotion of intercultural competencies was imperative. Therefore, the summer school started with the icebreaker exercise *Circles of my Multicultural Self*. When asked about Wednesday's most important insight on Thursday morning, one student wrote:

"Yesterday, the most important insight was that we all are so different, but at the same time so much alike. We are all human beings and our diverse backgrounds are valuable and complete each other."

When asked what we could do better next time, students gave valuable feedback, too. One student favored an increased number of lectures, another wished for more games, two pointed out that a summer school should be held in presence. One student connected the virtual setting with a certain lack of interaction:

"Students were still shy after the icebreaker – but I guess it was because it was held online. If it was in person, maybe more people would interact more."

In retrospect, spreading the summer school over five days might have been an alternative worth debating. Not only could we have distributed the amount of screen time better over single days – admittedly with the risk of a dissolution of the program –, but we

could have used the time to the benefit of the students for more networking and group work. The declared goal of a summer school should be that students produce something, be it a teaching unit or work sheets for use in the classroom. An increased amount of group learning scenarios fosters intercultural learning. Consideration should be given to an extremely reduced amount of frontal teaching scenarios.

In our case, the preparation definitely revealed digital competence deficits we had to tackle to ensure smooth execution. Combining this with deliberating the specificity of the simultaneous foreign language based intercultural encounter illustrated the complexity of the undertaking for everyone. Mindset, openness towards virtual exchange, and the development of digital skills are clearly fundamental success factors.

## 4 Conclusion and a Short Comparative Look at a Physical Summer School

In conclusion, the virtual summer school was a very exciting and positive experience. The format definitely bears a lot of potential in the internationalization of higher education. The 2023 physical IMPACCT summer school held in September 2023, however, was a completely different experience. A physical summer school raises other practical questions especially concerning traveling, financing, and catering. The overall impression we got while planning our 2023 summer school is that attracting students for physical short-term mobilities is quite challenging. Students weigh costs and benefits in this case with particular care; organizers should do the same. Some of our partners had to do a lot of convincing to motivate students to register.

Scheduling stays a challenge. It might come into a special focus because of the increased expense of travel. In our case, for example, visa problems led to a few cancellations at short notice. The definite advantage of a physical summer school is the personal intercultural encounter. At the end of the week, one student commented that she was positively surprised because the week did not match her expectations. The organizing team was very happy with the outcome as well, especially the networking between the students.

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# International and Sustainable?! Digital Pathways to Building International Cooperation in Teacher Education from a Management Perspective

ZINA MORBACH, INGA STEINBACH, SOPHIE BLUDAU, SVEN PAGE, ANNETTE HUPPERT

## Abstract

In the following article, a good practice example of building international cooperation in teacher education while considering different aspects of sustainability will be discussed, using the experience of project LiMa – Lehramt international in Marburg. The focus of this article is on the management aspect of relationship building and lessons learned in this project. In addition, benefits for students will be reported. Project LiMa aims to provide teacher education students in its pilot subjects biology, geography and education sciences with opportunities for international and intercultural exchange, so that they may increase their intercultural competencies in preparation for culturally diverse classrooms. The four-year project funded by the DAAD established strong partnerships with four universities in Poland, Portugal, Romania and Serbia, using an intentional combination of virtual and in-person measures. The article will first describe the relationship between sustainability and internationalization, considering potential goal conflicts. It will then investigate the advantages and disadvantages of a virtual kick-off event and explore opportunities of how virtual formats can be used for international relationship building on the level of staff and lecturers. Finally, the article will address teaching for sustainable development as an important transversal topic for international cooperation in the context of teacher education.

Keywords: internationalization, teacher education, sustainability, education for sustainable development, virtual formats, transversal topics, relationship building

## Outline

1. Internationalization vs. Education for Sustainable Development?
2. Sustainable Networking and the Benefits of a Virtual Kick-Off Event
3. Strengthening International Relationships through Virtual Formats
4. Virtual Teaching Cooperations and ESD as a Common Transversal Topic
5. Conclusion

## 1 Internationalization vs. Education for Sustainable Development?

Climate change and the sustainable use of the world's resources are urgent and world-wide concerns. While at first internationalization and sustainable development goals (SDGs; Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2023) appear to be at odds (the most obvious example being CO<sub>2</sub>-production while traveling abroad), when inspected more closely they share many similar and overlapping goals (DAAD, 2020; DAAD, 2021; Lang-Wojtasik et al., 2022). Internationalization aims to help people develop inter- and transcultural competencies, empathy, and tolerance, as well as an ability for personal reflection and for handling ambiguity and ambivalence, and generally a broader worldview. These competencies are also essential for teachers in conducting an education for sustainable development (ESD) at schools (UNESCO, 2020). Here, especially the goal of ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning (SDG 4), specifically sub-goal 4.7, which focuses on education for sustainable development, can have a guiding function for internationalization efforts (Lang-Wojtasik et al., 2022). But also other SDGs, such as achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls (SDG 5), reducing socio-economic inequality within and among countries (SDG 10), and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16), can benefit greatly from internationalization measures. Schools are often thought responsible for addressing social challenges such as sustainability in the classroom. Considering sustainability in internationalization efforts within teacher education is therefore crucial, especially since their goals might appear to be in conflict (for a more theoretical analysis of the link between ESD and internationalization see Buddeberg et al., 2024, in this anthology.)

Using project LiMa ("Lehramt international in Marburg"; English: International teacher education in Marburg) as an example, we will showcase how virtual formats, especially at the beginning of a cooperation, can help build relationships while considering ecological sustainability, and increase the commitment to the cooperation through quick and easy collaboration. Although personal contacts will remain important for internationalization efforts, virtual formats help initiate and sustain international relations while also being an important building block in making internationalization more sustainable in the economic, social, and ecological sustainability dimension (Kropp, 2018). This article therefore wants to explore how a conscientious use and combination of virtual and in-person experiences and events can help build sustainable, long-term cooperation on an institutional level within the internationalization of teacher education. Project LiMa received a four-year funding (2021–2024) within the DAAD-program "Lehramt.international", which promotes the internationalization of teacher education programs in Germany, funded by the Federal Ministry of Education and Research. (For more information on "Lehramt.international", see Bloch, 2024, in this anthology). The project has four partner universities, namely Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland), University of Kragujevac (Serbia), University of Lisbon

(Portugal), and Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu (Romania). LiMa focuses on the subjects of biology, geography and teacher education sciences.

## 2 Sustainable Networking and the Benefits of a Virtual Kick-Off Event

Starting a project on internationalization during a global pandemic seemed a challenging endeavor at the time, but as digitization efforts at universities increased and more and more useful platforms became available, these were a great starting point for building international cooperation networks. Thus, the subsequent recounts and advice need to be regarded as having worked primarily in the year 2021: On the one hand, people were used to virtual meetings and were looking for ways to engage abroad, during travel restrictions and beyond. On the other hand, they started seeing the light at the end of the tunnel and were hopeful to be able to travel again and meet new contacts in person soon enough.

### 2.1 Designing a successful virtual kick-off event

To start off the project, LiMa organized a virtual kick-off event. The goal was to create an event that was informative while being as engaging and personable as possible. In a first step, to acquire participants from all relevant departments of the partner universities, existing contacts at the partner universities were used to find interested colleagues. With each potential participant, at least one virtual meeting was set up with, during which the contacts were personally invited to the kick-off event. Secondly, to ensure participation and engagement at the event, one person from each partner university was asked to present the structure of teacher education in their country as well as the study program of their university. As a final preparatory step to show our appreciation and to make up for the event being virtual and not in-person, ‘surprise care packages’ were sent out to all invited people. These packages contained little presents connected to Marburg for a nice coffee break: a university coffee mug, fair trade coffee, locally produced cookies, a brochure with beautiful pictures of the city and a handwritten note. During the kick-off itself, a focus was put on atmosphere building. This included an effort to create a feeling of collegiality by welcoming everyone by name and including participants from the beginning, by building on the rapport from the virtual meetings conducted beforehand, and by paying attention to all comments or feelings of concern. Due to virtual meetings being more exhausting than in-person meetings, the program was also set up to be as varied as possible, i. e. short presentations alternated with videos and participatory elements, and various people from the organization team took on speaking roles to make the meeting more dynamic and diverting.

Regarding the software used, the kick-off was conducted in BigBlueButton, a meeting platform that in our experience has a comparably stable connection even with bad internet connectivity, which is important in an international setting. It also provides a space for collective note taking, has some interactive features and a chat func-

tion. Additionally, the interactive presentation software Mentimeter was used for participation (e. g. asking whether participants had experience in international project work) and for collecting feedback. After the official part of the event was over, a space for more informal exchange was provided; it turned out to be useful to switch platforms so participants knew that they could freely decide whether they wanted to participate further. The interactive conference tool Wonder.me offered a more relaxed context for this purpose.<sup>1</sup>

The number of colleagues who participated in the event (24 people from partner universities, 14 people from Marburg University) showed that our strategy for preparation and invitation was successful. Based on feedback collected at the end of the event with Mentimeter and based on personal communication with participants following the event, participants were very happy with the kick-off meeting, felt integrated and well-informed, and appreciated that the event was an international learning and exchange opportunity in addition to being a project kick-off. Communication with the international colleagues who presented during the kick-off showed that they felt a sense of responsibility for the event as well as for the project, and their commitment to the cooperation was mostly stronger in the long run than that of their colleagues without a speaking role. This all showed that it is worth putting in the effort to build personable relationships, as especially the ‘care packages’ were mentioned again even a year later when the team was finally able to visit all partners in person.

## 2.2 Benefits of a virtual kick-off vs. an in-person kick-off event

Looking back, conducting the kick-off event in a virtual format this way was the best start the project could have had, especially when considering factors of sustainability. Considering the process of connecting to our partners and weighing the benefits an in-person kick-off might have had against the ecological and financial resources needed, it seems that a well-designed virtual event can provide many of the benefits of an in-person meeting while coming up with some additional advantages:

- building personable relationships through proactively communicating appreciation (e. g. personalized gifts) and creating a relaxed atmosphere (through a personable communication style)
- shared feeling of accomplishment and learning, each partner is valued for bringing in their perspective and expertise
- a very small ecological footprint, no financial resources needed
- less organizational effort for the project coordination and the participants
- more people are able to participate – not limited by financial resources and less time commitment for the participants

Conducting a virtual kick-off gave us the chance to avert hurdles, such as financial efforts, ecological concerns, and organizational efforts. Digital media therefore helped us focus on internationalization measures more directly early on in the process, which has also been described by other projects (Staab & Egetenmeyer, 2019).

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<sup>1</sup> Wonder.me has now been discontinued, but there are many similar tools, for example HyHyve: <https://www.hyhyve.com/de/>

### 3 Strengthening International Relationships through Virtual Formats

Even after conducting a successful kick-off event, building consistent and stable relationships with international project partners remains challenging. Project LiMa used different strategies to achieve this goal, which will be described and reflected upon below.

#### 3.1 Virtual cooperation as a tool for relationship building at staff level

Regarding relationship building, it is beneficial to have goal-oriented communication to ensure that the partners benefit from the cooperation, and to communicate these benefits clearly. One measure that corresponded with these principles was the extracurricular virtual international lecture series which project LiMa organized and to which colleagues from the partner universities were invited as speakers. This collaborative endeavor provided a clear topic for discussion in online meetings and after completion allowed for the shared experience of a successful event, which helped build relationships immensely. Additionally, there were clear benefits for speakers, as all talks were remunerated and speakers could add their international speaking engagement to their CV. Moreover, as more indirect benefits to all partner universities, topics were varied so that some of the partners were able to integrate sessions into their own teaching, students and lecturers had an opportunity to learn from experts from other universities and people were able to network over a series of events. These lecture series were an important cornerstone of the relationship building process and provided a basis on which to explore further cooperation, as described below.

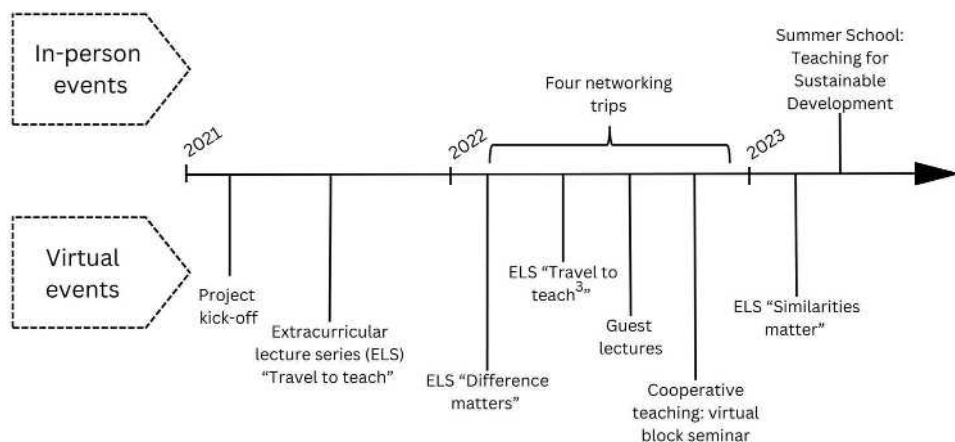
#### 3.2 Networking trips

Besides the ecological dimension of sustainability, internationalization projects also need to consider the cultural, social, and economic dimensions. Virtual formats may in some cases replace in-person meetings (as in the case of the virtual kick-off) and support long-distance relationship building (as did the virtual lecture series). Nevertheless, international networks will continue to depend on social interaction and personal relationships. Networking trips of administrative staff and lecturers to each of the four partner universities were very important to further the international exchange, to explore ideas of collaboration and to better understand working and living conditions of the partners.<sup>2</sup> The chart “Good practice: Using virtual tools to sustainably internationalize teacher education” shows an overview of the measures related to relationship building with partner universities taken by project LiMa.

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<sup>2</sup> In accordance with ecological sustainability, we aimed to reduce our ecological footprint as much as possible: by traveling by train where possible and compensating for our CO<sub>2</sub>-production otherwise.





**Figure 1:** Good practice: Using virtual tools to sustainably internationalize teacher education.

The virtually established personable relationships built using the strategies described above were fundamental for the open and effective exchange during these visits to the partner universities. The very good rapport, especially with the people involved in the lecture series, established a good baseline to continue an ongoing conversation rather than conducting a first meeting. The clearly communicated expectations discussed during preparatory online meetings and the collaborative organizational planning of the trip were also extremely helpful.

Having these opportunities for personal exchange with the partners is important not only for long-term relationship building via shared experiences, but also for increasing the intercultural competencies of the staff members and for decreasing existing stereotypes among them. This is also in line with the *whole institution approach*, one of the guiding principles in ESD, which states that institutions can strive for innovation if they work holistically (Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung, n. d.). In-person exchange during networking trips also helps to procure a clearer understanding of the living, studying, and working conditions of students as well as lecturers and staff. This knowledge directly benefits student counseling and helps the project team understand limitations in the cooperation based on resources or challenges the partners face. In practical terms, it also turned out to be quite helpful to solve issues such as exchange agreements in person, to get to know the point of contact for the students personally and to visit and thus acquire new partner schools abroad.

## 4 Virtual Teaching Cooperations and ESD as a Common Transversal Topic

Based on the knowledge acquired during the virtual relationship building and during the networking trips, collaborations with each partner could be fostered based on their individual challenges, needs, and availability. Here, cooperation is not a 'one shoe fits

all' but needs to be individualized. In general, though, transversal topics such as ESD, inclusion, digitalization and education for democracy are topics that are well suited for cooperation. They are relevant for teacher education in all countries while at the same time different countries have different perspectives and different conditions from which they approach these topics (e.g. economic background of pupils, urbanization, national history, and political systems; see also Seifert, 2024, in this anthology).

#### **4.1 Virtual cooperation formats**

Based on connections made virtually and during the visits, it was possible to establish different kinds of virtual cooperation focusing on various (transversal) topics. Formats and topics of virtual cooperation included:

- Extracurricular lecture and workshop series: virtual lectures and workshops open to students and staff from all partner universities conducted in English. Topics included: gender sensitive teaching, education for democracy, ESD, digitalization, and inclusion.
- Guest lectures: (virtual) lectures given by lecturers from a partner university as part of curricular teaching. Topics included: politic didactics, working abroad as a teacher.
- Cooperative teaching: virtual cooperation within curricular teaching where lecturers from at least two universities cooperate to create a new course which benefits from expertise and perspective of two different cultures. Topics included: inclusion/exclusion.

#### **4.2 ESD as a common transversal topic**

Regarding in-person exchange, a summer school in Marburg was one of the main project activities in this area besides actual student mobility between the partner universities. During the networking trips, ESD as a transversal topic turned out to be a topic that was very relevant to all partners and their students, connected the three pilot subjects biology, geography and teacher education sciences, all while being mostly underrepresented in curricula. It also offered a framework that includes most of the other transversal topics (such as education for democracy – SDG 16; inclusion – SDG 10; gender equality – SDG 5).

Therefore, for the 2023 international summer school, the topic “Teaching for Sustainable Development” was chosen. A topic, which was bound to connect the scientific interests of our partners with each other, while also having high relevance for schools and teacher education. Colleagues from all partner universities were invited and tasked with selecting and nominating students for stipends to attend the summer school in Marburg. Advertising was therefore based on the successful networking strategies described above, as the invitations and information were sent out to the partners abroad as well as being advertised locally and virtually, e.g. via Instagram.

In line with the topic of ESD and with the goal of intercultural exchange, the aim was to create a program that was as varied as possible, including many different formats of learning and teaching, and providing as much space for personal exchange and

collaboration as possible. Besides traditional formats of learning, such as workshops and keynotes, we therefore put a special emphasis on interactive learning opportunities using a project-based learning approach. As such, a large amount of time was reserved for phases of international and interdisciplinary group work, during which participants (students and lecturers alike) collaborated to design and create small projects related to teaching for sustainable development. Projects included lesson plans, interactive learning activities and cutout animated videos on international project ideas. To further focus on values and principles related to ESD, such as education for democracy, equality, and non-hierarchical communication, elements for atmosphere building and personal exchange were implemented. Examples for these elements are icebreakers, a digital-based city rally via the app Actionbound, a communal evening, a session at an improvisation theater, a group discussion as well as setting up a 'quiet space' all participants could use freely.

To ensure that sustainable collaboration would continue after the summer school, several measures were set up: During the event, we connected partners and university members with similar research areas and interests and arranged meetings for them during the week. Students were encouraged to create their own groups and networks and to use the project ideas developed during the summer school for further collaboration. An information fair, which included local and international initiatives and scientists, gave participants the chance to network and draw inspiration for further activities related to education for sustainable development. All the presentations, links, contact information of fair participants, photos, and videos were made available using a learning platform. This platform also included a collaboration space participants could use during the event. Recordings of keynote are publicly available and are converted into elements of Open Educational Resources, so that lecturers from the university of Marburg and its partner universities can use them subsequently in their own teaching.

Overall, the success of the summer school was based on the substantial work put into relationship building in the first years of the project. The higher than expected number of participants is likely in part due to the good network built during the project start and the very personable relationships within this network. Furthermore, the topic of ESD and the relevance for the coming generations was the most mentioned reasons for student participation, and the varied program was mentioned repeatedly in the evaluation. Furthermore, the relaxed working atmosphere was pointed out during the evaluation as well and was crucial for the successful intercultural exchange and the friendships built during the event.

## 5 Conclusion

As this article shows, virtual components, supported by intentionally selected in-person measures, can lead to more collaboration in efforts of building sustainable relationships with international partners. The efforts were sustainable in several different regards: They helped focus on internationalization efforts while saving resources, specifi-

cally on travel, and thus reduced the environmental footprint of the project. Virtual exchange possibilities also helped to reach more staff and students from the partner institutions, since financial and organizational hurdles were reduced. Finally, project LiMa was also able to address sustainability as a transversal topic in teacher education during the summer school on “Teaching for Sustainable Development”. Although obstacles remain, the careful and attentive alignment of the project measures makes it possible to establish sustainable international connections and collaborations in the context of teacher education.

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# Blended Mobility Format of Continuing Education Links School Teachers of German Schools Abroad and Students of Teacher Education of the University of Cologne

KATRIN KAISER, CHRISTIANE BIEHL

## Abstract

The article shows how the concept of internationalization of teacher education is being given a new component through an innovative interlinking of formats: student internships at schools and continuing education for teachers. The blended mobility format<sup>1</sup> presented here integrates students of teacher education from the University of Cologne (UoC) in a virtual series of advanced training courses organized by the Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA) for teachers at German schools abroad. It will be shown how inter-group tandems (one student plus one teacher) are formed to carry out project work at the school in attendance as part of the advanced training program.

Keywords: German schools abroad, teacher education, blended mobility

## Outline

1. Desideratum: Internationalization of Teacher Education – Opportunities in the Virtual Space
2. Innovative Concept: Cross-target Group Training in the Virtual Space
3. Conclusion
4. References

## 1 Desideratum: Internationalization of Teacher Education – Opportunities in the Virtual Space

For some time now, there has been a consensus on the central importance of promoting the internationalization of teacher education, especially in the university context (Lenzen, 2013). Given the increasing heterogeneity of the student body in a globalized society, the demand to impart a high level of communicative and intercultural competencies in teacher education is as relevant as ever (Busse & Göbel, 2017). In order to acquire these skills, a personal (physical) experience abroad is essential and well-

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1 The efficacy of blended mobility formats has already been analyzed (e. g. Olearczyk, et al. 2019; Perfözl, et al., 2022).

known (German U15, 2023). However, without questioning physical mobility, internationalization and digitalization must be considered more comprehensively, especially today. Thus, virtual internships at schools abroad are already the subject of research (Hänssig, 2023). The step towards the further development of interchangeable blended mobility formats is desirable, particularly evident in the current recommendation for forward-looking teacher education from the German U15 (2023) and the German Exchange Service study *BintHO* (DAAD, 2023). The UoC faces this challenge by establishing a customized offer structure.

The internationalization of teacher education is a focal point at the UoC. As part of the internationalization strategy, it is anchored as an essential field of action and profile-forming feature. Since 2013, the Department of International Mobility – mostly in cooperation with the Centre for Teacher Education – has developed modules to address this desideratum. In addition to the DAAD-funded UNITE Cologne project (Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD), n. d.) and other multimodal mobility formats (Wild et al., 2023), the hybrid competition project *university students meet schools@eu-rope*, honored by the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, should be mentioned. It is characterized by the integration of stakeholders from schools, university institutions, the city of Cologne, and civil society (Minister für Bundes- und Europaangelegenheiten, Internationales sowie Medien des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen und Chef der Staatskanzlei, 2023).

The first pillar of this innovative concept is the network *internships@schoolsabroad*, through which 792 students (as of winter semester 2023/24) have completed internships at over 80 cooperating schools worldwide since 2013 (Universität zu Köln international, 2024). The collaboration is likewise inspiring for students and teachers:

“Students of teacher education are a great asset for German schools abroad, as they convey a modern, up-to-date image of Germany. They can optimally bring the current state of university into the schools.” (A.Hendrischk-Seewald, responsible for the series of advanced training courses at the ZfA until October 2022, personal communication, April 5, 2022).

The second pillar is the cooperation between the UoC and the ZfA, which is remarkably diverse and sustainable (Bundesamt für Auswärtige Angelegenheiten Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen, 2024). In particular, the expertise gained in the virtual space as part of the *Sprach-Tandem Deutsch* project has been used and taken into account in this anthology’s topic (Biehl & Kaiser, 2022).

## 2 Innovative Concept: Cross-target Group Training in Virtual Space

The teacher training in Germany falls within the jurisdiction of the education authorities of the federal states. However, it essentially consists of three phases: academic studies, preparatory service (practical teacher training phase in school settings), and continuous professional development. Particularly, the third phase, against the back-

drop of changing requirements plays an increasingly prominent role in the field of education.

The recommendation of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation is obvious: the central goal of in-service teacher education – as the *third phase* after university studies and preparatory service – should be the continuous professionalization of teachers (Böttcher et al., 2021). The aim is to increase knowledge transfer between universities and schools at home and abroad. In particular, the potential of digital teaching and learning is to be used more intensively (Kuschel et al., 2020). Therefore, virtual training courses are an effective method of conducting continuing education internationally with the participation of various stakeholder groups.

In the face of multiple global crises, society is becoming increasingly polarized. To strengthen the resilience of democratic forces, it is essential to promote the development of a democratic attitude and participation at an early stage (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung Nordrhein Westfalen, 2023; Hertie Stiftung, 2023). The Federal Government's catalog of measures to combat right-wing extremism and racism – including at German schools abroad – can be seen as a response to this (Bundesministerium des Innern und für Heimat, 2021). Within the framework of the *Initiative for Tolerance and Responsibility* organized by the ZfA, a continuing training strategy has been developed, which is primarily aimed at training teachers at German schools abroad on topics relating to value orientation:

“Due to the excellent cooperation between the ZfA and the UoC, the foundations of which were laid in the 2013 cooperation agreement, we have also decided to allow UoC teaching students to take part in the virtual program.” (A. Stefani, Deputy Head of Department ZfA, 6, personal communication, August 23, 2023).

The format is designed to train teachers to experience school as a place of living democracy and protection, to sensitize school pupils to diversity, tolerance, and equal opportunities, and to foster their willingness to act sustainably and responsibly. Latest teaching and learning materials and digital tools are provided to broaden professional and methodological expertise. The exchange of practical examples completes the offer and leads to the development of constructive options for action in challenging situations in the teaching context. Information material and results will be compiled on digital collaboration tools (Padlet) and can be accessed asynchronously. The training aims to show that the teacher's personality plays a decisive role not only in the technical implementation of the lessons (Barth, 2020) but also in the transmission of values and the promotion of socio-political commitment. The learning modules, such as Open Educational Resources, offered by the UoC on this topic (Universität zu Köln, 2022), also expand the knowledge of teachers and students and make the effectiveness of a cross-target group, international blended mobility project visible.

“We are not all in the same boat, but we are in the same storm (...). If we are together, we can make it happen.” (C. Kohler, Teacher at Lanús German School, Argentina, personal communication, November 29, 2022).



The pillars mentioned above, form the framework of the new concept: students from the *internships@schoolsabroad* program and teachers from German schools abroad participate interactively in the virtual continuing training. Forming tandems (one student plus one teacher) is encouraged in safe breakout rooms. A joint school project is designed within this frame and will be implemented in the subsequent attendance phase:

“I found the additional offer of the practical project (...), which the organizers spontaneously included in the series, remarkably successful. All interested parties could exchange ideas about possible teaching and school development projects. I would emphasize this aspect in a new training program edition and further consolidate the networking concept.”  
(B. Buchholz, Consultant for German as a foreign language for Bulgaria, ZfA, personal communication, October 12, 2022).

From 2021 to 2023, the *Department of International Mobility* selected 17 students of teacher education for participation: 3 Bachelor students and 14 Master students. The following school types were represented: 11 high /secondary schools, four special education schools, one primary education, and one vocational school. Several synergy effects are thus achieved:

- Cross-institutional training on current socio-political topics
- Utilization of virtual formats increases digital skills
- Transfer of theoretical knowledge into practice (ensures competence to act)
- On-site practical phase serves to reflect on and review individual teaching strategies
- Performing multiplier roles: Students act as ambassadors, providing information about study/research at the UoC. Teachers present teaching abroad as a career option.
- Physical mobility module: Recognition as academic achievement (internship)
- Skills acquisition and quality assurance through certificates <sup>2</sup>
- Trilateral alliance between the university, the school and the ZfA is strengthened.

The spectrum of subjects on *Tolerance and Responsibility* is initially elaborated collectively within the context of the virtual training program (refer to the aforementioned), ensuring optimal conditions for the in-person envisaged project implementation. Challenges in planning and implementing the concept can be addressed quickly without barriers in the virtual space, and direct solutions can be put forward for discussion. Loss of time, which is usually caused by contacts not being stabilized in advance by the participants or a lack of process coordination, can be cushioned by the preparatory work in the virtual process. A perspective change occurs as part of the competence-orientated teaching/learning processes. During the virtual training component, teachers and students meet as in the role of *learners*. The fact that the peer group can draw on different worlds of experience at school and university makes this process highly communicative and enriching:

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<sup>2</sup> Micro-credentials could be considered a flexible, quality-assuring recognition measure. (HRK, 2022)

“I took part in several online workshops organized by ZfA. My favorite aspect of the workshops was exchanging views and experiences with colleagues from all over the world and with university students. Their contributions to our discussions offered another dimension, a fresh perspective, which I highly valued. I feel corporations like this can only benefit all participating sides.” (J. Straßburger, Teacher of the German European School, Singapore, personal communication, November 30, 2022).

The change of perspective takes place during the realization of the project abroad. The teachers take on the role of tutors: they introduce the students to the reality of school and support them with constructive feedback.

“I was particularly impressed by the collaboration in the school. The pupils were committed and were able to show their strengths in this project (developing a song). The music teacher supported me throughout the realization.” (A. Schnorrenberg, a student from UoC, personal communication, November 29, 2022).

The model allows both groups to reflect on their actions and interrupt teaching routines to explore new approaches and methods. The appreciative voices speak for themselves:

“The students were consistently enthusiastic about the opportunity to train and exchange ideas with over 30 experienced DaZ (German as a Foreign Language) teachers and acquire certificates. We would expressly welcome a continuation of this project.” (A. Stefani, see above).

“Without the concept of the UoC and the ZfA (...) I would not have considered a stay of several months at the German School in Singapore.” (L. Demirel, a student from UoC, personal communication, November 25, 2022).

### 3 Conclusion

The combination of various target groups is extraordinarily effective in the international continuing education setting, which qualifies both sides. It ensures the inclusion of different perspectives and exchanges across institutions (Altrichter et al., 2019). A. Hendrischk-Seewald points out the multi-perspective approach: “Both sides benefited. They complemented each other wonderfully in terms of experience and perspective.” (A. Hendrischk-Seewald, see above).

Nikola Poitzmann (member of the Hessian Ministry of Culture, advisor for the *Tolerance and Responsibility* project) emphasized the active participation of the students as *ice-breakers*. Intercultural encounters between teachers and students are highly valorized: “During the sessions, there was always the opportunity to reflect on the theoretical input in changing small groups and consider what can be integrated into everyday school life and where there may be (also local) challenges.” (Z. N., student of the UoC, personal communication, December 1, 2022).

The modular training format fulfills international digital education's desiderata: accessibility, inclusion, sustainability, security relevance, and flexibility. The term *internationalization of continuing education @ home* seems appropriate. Transferring continuing education content into school practice and simultaneously into the university context is thus assured of success. This blended mobility project – as the congenial interweaving of two *short mobility* formats – can provide a strong impetus to continue establishing customized mobility structures at universities and schools and transfer continuing training content into practice.

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# Breaking Down Barriers with MAPS – (How) Do Future Elementary School Teachers Use International Learning Opportunities?

FREDERIKE BARTELS, FRIEDERIKE-SOPHIE MAASCH, VERA WILLGOSCH, SARAH WINKLER

## Abstract

This article explores the challenges faced by the University of Vechta in facilitating international experiences for students of teacher education. It presents the MAPS project (International Mobility in the Master's Program in Primary Education), a collaborative initiative between the University of Vechta (Germany), the University of Tallinn (Estonia), and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Italy), funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD). The project aims to enhance the internationalization of teacher education through three key components: the structural integration of a study abroad program, an international summer school of teacher education, and expanded collaboration among the participating partner universities. The article examines structural and organizational adjustments to promote mobility, factors influencing participation, and students' perceptions of these initiatives. The findings provide insights for future strategies to promote internationalization in teacher education.

Keywords: internationalization of the curriculum, teacher education, structured mobility, summer school, students' experiences

## Outline

1. Introduction
2. Starting Point
3. Concept Development
4. Experiences
5. Discussion and Conclusion

## 1 Introduction

In 2021, the project "MAPS – International Mobility in the Master's Program in Primary Education" was launched, a joint initiative of the University of Vechta (Germany), the University of Tallinn (Estonia) and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (Italy). It is funded by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and is one of the various internationalization initiatives in Germany that aim to promote global and intercul-

tural perspectives in teacher education. The project is coordinated by the University of Vechta, a small institution in the rural landscape of Lower Saxony with around 4,000 students. Since 1830, the university has pursued a traditional focus on teacher education for elementary school and lower secondary education (University of Vechta, 2024). In view of the current challenges, the University of Vechta, like other teacher education institutions, is faced with the task of preparing educators for increasingly diverse classrooms (European Commission, 2017).

## 2 Starting Point

The importance of internationalization was recognized early on at the University of Vechta. Over the past ten years, the institution has consistently prioritized internationalization as a fundamental element of its strategic planning. To strengthen this commitment and improve learning opportunities, the University of Vechta has made important structural, curricular and organizational changes. One important aspect focused on initiatives to facilitate study abroad and the recognition of academic achievements.

### 2.1 Internationalization at the University of Vechta

In the winter semester 2012/13, the University introduced a mobility window in the fifth semester of the combined Bachelor's program and in the third semester of the consecutive Master's program. This concept maximizes flexibility for students seeking international study experience by minimizing the number of required curricular components in these semesters. The University of Vechta uses the ECTS grading system, which ensures easy recognition of credits earned abroad. In addition, students have the opportunity to complete general school internships, orientation internships, and internships abroad specifically for the study of English. The University recognizes the acquisition of additional qualifications in the field of interculturality with the Extracurricular Certificate in Intercultural Competence, for which participation in intercultural training, study abroad, or language courses can be recognized as partial credit. The International Office and the Center for Teacher Education provide comprehensive support and guidance, including placement in partner schools and consideration of individual preferences. The University's extensive international network of partner institutions facilitates access to a wide range of opportunities. The annual International Week and a Teacher Education Program for Incomings underscore the University's commitment to providing diverse opportunities for intercultural learning.

### 2.2 Challenges in Recruiting Students for International Experiences

Despite the aforementioned facilitations, incentives and positive structures, the University of Vechta, like many other educational institutions, faces the challenge of attracting teacher training students to international experiences, especially abroad. In the view of the authors of the article, various factors contribute to the fact that students are not yet making sufficient use of the wide range of opportunities.

From the authors’ point of view, one of the reasons is the Master’s structure in Lower Saxony. In the winter semester 2014/15, the Master of Education in Lower Saxony was reformed and the teacher education program for elementary and lower secondary school teachers was extended from two to four semesters. The aim of this change was to strengthen the practical and professional orientation, integrate reflection on aptitude, promote academic orientation and support research-based learning (MK, 2014). To this end, an 18-week internship block was introduced, which, together with the preparatory, accompanying and follow-up courses at the university, forms the so-called internship block (Praxisblock) (see Figure 1). At the same time, a project (the so-called “Projektband”) intended to support research-based learning was introduced for students to carry out at their placement school. The Projektband is accompanied by a seminar (see Figure 1). The seminar extends over three semesters and includes the development of a research question in the first semester, the practical implementation in school practice in the second semester, and the subsequent evaluation/follow-up in the third semester. From the authors’ point of view, this structure of the Projektband could be perceived as a potential obstacle to studying abroad, especially as it coincides with the mobility window.

Master of Education

1.	2.	3.	4.
Praxisblock (Internship)		<i>Mobility window</i>	
Projektband			

Figure 1: Structure of the Master of Education and integration of a stay abroad

According to the authors, another reason for the low interest in international experiences may lie in the needs of the target group. Students at the University of Vechta often state that they chose the university because of its familiar atmosphere and proximity to their home town. The familiarity and comfort associated with studying in familiar surroundings could influence the willingness to embark on an international experience, especially if uncertainty and lack of family proximity play a role. It is also possible that the relevance of internationalization for later careers is not fully understood (Wernisch, 2016), that the removal of barriers at a structural level is not perceived, or – as reported in the literature – that the organizational and financial costs of studying abroad, the perceived extension of study time, or the lack of support systems act as a deterrent (Middendorf et al., 2017).

In summary, the challenges identified for the internationalization of teacher education at the Master of Education level raised several questions. On the one hand, the question was how the structure of the Master of Education can be changed in order to offer students more flexibility and at the same time promote participation in international experiences. On the other hand, there was a need to clarify how the needs of the



target group could be better taken into account in internationalization efforts so that they can embark on an adventure abroad or an international experience at home. These considerations formed the starting point for the development of the MAPS pilot project.

### 3 Concept Development

Based on the challenges outlined above, the MAPS project was developed with the aim of offering an internationalized teacher education at the University of Vechta that takes into account the specifics of teacher education in Lower Saxony and the particular target group of students at a small university in a rural area. The activities should primarily be aimed at students in elementary school teacher education, as the authors believe that they are a particularly difficult group to reach with internationalization offers. Low-threshold learning opportunities should be developed that enable students to gain international experience in a structured way, to acquire intercultural, linguistic and subject-specific skills through different formats, and to make the international dimension and its relevance more visible. In addition, cooperation in the area of teacher training should be institutionalized and expanded with suitable project partners. For this, the project is based on three pillars:

- Pillar 1: The structural integration of a stay abroad into the teacher education curriculum by means of an internationally perspectivized Projektband.
- Pillar 2: The institutionalization of a 14-day summer school in the interdisciplinary profile area in the form of a Module.
- Pillar 3: The expansion of cooperation between the Universities of Vechta (DE), Tallinn University (EE) and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano (IT).

#### 3.1 Structural Integration of the Stay Abroad

The internationalization of the Projektband seemed a promising approach from the authors' point of view. This was to be achieved by linking a possible stay abroad in the third semester with the educational seminar accompanying the Projektband and thus embedding it in the curriculum. In order to internationalize the content of the seminar, the research topics should be related to the compulsory school system and include multilingualism, diversity-sensitive pedagogy, social inequality and global learning. In the first semester, an internationally comparative research question is developed, which will then be worked on in the practical block (2nd semester) and completed during the stay abroad (3rd semester) – digitally accompanied (see Figure 1). Research design, data collection, analysis, interpretation and classification of results will be developed in the seminar.

Since student teachers have to complete three additional compulsory modules in the third semester, the mobility window, in addition to the Projektband, it seems necessary to cooperate with partner universities where students have the opportunity to take modules similar to those they would have to complete in the third semester in Vechta

(e. g. school development, teaching and learning in elementary schools, and inclusion) in order to increase the attractiveness of a stay abroad. This is intended to facilitate the recognition of coursework completed abroad and to dispel concerns about a longer duration of study (Middendorff et al., 2016, p. 21). The fact that the fourth compulsory module is an elective module from the interdisciplinary profile area is an additional incentive for study abroad. If it is completed abroad, it can be credited with 5 CP, which reduces the workload in the third semester from 20 ECTS to 15 ECTS. At the same time, it can be counted towards the Intercultural Competence Certificate mentioned above. In order to meet the challenges outlined with regard to the student body in Vechta, it also makes sense to look for partner universities for the stay abroad that are similar in size and general conditions to the home university and are easily accessible within Europe.

Therefore, the University of Tallinn and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano were considered for a project partnership. Both universities meet the aforementioned requirements and are known for their strong teacher education programs. There is great expertise in digital technologies and school development at the University of Tallinn. This is particularly beneficial for students who wish to develop their skills in these areas. The Free University of Bozen-Bolzano offers a specialized Master's degree in Elementary Education with a special focus on Inclusive Education. This program offers students the unique opportunity to design their academic profile according to their interests and career goals. In addition, both universities offer modules with qualification profiles that are closely aligned with the three modules mentioned in Vechta. This alignment ensures a coherent and complementary learning experience for students at these institutions. An additional incentive is that the language of instruction at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano is German. This linguistic feature opens up opportunities for students without advanced foreign language skills to participate in a semester abroad. It is worth noting that existing Erasmus+ agreements already facilitate smooth cooperation between the aforementioned partner universities and the University of Vechta.

In order to minimize financial concerns, scholarships for the 5-month stay abroad should be awarded by the DAAD. In addition, all scholarship holders should be given the opportunity to prepare themselves linguistically for their stay abroad and to participate in intercultural training, also in order to collect these partial credits for the certificate "Intercultural Competence" (cf. also Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology).

### **3.2 International Summer School for Teacher Education**

The second pillar of the project involves the introduction of an annual, two-week English-language "Summer School for Teacher education" at the University of Vechta. This program is designed to be offered as a curricular module, firmly anchored in the profile area of the participating partner universities. In line with the goal of internationalization at home, the summer school aims to provide students, including those who do not plan a longer stay abroad, with the opportunity to engage in a low-threshold exchange with student teachers from different countries. This experience will enable

them to acquire professional, intercultural and language skills. The condensed format of the summer school is strategically scheduled outside the lecture-free period of all participating universities. This scheduling minimizes overlap with other courses and exams and ensures optimal participation.

To ensure a rich and diverse curriculum, the module is designed collaboratively by faculty from different partner universities, incorporating a wide range of perspectives. Each year, a minimum of five students from participating partner universities will be encouraged to enroll. Financial support for their stay will be provided by the DAAD.

In terms of content, the module will cover various professionally relevant topics in elementary teacher education, with a particular focus on cross-cutting issues such as inclusion, diversity and internationalization.

### **3.3 Steering Group**

In order to institutionalize and expand the cooperation in teacher education between the stakeholders of the University of Vechta, the University of Tallinn and the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, a steering group consisting of students, lecturers and an administrative staff will be formed. This group will be tasked with developing initiatives for the internationalization of teacher education at the participating universities. The role of the steering group is to ensure the continuous development of internationalization in line with student needs and university conditions. Regular bi-annual digital meetings will facilitate this coordination. The steering group will continue throughout the duration of the project, monitoring the development of cooperation and planning new joint activities.

In order to underline the international dimension of teacher education at the University of Vechta and to strengthen its importance, special guidance and information materials will be provided. These materials will assure an insight into the project's objectives, activities, available modules at the partner universities, recognition opportunities, and key contacts.

## **4 Experiences**

In the first project year 2021, a project website was set up to raise awareness of the project and its activities. As part of the International Week at the University of Vechta, information events on the study abroad program were held annually onwards, which were more or less well attended. In addition to announcing the scholarships on the bulletin board of the university and in newsletters and presenting the teaching modules, leaflets, information videos and posts on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram were made available about the scholarships abroad and the summer school. These videos were published on the MAPS website and on social media. The number of clicks shows that only a manageable group of people were reached (< 200). The personal promotion of the summer school at the partner universities, on the other hand, proved to be a valuable measure. It has increased the number of people interested in the summer school.

In addition, information about mobility opportunities and internationalization activities as well as the importance of internationalization for teaching in heterogeneous classes is regularly provided in various introductory courses. Overall, a large number of students have been reached as a result.

#### **4.1 Experiences With the Study Program Abroad and Accompanying Seminar**

For the winter semester 2021/22, a module description for the internationally oriented educational science seminar of the project band was created and successfully integrated into the regular curriculum. The seminar was specifically advertised as an internationally oriented course and met with interest in the first round with a total of nine participants, including three MAPS scholarship holders who had applied for a stay abroad. The participants rated the professional added value of internationalization as particularly high. The project reports of the three students who completed a stay abroad during the seminar showed a successful analysis of discrimination and inequality in schools and teaching from a comparative perspective of the Italian and German education systems.

However, despite intensive advertising of the project and publicizing the scholarships through various channels, only four students applied for the five scholarships advertised for the five-month stay abroad at one of the two partner universities. The applicants showed an increased interest in studying at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano, with German as the language of instruction and an interest in the Italian way of life cited in the oral interviews and application forms as decisive criteria for choosing the FU Bozen-Bolzano. In summer 2022, five students applied, but even in the second cohort only three scholarships could be awarded – two to the University of Bozen-Bolzano and one to the University of Tallinn. A further scholarship for the University of Tallinn could only be awarded after a third call for applications. Here, personal discussions revealed that the language of instruction, English, was perceived as an obstacle.

The selection of modules that can be studied abroad was rated positively by the students, even if the recognition process proved to be more difficult than expected. This was due to last-minute curriculum changes in the Master of Education program at the University of Vechta and at the partner universities, which meant that different modules than had been planned had to be selected abroad. It also became apparent that many university lecturers were not sufficiently familiar with the basics of recognition practice in the European Higher Education Area, which led to a greater need for communication than assumed before the start of the project. It also became clear that students who did not follow the study plan had difficulties completing recognized modules.

Nevertheless, the experience reports of the first cohort, who completed their stay abroad in the winter semester 2022/2023, show that the personal benefits of studying abroad outweigh the additional organizational effort. The support provided by the lecturers was rated very positively.

### 4.2 Experiences with the Summer School

As already indicated in the previous chapter, a module and its description, entitled “Teaching and learning at elementary school from an international perspective” was developed in collaboration with lecturers from all partner universities. It was included in the compulsory elective program of all three universities in the winter semester 2021/22. The module consists of three seminars with changing thematic focuses, so that different priorities can be set depending on the availability of lecturers. As can be seen in the diagram, the program consists of various optional and compulsory elements (see Figure 2).

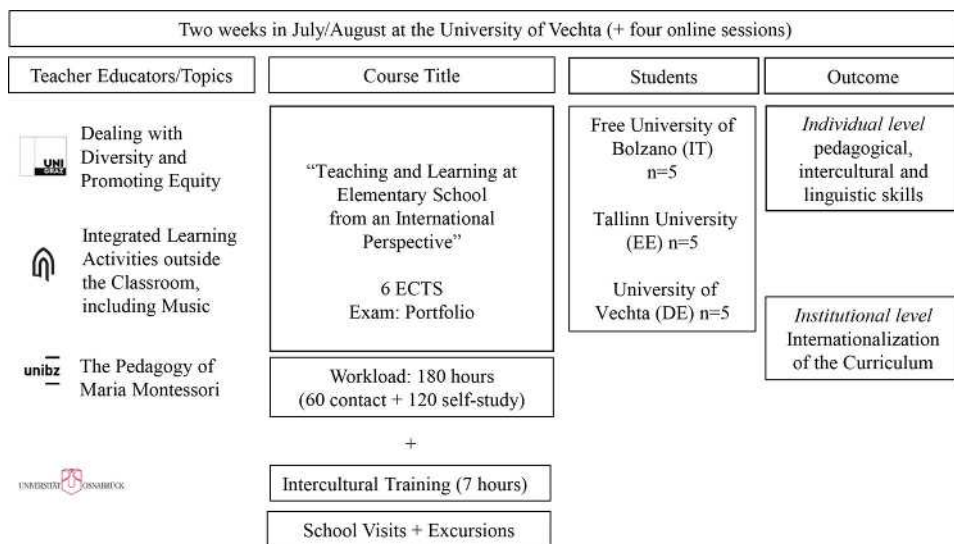


Figure 2: International Summer School of Teacher Education at the University of Vechta

The first round of the summer school took place in the first half of August 2022. The second round took place in the second half of August 2023. At the first summer school in August 2022, 5 Estonian and 2 Italian students were taught by international guest lecturers from Austria, Italy and Estonia. The second round in 2023 was attended by 5 Italian and 5 Estonian students. In 2022 (and 2023), 16 German students each registered for the summer school at the University of Vechta, but only a limited number of them took part (2 in 2022, 5 in 2023).

In order to find out the reasons for the high drop-out rate among German students, the students who backed out were politely asked via email to explain their reasons: some German students stated that they “had expected the summer school to be less demanding”. Overall, however, the reasons remained hidden from us. The higher participation of Italian students in the second summer school in 2023 is mostly due to an intensive introductory event in Italy in March 2023, where a lot of time was spent informing students about the summer school.

In order to systematically assess the experiences of summer school participants, an adapted questionnaire from the “EduSaPMan” project (2017) was used, with additional questions included. Each section, covering reasons for participation, organization, content quality, lecturer competence, practical work, excursions, student contributions and reported learning gains, showed high internal consistency ( $\alpha$  between 0.87 and 0.94). The response options for the EduSaPMan project questions used a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), while other questions used a four-point Likert scale.

The following analysis is based on the responses of the first cohort of students ( $n = 9$ ).

The overall organization, different seminars, variety of lecturers, time management, recognition of the summer school in the university curriculum, workload, atmosphere and excursions were consistently rated as very good. With regard to the topics covered, the intercultural training stood out as particularly positive, fostering the participants’ willingness to change their perspective and embrace cultural differences. 56 % strongly agreed that their level of knowledge before attending the summer school was sufficient to understand the seminars. 67 % strongly agreed that their knowledge increased significantly after the summer school. A substantial 77 % felt much better prepared (23 % better) for future work in multicultural and multilingual classrooms. In particular, students reported feeling well prepared to “become a more open teacher” and “better understand what to do to be effective in the classroom”.

In addition, participants emphasized increased theoretical and practical knowledge “in dealing with a multicultural classroom” and “a better perception of different aspects of multicultural diversity and how to deal with different problems”. The summer school significantly increased confidence in language and communication skills through intercultural interactions. 55 % rated their growth in intercultural and language skills as high, 45 % as very high. Students expressed enthusiasm for meeting new people and interacting with others, and emphasized how intercultural encounters helped them accept different perspectives on the same topic. Overall, students found the program “very motivating and inspiring”. One student suggested that “there should be more initiatives like this in the future.”

### **4.3 Experiences with the Steering Group**

The steering group, established in 2021, has become a cornerstone of the MAPS project. It meets regularly, at least every six months, to discuss strategic aspects of the internationalization of teacher education. The project partners actively take on important coordination functions at their respective locations and ensure lean processes in the application and implementation of the various internationalization measures. Face-to-face and digital meetings have been important forums for collaboration and decision-making. The impact of the steering group goes far beyond the formal meetings. Individual members not only participated in the planning and implementation of the summer schools, but also served as guest lecturers. This dual involvement underscores the commitment of the group, which is not limited to formal meetings. This

collaborative approach has allowed for efficient decision-making and successful implementation of initiatives. As the steering group continues to achieve its goals and foster collaboration, its dynamic influence remains critical to the ongoing success and adaptability of the MAPS project. However, it is important to recognize that student participation in the activities of the steering group has been limited. Given the importance of the student perspective, future initiatives should include strategies to actively involve students in decision-making processes.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

In our view, the “MAPS” project (International Mobility in the Master’s Program in Primary Education) has successfully met the major challenges of internationalizing teacher education at the University of Vechta. By systematically overcoming structural barriers, such as those inherent in the Master’s structure in Lower Saxony, and taking into account the special needs of a specific target group – the Vechta students at a small, rural teacher training university – the project has taken decisive steps to better prepare students for the demands of a globalized world.

The students’ experiences have been consistently positive across all programs, with the short-term format of the summer school in particular proving to be a valuable strategy for a structured learning opportunity to develop professional, linguistic and intercultural competencies. On a positive note, the summer school has become a central component of teacher training at the participating universities and is attracting growing interest, which is reflected in extended cooperation with other institutions such as the Karl-Franzens University of Graz (AT). This suggests that a compact international offering can provide significant added value for the development of professional skills and is a low-threshold but effective way to prepare students for the challenges of a multicultural classroom. However, the sustainability of these experiences should be further researched.

Of particular importance for the future development of measures is the realization that personal introductions through information events lead to an increasing number of people interested in internationalization measures. This should be emphasized again, especially with regard to German applicants, as they are still difficult to reach, while experienced and international students participating in Erasmus programs or completing adaptation qualifications at the University of Vechta often show great openness and interest in formats such as the summer school. Further activities are needed in the future, e. g. holding the summer school at the partner universities in order to possibly increase the interest of German students in the short-term program.

Despite the overall low number of applications for the scholarships, it is noteworthy that, according to documents from the Master of Education Examination Board, which is responsible for recognition procedures, more and more students at the university have applied for recognition of academic achievements abroad in recent years.

This increasing demand underlines the impact of the MAPS project, even if it is certainly not possible to prove causal chains of effect. It shows that the increased communication and awareness of internationalization and recognition opportunities means that more students are taking advantage of the learning opportunities on offer. However, it also shows that certain hurdles only became apparent as a result of the increased demand, which now need to be addressed, such as changes in the curricula and teacher educators lack of knowledge about recognition procedures in the European Higher Education Area (cf. also Brück-Hübner & Nierste, 2024, in this anthology).

The exchange with the steering group was particularly important for the success of the project, which also demonstrates a positive approach to long-term institutional cooperation beyond the duration of the project. The close cooperation between the universities and the establishment of a steering group have helped to break down barriers and facilitate the exchange. However, it is important to ensure that recognition practices are continuously improved and that students' needs are at the center of attention.

Overall, the MAPS project shows that the internationalization of teacher education in general, and at small universities in rural regions in particular, is possible, but that it poses specific challenges. The development and implementation of measures must be closely aligned with the needs of students and the structural framework of teacher education. Continuous evaluation and adaptation of measures is crucial to ensure sustainable internationalization and to optimally prepare students for the demands of a globalized world.

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# **Inclusion-related Professionalization of Ongoing Elementary School Teachers – Collaborative and Bilingual Teaching of the Subject Inclusive Education in a Multilingual Border Region**

SIMONE SEITZ, HEIDRUN DEMO

## **Abstract**

This article provides the conceptualization of a bilingually (German/Italian) and collaboratively held lecture of Inclusive Education in the context of the elementary teacher study course (master's level) at the Free University of Bolzano/Italy where qualification for an inclusive educational practice is obligatory for all students. Teacher education in this culturally diverse region is structured multilingually (German, Italian, Ladin), but with much of the study being separated by language. In the presented concept of a collaboratively held lecture, students are therefore specifically brought into a bilingual exchange, encouraged to reflexively process the inclusion-related professional experiences acquired in the internships and the cultural boundedness of knowledge which we discuss it in the light of teachers' professionalization theory.

Keywords: elementary school, professionalization, inclusive education, Italy

## **Outline**

1. Teacher Education in Italy and the Province of Bozen-Bolzano
2. Inclusion-related Teachers' Qualification in a Multilingual Cross-cultural Region
3. References

## **1 Teacher Education in Italy and the Province of Bozen-Bolzano**

In this article we reflect on a bilingually held lecture at the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano, Italy. For a better understanding, we preface our considerations on university teaching with summary information on the educational system in Italy.

### 1.1 Elementary School and Early Education

The elementary school in Italy is part of an overall inclusive education system (for further reading in inclusive education see Müller, 2024, in this anthology). It comprises five years of schooling, follows on from kindergarten, and continues to the three-year middle school, all of which have also been attended by all children together since the 1970s (Pulyer & Stuppner, 2019; Ianes, Demo & Dell’Anna, 2020). Curricula apply to all children; in case of administrated as having “Special Educational Needs”, children receive an individual education plan, which is to be integrated as a hinge (Chiappetta Cajola, 2015) between individualization and commonality in elementary education. Within this frame, in the Autonomous Province of Bolzano the educational system is structured according to different languages of instruction. When a child enters each new educational level families decide whether s/he should attend a kindergarten/school having as educational language either German, Italian or Ladin. In each case the other language(s) – German and/or Italian – is/are taught as a subject in the sense of a second language.

### 1.2 Teachers’ Qualification for Elementary School and Kindergarten in an Inclusive Educational System

Compared internationally, in Italy an academic qualification for elementary school teaching was fully accredited quite late (1998). Since then, university education for elementary school teachers is uniformly regulated by the Ministry of Education in a five-year university master’s degree program. There is no preparatory service at the end of the program; instead, students must complete internships in kindergartens and elementary schools which are interlinked with the university courses during the five years (for further reading in elementary teacher education see Seifert, 2024, in this anthology).

The study program offers graduates the opportunity to work both in elementary schools and kindergartens. One of the obligatory educational goals of teacher education in Italy is an inclusively thinking and acting teacher (Lazzari & Balduzzi, 2014; Seitz, 2011). Consequently, the inclusive education perspective should be taken up in all study subjects and inclusion-related curricular components must therefore be taken by all students as a compulsory part of the study course.

### 1.3 Teachers’ Qualification for Elementary School and Kindergarten in a Multilingual Border Region

At the Faculty of Education of the University of Bozen/Bolzano, a multilingual and culturally diverse region, teaching is offered in four languages (German, Italian, English, Ladin). However, this is structured by, on the one hand, studying separately according to the chosen language, but at the same time making high language demands on all students (Mastello & Zanin, 2021). They must demonstrate high proficiency in German and Italian as well as in English, and study at least 30 ECTS in the respective second language and 15 ECTS in English (unibz, 2017). This solution is not without contradictions to the shaped by pluri-linguism and cultural hybridity life-situation of

students and the inclusive structure of the Italian educational system with the upcoming demands on dealing with diversity for teachers.

Graduates of the program again encounter ambivalences in their professional life because the majority of kindergartens and elementary schools are monolingually conceptualized whereas in a growing part of families at least two languages are spoken equally. Moreover, most other social subsectors are organized bi- or trilingually (administration, etc.) and proven bilingualism is a formal requirement for all higher qualified professions within the region.

Educational practice is this way characterized by a structure oriented towards difference along the language of instruction used at school; the language chosen by families in kindergarten and school for their children is *the* segregation feature in the province of Bolzano and ultimately represents a form of inclusive exclusion (Stichweh, 2013) within an inclusive educational system. At present, however, families often choose educational institutions for their child that do not correspond to the first language practiced in the family (Zinn, 2018). This is also reflected in the form of pronounced multilingual peer-cultural practices among children, which include not only German and Italian but also different dialects and other languages of origin, and thus overall run counter to the linguistically segregating organizational structure of educational institutions.

## 2 Inclusion-related Teachers' Qualification in a Multilingual Border Region

The considerations made imply specific tensions for the inclusion-related university qualification of teacher students at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano which will be discussed in depth in the following.

### 2.1 Inclusion-related Teachers' Qualification at the Free University of Bozen-Bolzano

Regarding qualification for an inclusive education system, it can be asked how aspects of inclusion and exclusion at kindergarten and school, including diversity-related ambivalences, can be taken up and productively dealt with in university teaching. A research-oriented university education aiming at a scientifically reflective habitus of professionally acting teachers (cf. Helsper, 2018) not only includes building up appropriate "knowing-how", but also reflexive processes, enabling a contextualization and reframing of inclusion-related experiences made (Seitz & Slodczyk, 2020). This is because students are encouraged to critically relate experience-based knowledge acquired in their practice at kindergartens or elementary schools and encounter requirements for professional socialization that are shaped by the respective organizational cultures to the knowledge acquired at the university.

For university teaching this also implies a critical-reflexive view of school/kindergarten cultures concerning societal diversity, multilingualism and social practices of

“doing difference” (Machold & Wienand, 2021). Concretely, the lecture “Inclusive Education” is therefore designed bilingually, in Italian and in German, and is offered jointly to all students enrolled for the different study courses in either Italian, German or Ladin. Students are brought into a multilingual exchange and are asked to reflect on experiences of inclusion and exclusion in their own educational biography as well as in their professional practice during their internships. In this way, cultural formations of linguistically different knowledge corpi and professional discourses as well as diverse educational biographical imprints are made accessible for reflection.

## 2.2 The Lecture “Inclusive Education”

The lecture “Inclusive Education” is placed in the 8<sup>th</sup> semester of the study course and is organized in three-hours teaching blocks, of which each session also includes short active work phases. Decision on topics, learning styles and assessment methods have been guided by three main ideas to foster a joint multilingual and critical reflection on aspects of inclusive education. First, meaningful topics that allow for a problem-oriented critical reflection of theoretical approaches, didactic models and educational practices conceived in different frames and discourses have been selected and are worked on by means of preparatory readings, short lectures and discussions in an internationally framed theoretical background. In concrete, this regards knowledge on the macro level of (different) educational systems, the societal function of educational institutions and on governance dynamics at the meso level of organizational development processes and organizational cultures, as well as the micro level of educational conceptualizations and action-guiding pedagogical and didactical orientations. For all these levels, fundamental notions for decision taking in professional actions, such as individualization and communality or support and assessment, have been addressed highlighting and discussing their origin in partly diverging knowledge corpi related with diverging educational systems. The idea is that distance taking from ways of thinking “taken for granted” (Scott, 2014), opens a meta-level from which the location-boundedness (Mannheim, 1952) of specific scientific positions and discourses can be made conscious. One example is the slightly divergent notions of the overarching considered important idea of antinomies between the theory of the “trilemma of inclusion”, developed in Germany (Boger 2023) and the concept of “speciality/normality”, developed in Italy (Ianes & Demo 2022), which enables critical theory-led reflections on knowledge generation in relation to national (and regional) policies and practices.

Second, the choice of learning styles, materials and assessment modes was guided by the awareness of working with a linguistically diverse group of student teachers. The challenge of creating an accessible learning environment has been tackled for example by putting into practice some principles of the Universal Design for Learning to simultaneously reduce possible learning barriers for students and become vivid examples of practicing inclusive teaching according to the theoretical notions presented in the lecture (Bartz et al., 2018; Demo & Ianes, 2021). Peer interaction as a means for intersubjective reflection – mirroring knowledge discourses within educational organizations – has been facilitated through learning methods that are strongly based on group work

(Knauf et al., 2018). Co-teaching allows translations and searching for language-equivalents as well as for multilingual approaches to the same or to similar concepts where students are always free to choose which language they use. Flipped learning has been implemented, by reading materials in changing languages given in advance and ensuring time during the lectures for peer-based reflection on them. Furthermore, students can choose the language and topic to be deepened in an individually written essay in preparation of the exam according to their preferences.

Third, a particular role during the lectures plays the analysis of (partly video-based) case-situations which open divergent interpretations and different options for action (for example, to link individualization and commonality), whereby changing observation perspectives are first adopted and then divergent written interpretations of the scene are reflected upon (Seitz & Hamacher, in press). This approach inspires discussions in small groups on possible educational strategies as well as the pedagogical and didactical orientations behind them which can then be related to the diverging experiences made during internships. This enables at the same time in-depth work in alternating languages, which also explicitly calls for a discourse on meanings of pedagogical and didactical situations and the negotiation of appropriate terms in the different languages. This way, strategies for collaboration in groups shaped by diversity but also for co-teaching are not only presented, but also personally experienced.

### 2.3 Conclusion and Perspectives

Summing up, the presented example is based on the assumption that deliberately constructed augmentation of diversity of the students' learning group and the contact with notions and concepts originated in diverse knowledge corpi can be seen as a motor for inclusion-related teachers' professionalization as they ask to rethink and analyze the – partly implicit – guiding principles and concepts of scientific knowledge as well as practices the university students are familiar with (Darling-Hammond, 2017). This way addressing ambivalences, tensions, and contradictions between the discourses from different contexts and related critical reflections activated in peer groups can also contribute to the formation of an inclusion-related scientifically reflective habitus of professionally acting teachers.

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# Elementary School Placements Worldwide: Austrian Student Teachers Engage with Linguistic and Cultural Diversity Through Hands-on Experience

SANDRA BELLET

## Abstract

In line with the *Higher Education Mobility and Internationalization Strategy 2020–2030* of the Austrian Ministry of Education, the Pädagogische Hochschule Vorarlberg (PHV), a university college of teacher education, has initiated the project *Elementary school placements worldwide*. The project gives students the opportunity to develop intercultural competences and teaching expertise through encounters with school systems and people from around the globe. The PHV thus responds to the demands of a globalized world with schools that reflect society and exhibit a high degree of cultural and linguistic diversity. The PHV has collaborated successfully with the Beit Berl College Laboratory School in Israel and the One World Foundation Free Education School in Sri Lanka. Student teachers report on the special experiences they have had and how much it has positively changed their skills and also their attitudes as teachers. At the same time, PHV faculty members who have served as mentors say the experience has broadened their horizons regarding teacher education, schools, and teaching practices worldwide. This article describes both collaborations and outlines a successful (research) project that was implemented and evaluated in Israel during the summer semester of 2022. As an outlook, the project *School from the Perspective of the Global North and South – Practical Experiences* is presented, with which the PHV will expand and further develop global teaching practice. The elementary school placements are co-funded by the European Commission's *Erasmus+ Programme, Learning Mobility for Individuals*.

Keywords: elementary school placements worldwide, global teaching practice

## Outline

1. Elementary School Placements Worldwide
2. School Placement: Beit Berl Lab School, Israel
3. School Placement: Free Education School, Sri Lanka
4. School from the Perspective of the Global North and South
5. Conclusion

## 1 Elementary School Placements Worldwide

In Austria, student teaching in schools is an integral part of the bachelor's program for elementary school teachers. The bachelor's program lasts eight semesters. After that, students can already be taken on in the school service and complete the master's program in two years part-time instead of one year full-time. Beginning in the 5<sup>th</sup> semester, student teachers complete a four-week teaching practice each semester as part of their studies and at the same time choose a focus area. In the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> semesters, the student teaching practice must be focus-specific and project-oriented. Depending on the focus area, it may also take place abroad. Hence, student teachers can apply for a school placement at the partner school in Israel or Sri Lanka. Starting in the 2024/25 academic year, the project will be expanded to include partner schools in Ghana, Uganda, Kenya, and Brazil. During the global teaching practice, PHV faculty members monitor students both online, providing feedback to lesson planning and commenting reflections on teaching, and on-site through classroom observations. The project aims to develop the student teachers' language awareness, language learning awareness, and general pedagogical, social, and transcultural (communicative) competences. For their future profession as teachers, it is essential to be able to consider the heterogeneity resulting from the wide variety of cultures and languages to which they are exposed when working with children and their parents. The two examples described here were carried out within the framework of the focus area *Panlinguistic Pedagogy in Primary Education* (Bellet, 2022). It is characterized by a combination of modules in the field of language awareness with all its cognitive, emotional and social dimensions as well as language learning awareness and TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages).

## 2 School Placement: Beit Berl Lab School, Israel

The PHV has collaborated with the Beit Berl College in Kfar Saba, Israel in various joint teaching projects, including online (Bellet, Ilg, Zeppetbauer, 2021) for several years. Part of this collaboration is the exchange of student teachers to and from Israel. In the winter semester of 2022, two PHV students completed a four-week school placement at the Laboratory School of Beit Berl College. As part of their school placement, they developed a so-called *Mehrsprachiges Lesetheater* (MELT, Multilingual Reader's Theater) and implemented it as a school practice project with a class of Israeli fifth graders. The MELT method is an innovative, cross-linguistic, and cross-curricular phonetic reading method to promote reading fluency and reading motivation in the languages taught in schools (Kutzelmann, Massler, Hendel, 2017). The core of MELT is a multilingual dramatized read-aloud text based on a narrative in which the languages promoted at school (language of instruction and foreign languages) appear simultaneously. In addition, migrant languages (children's family languages such as e. g. Russian) can be included. In MELT classes, students work in groups and rehearse a scene

from the play, with the goal of being able to read it aloud fluently and expressively in several languages. The use of different languages promotes an aspect of language awareness, namely appreciation and openness to other languages, a goal that has often been excluded in foreign language teaching in the past (Hallet, 2015). The school practice project was monitored by PHV faculty members and evaluated immediately after the completion of the nine teaching units by means of questionnaires for both the student teachers carrying out the project and the students. In addition, the student teachers continuously recorded their personal reflections on the individual process steps throughout the project, which were also evaluated (Ilg & Bellet, 2023). It could be shown that the school practice project MELT described here was successful in several respects. Positive effects can be reported for the student teachers who carried out the project, for the participating 5<sup>th</sup> graders and for the partner institutions. The student teachers were introduced to an action-oriented (Germain-Rutherford, 2021) and innovative teaching method that uses stories to connect with the children's world and enables authentic and cooperative language learning. During the implementation of the project, they were forced to react flexibly to the challenges posed by the linguistically and culturally diverse setting, and they did so successfully. As a result of the school practice project, they were able to enhance their pedagogical, linguistic, and teaching competencies. Finally, it should be emphasized that collaborations such as this one with partner universities around the world can contribute to the internationalization of teaching and research at both institutions. Not only for the student teachers, but also for the participating faculty members, the school practice project described here provided an opportunity for a change of perspective and for the expansion of intercultural and professional competences (see also Redecker, 2024, in this anthology).

### 3 School Placement: Free Education School, Sri Lanka

For the past six years, up to six student teachers per year have completed a four-week school placement at the Free Education School in Sri Lanka. Together with the Ayurveda Guesthouse & Resort and the Art and Literature Program, the school forms the three pillars of the One World Foundation, which supports educational projects in Sri Lanka. The school is located in the small rural town of Ahungalla on the southwest coast of Sri Lanka and provides free education to local families for their children (free education is not yet available to all) as well as vocational training to adults. Especially in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) for students between the ages of 6 and 18, the school needs well-trained teachers who can also support the local classroom teachers in a train-the-trainer approach. Developing communication skills is a primary objective for young learners. This is essential for their future career goals in the emerging, internationally focused state of Sri Lanka and aligns with the Sri Lankan government's *General Education Sector Development Plan* (2020, p. 24). However, students often lack adequate role models for practicing proper English pronunciation. Most elementary school teachers are not fully qualified to teach English, which can result in

limited vocabulary and incorrect pronunciation that hinder children's progress in learning English (Indrarathne & McCulloch, 2022). The main objective of the school placements therefore is to improve the English language proficiency of both the students and teachers. Cultural exchange and innovative teaching methods with motivating, action-oriented units are necessary for achieving this goal, and the school provides numerous opportunities for a variety of teaching activities. These help PHV student teachers to enhance their teaching skills while developing a global mindset. The following two quotes extracted from students' reflective papers after their school placement provide a glimpse into some of their learning outcomes:

"All in all, we left the Free Education School with a suitcase full of positive impressions, wonderful experiences, warm encounters and confidence in our own qualifications as teachers". (Annalena, 2020)

"The experience we had with the language barrier showed us the problems caused by communication difficulties and made us aware of how difficult it is for speakers of migrant languages when they do not speak the language of the majority". (Sophia, 2022)

## 4 School From the Perspective of the Global North and South

As mentioned above, an important part of PHV's internationalization strategy is to expand global teaching practice to allow more student teachers to complete their student teaching in the Global South (beyond Sri Lanka). To this end, PHV will expand its school placements to Sub-Saharan-Africa and South America and, starting in the academic year 2023/24, will establish school placements with schools in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, and Brazil. At the same time, existing collaborations with Israel, the United States and Taiwan will continue. The project *School from the Perspective of the Global North and South – Practical Experiences* aims to sensitize student teachers to the differences between education in Austria, Israel, the U.S, and Taiwan compared to Sub-Saharan Africa, Brazil, and Sri Lanka. Among other things (e. g. culturally conditioned value of education) they should be able to recognize how different financial resources affect educational opportunities and equity. The results will then be reflected, discussed and scientifically treated in the above-mentioned focus area courses with the student teachers at home.

The project was developed during the *Africa UniNet* and *Erasmus+ Cooperation Seminar* in Kenya in October 2022 and discussed with representatives from universities in Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda. Subsequently, the concept was reviewed with the respective universities via video conference and was positively evaluated by all partners. It was agreed that starting in the academic year 2023/24, students will be able to complete a four-week school placement at the other partners' laboratory schools. After the successful agreement, a university in South America was sought that would also train student teachers and support the demand for educational equity. The Universidade Fed-

eral Fluminense (UFF) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil meets these criteria and trains teachers who will work not only in private schools, but also in public schools. The Brazilian school system is characterized by great inequality. While graduates of private schools perform comparably to students from the Global North, public schools lack both financial and human resources. For example, English is not taught in public schools. Yet English language skills are important for integration into the labor market. Schools in the catchment areas of favelas (Brazilian slums) pose a particular challenge. Students often attend school only for the free lunch and leave immediately after. The UFF sends its student teachers to two of these schools for after-school activities to keep the students in school longer and give them a perspective outside the favelas. This is where the global teaching practice project comes in, and the PHV, in collaboration with the UFF, sends student teachers to these schools for a school placement. The student teachers assist the teachers during the morning classes and team teach short sport or art classes in English with the Brazilian student teachers in the afternoon. In this way, the children learn English through the *Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)* approach, a very successful method in foreign language teaching.

In addition to the PHV's student teachers doing their student teaching in Africa and Brazil, this project will also bring student teachers and faculty from Africa and Brazil to Austria. Students who, for various reasons, are not able to do their student teaching abroad will be able to interact with their colleagues from Africa and Brazil through team teaching in the PHV's laboratory school and by attending courses together.

## 5 Conclusion

Three of PHV's global school practice projects were presented with the aim of preparing student teachers for the 21st century. The collaboration with Beit Berl College enables student teachers to develop their professional and personal skills for teaching in today's multilingual and multicultural classrooms. Israel, historically characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity, is an ideal place for student teachers to try out and evaluate multilingual teaching methods in an authentic school setting. The school practice project at the Free Education School in Sri Lanka sensitizes students to the divergent value of education in today's globalized world and makes them aware that free access to education cannot be taken for granted. Finally, the project *School from the Perspective of the Global North and South – Practical Experiences* presented as an outlook takes up the above-mentioned themes and extends the possibilities of school practice to the regions of Sub-Saharan Africa and Brazil. By working together in diverse school settings, student teachers, teachers, and university faculty from around the world can learn from each other and broaden their perspectives on education in the context of cultural and linguistic diversity.

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# Discussing Transcultural Trainings in Video Conferences: Digital Teacher Education for an Inclusive World

ANKE REDECKER

## Abstract

Transcultural trainings offer the possibility to reflect societal biases, discrimination and privileges, domination and prejudice as well as discourses that provoke and establish, de-construct and transform practices of a harmful recognition. Discussing these practices is essential to improve *Bildung* as a practice of critical judging – especially in courses of teacher education, where prospective experts should be encouraged to feel and arise awareness of problems and chances in diversity education with the aim of building an inclusive society, supported by dialogic didactics. By problematizing transcultural trainings in video conferences they can profit from reflective distance by digitality without neglecting empathy and role-taking, looking at ambiguities of enabling and dominating online-relations in analogy to societal biases, especially those children and youngsters who suffer from stigmatization and self-fulfilling prophecies by teachers and peers.

Keywords: digital teacher education, transcultural training, video conference, anti-discrimination, dialogic didactics, inclusion

## Outline

1. Reasons, Goals and Theoretical Backgrounds of Transcultural Trainings
2. Paradigmatic Approaches to Reflection and Role-Taking
3. Dialogic Relevance of Distance Learning and Teaching in and beyond Video Conferences
4. Discussing Transcultural Trainings in Online Meetings
5. Critical Cocreation for an Inclusive World: Retrospect and Outlook

## 1 Reasons, Goals and Theoretical Backgrounds of Transcultural Trainings

Transculturality and transnationalization are more than ever relevant topics. With Wolfgang Welsch (2020) we can stress that there have never been strict cultural separations between social groups. Human beings have always migrated and been influenced by foreign cultures. In recent times, national and cultural borders have been ques-

tioned and increasingly overcome. There are more migration and travelling, communication via internet, worldwide markets and social communities. While in ancient times Johann Gottfried Herder (1967) thought of cultures as closed entities, Wolfgang Welsch overcomes this description, which he calls a *multicultural* one, with a *transcultural* concept, stressing that all human beings have a kind of patchwork identity, influenced by manifold cultural aspects, that are often merged and interwoven. We live in a globalized world, where local affairs can have global effects and vice versa. Thus, transculturality and transnationalization are important issues in all fields of education to engage in a sustainable, just and responsible future society. Especially multipliers like students in teacher education, who do not only care for their own way of dealing with human diversity, but should encourage learners to reflect and shape cultural interrelations, have to be sensitized for related chances and challenges in this field of interest.

If we ask how human beings behave and should shape transcultural interactions, we can refer to a recognition theory that highlights our vulnerability and responsibility as social actors (Honneth, 2020; Stojanov, 2019). Addressing others, we can help or harm them – both often at once. Harm can mean ignorance, open discrimination or stigmatization by suppressive hierarchies (Hormel & Scherr, 2009; Mecheril & Vorenk, 2014), as we can find in colonial discourses, labeling the so called underprivileged as low developed and uncivilized. Postcolonial approaches criticize these ways of addressing and characterize them as a matter of powerful discourses.

“A discourse is a group of statements which provide a language for talking about—i.e., a way of representing—a particular kind of knowledge about a topic. When statements about a topic are made within a particular discourse, the discourse makes it possible to construct the topic in a certain way. It also limits the other ways in which the topic can be constructed.” (Hall, 2019, p. 155)

The way cultural diversity is established and dealt with – even in schools and teacher education – is constructed in relations of recognition. “The language (discourse) has real effects in practice: the description becomes ‘true’” (Hall, 2019, p. 157). This does not only concern transculturality, but also its intersectional relations. Addressing somebody as a human being with migration background (and/or as man/woman/queer, disabled person etc.) can be a powerful attribution which constructs and deepens the gap between privileged and underprivileged. To shape future acts of transcultural recognition we can de-construct these acts to see how people are addressed by discourses: “Of course, this process of being formed is neither a single story nor a single sequence, because we are educated through various means, and in various stages, and sometimes we have to undo our education, unlearn what we have learned.” (Butler, 2012, p. 18)

This is a matter of *Bildung* that can be discussed in manifold contexts of inclusion (see also Vogt et al., 2024, in this anthology). *Bildung* can be seen as a critical education questioning attitudes and practices. While we learn in manifold ways, for example unconsciously, by conditioning or mere internalization, *Bildung* is based on reflection (Kant, 1971) and can be established to put oneself into sensible and responsible relation

to others, the other and oneself (Humboldt, 1960). Learners do not only have the task to understand learning topics and their contexts, but should also learn to judge on them, making use of several scientific approaches such as the ethical, sociological or political. Acknowledging the learning subject as a person with dignity, teachers have to support their learners' education by encouraging them to question power relations in transcultural scenarios and to shape future relations responsibly with the aim of building an inclusive world. This also affords acts of self-reflection – not only those of learners in school, but also critical self-awareness of (prospective) teachers (Redecker, 2020b), who have to question their attitudes, positions, and practices.

## 2 Paradigmatic Approaches of Reflection and Role-Taking

Dealing with transcultural trainings (Leiprecht & Lang, 2001; Pates et al. 2010; Foitzik et al., 2019; Redecker, 2023b) can be an essential approach to realize and reflect power relations, their conditions, backgrounds and effects with the aim of questioning them critically, finding one's own position and a suitable way to deal with them. This can be exemplified by the training "One step forward" (Grawan, 2019). In online courses, this training can be discussed by students in teacher education after watching a film that shows the training and its discussion by the training participants in the film. Beforehand, the training is explained and its aims are described: The training participants are instructed to answer questions that concern topics of social, economic and cultural (in-)justice. At the beginning they stand in one line. If they can answer the following question with 'yes', they go one step forward. Everybody has to choose the answer according to his/her own experiences. There is a pause before the next question to realize and reflect where everybody stands and how this feels. Possible questions can be:

- Do you feel safe outside in your quarter at night?
- Is it easy for you to find a new flat?
- Do you always have enough money?
- Do you feel comfortable, if you are with your partner/friend in public?
- Was it ever necessary to support your parents economically?
- Is it easy for you to find a job?
- Can you confirm that you never suffered from discrimination or ignorance?

After the training the participants come together and discuss what they have experienced during the training and how they want to comment this. The trainer, who leads the discussion, has prepared open questions to support the interaction, e. g.:

- How does it feel to stand in front/at the back?
- What can be the reasons to stand there?
- How can we shape chances and challenges related to that?
- What can we influence, what not?
- How do we deal with social, economic and political difficulties?

Based on their own biography participants can realize that they are not only single subjects, but pre-determined by different forms of social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1983). They look at their privileges and disadvantages and those of other human beings, reflect alienness (Waldenfels, 2010; Lippitz 2003), powerful prejudices, but also possibilities of dealing with them, shaping a transcultural future between full autonomy and absolute determination. In facing an unknown future they can realize that they have to cope with this contingent scenario without giving up responsibility and reasonability, considering that they are able to influence their own economic, social and cultural capital and those of others.

Looking beyond the own horizon and highlighting empathy, a variation of the training can be realized. Now the participants do not answer the questions for themselves by going one step forward or standing still, but receive components of a fictional biography, for example a young refugee from a poor family or an old migrated woman with language problems. This way of role taking can help to reach a better relation between critical distance and emotional involvement enabling the participants to find helpful analogies, e. g. discussing the discrimination of a man with disability comparable to own experiences as migrated student. To a certain extend they can decide in how far they want to show and discuss the analogies and detect their own personal situation.

A reduced involvement with increased critical distance can especially be reached by not directly taking part in the training, but by watching a film that shows a certain group of training participants, their reactions and discussion. Those who watch the film are invited to start a meta-reflection. This can be established in digital teacher education using video conferences to discuss transcultural trainings. Before this is explained, the dialogic relevance of digital learning will be highlighted.

### **3 Dialogic Relevance of Distance Learning and Teaching in and beyond Video Conferences**

Digital learning in school and teacher education can provide many features that enrich regular offline methods (van Ackeren et al., 2017) and offer flexibility of place and time by mobile learning (Uther, 2019). Learners enjoy an enriched communication mix, combining different ways, styles, and methods of digital interaction, e. g. connecting wikis with e-portfolio strategies, using whiteboards and breakout rooms. During the Covid 19 pandemic teachers explored several forms of online learning and teaching. Some of them focused on drill and practice programs for single learners who were not encouraged to improve critical learning, but just trained to reach preconstructed goals and to be rewarded by gamification. These extrinsic motivated learners mostly are not encouraged to question the expected outcomes and rethink methods creatively (Redecker, 2020a). While cocreative learning processes are essential to establish a cooperative learning culture (Zierer, 2021; Vorstand DGfE Medienpädagogik, 2020; Allert & Asmussen, 2017) and critical orientation (Hofhues et al., 2014; Mayrberger, 2020; Redecker, 2022), children and youngsters missed impulses of their peers and teachers

during the pandemic (Joulaei & Zolfaghari, 2021). This shows that *Bildung* is based on social contacts.

We need other human beings who help us to learn something qualitatively new (Redecker, 2020d). Sometimes they see what we have not noticed and question what seems to be clear to us. We can discuss their impulses in video conferences as if we were together in presence (Clemens & Thibaut, 2020; Knaus, 2020; Wagner, 2020). In scenarios of physical, but not social distancing, video conferences offer regular meetings that can help to find daily routine, stability and clear structuring (of time and learning content) in a communicative atmosphere of face-to-face interaction (Goetz, 2021). Learners make use of several communication channels multisensually and simultaneously (Dickel, 2020). They can hear and see each other and profit from technical enrichment by cameras, microphones, loudspeakers and chats, offering choice, modification and combination of different communication styles and channels. Break-out rooms are opened to discuss in various groups and establish a concentrated learning atmosphere, because partner or group work in small formation can be realized without background sounds of the others.

These are essential preconditions to establish a learning and teaching culture of mutual problematizing, supported by dialogic didactics (Klieme, 2020). We need well-prepared (university) teachers empowering the critical learner. They can establish dialogic didactics to raise irritation and inconsistency, which are required to start and improve their students' processes of personality development (Meyer-Drawe, 2013; Redecker, 2023a) in showing them that digital education is more than digital learning. Dialogic didactics are based on open questions that can be discussed in the learning group, e. g.:

- What do you think about this?
- How do you justify this?
- What can be the next step in your/our learning process?

Students in teacher education who experience this kind of research orientated didactics at university become familiar with it and are prepared to handle it in their school practice. They can look at themselves and their learners as subjects of (critical) education and personality development, not merely as objects of internalization, training and drill-and-practice strategies (Redecker, 2020c). Learners debate different attitudes, wishes and interests, get used to review statements, discuss their own reasons and those of others and learn to take responsibility for their own position.

Video conferences can also be used to plan and develop cocreative e-portfolios or learning journals supporting the critical learner in interaction (Dickel, 2020). During the conferences as well as in accompanying activities on learning platforms, by chat and mail, students can also learn to cope with challenges of online communication and research. Suffering from the *stress of always on* and *anytime anywhere* they may feel observed and dominated by algorithms, teachers, and other learners who watch their activities on learning platforms (Allert & Asmussen, 2017; Redecker, 2020c) and currently seem to expect answers to their mails and posts. Preparing the conference students can

also suffer from an information overload. Researching in the world wide web they deal with vast amounts of information that have to be evaluated. What can we believe? And what is not trustworthy?

“A new responsibility seems to be upon us: to ensure that our learners have the opportunity to develop skills and literacies that are appropriate for deep learning from (or in spite of) the published but unfiltered information they are currently encountering.” (Wellburn & Eib, 2016, p. 70)

Students can learn to make decisions in scenarios of contingency and uncertainty and to use information carefully, because we often prove digital information without being certain enough of knowing and having an overview of all aspects of proving. Learners in teacher education can get used to coping with ambivalences and ambiguities of contingency and control, realizing that even their (future) learners have to withstand these scenarios, which is especially harmful for those suffering from cultural discrimination and learning deficits. Dialogic didactics establish a meta-communication in video conferences to discuss these pressures and challenges preparing (prospective) teachers for problematizing these scenarios and their power relations in schools.

Experiencing and problematizing these power relations (Redecker, 2020b) can sensitize learners for comparable situations in transcultural contexts where human beings are dominated and discriminated. This also concerns intersectional aspects, for example the relation of migration and poverty. In digital learning scenarios prospective teachers can realize that learners' economic status decides on their learning chances. If students cannot afford the adequate technical equipment, they are left behind (Hurrelmann & Dohmen, 2020). Digital learning scenarios can encourage students in teacher education to acknowledge the individual learner and the concrete learning situation.

## 4 Discussing Transcultural Trainings in Online Meetings

Modes of digital teacher education can be especially installed to problematize domination and discrimination in transcultural scenarios directly. Thus, transcultural trainings, for example “One step forward” (Grawan, 2019), can be discussed in video conferences after watching a film that presents the training and its reception by the training participants. While the questions discussed by the training participants of “One step forward” focus on biographical experiences, social circumstances and their backgrounds, further questions can especially aim at reflecting the video conference participants' role as (prospective) pedagogical experts in school education. Here the intended self-reflection refers especially to interactions with learners in school, possibly introduced by questions like:

- What could be special challenges for children and youngsters in this training?
- What does it mean to live in a transcultural world?
- What kind of global future do we want to establish?
- What can teachers do in contact with their students to improve educational justice?

In their discussions, students in teacher education focus on migrated youngsters, their challenges and problems, e.g. suffering from language problems and social withdrawal as underprivileged people, who can be excluded and discriminated by others, e.g. peers or teachers. While discussing these topics, communication rules are essential. For example, the participants acknowledge, that everybody has the right to finish one's comment, before the next participant starts to speak. They also realize that everybody can, but nobody must say something. These rules are not only essential for the ongoing discussions, they also prepare didactical approaches in the classroom, because participants in the video conference are trained to practice and discuss transcultural trainings with children and youngsters by reflecting these trainings in the online course. Realizing chances, challenges and ambiguities of online learning and teaching during the video conference, students of teacher education are also prepared for a future mode of (digital) schooling and learn to debate societal problems and chances in the as-if scenario of digitalized enriched discussion rooms in analogy to in-person scenarios. They exercise several ways of digital didactics with a dialogic orientation, forming focus groups in breakout rooms and training to lead group discussions.

Students of teacher education can realize that they have to handle processes of recognition responsibly looking at the possibility of discrimination by neglecting or highlighting specific aspects of diversity in a certain way. Looking at living conditions of their addressees they have to focus on adequate learning concepts and students' empowerment by encouraging their diverse addressees to stand up for equal rights. To enrich their discussions participants of the video conference can research, present and debate (passages of) scientific texts that can be related to discrimination in transcultural school education, e.g.:

"The main domain of cognitive (dis-)respect during childhood, it should be noted, is the school; moreover, as noted previously, children are also subject to social disregard in the school domain. When children are exposed to social disregard, they are liable to underestimate their abilities and to discount their own views and beliefs. Thus these children are ultimately unable to integrate these views and beliefs into their current life and this problem will persist into their future public life." (Stojanov, 2019, p. 334)

To reflect argumentations like these students in teacher education can question discriminative categorization, stigmatization and stereotyping by discourses in the field of pedagogy. They are also encouraged to reflect the power of self-fulfilling prophecies. Referring to PISA studies Stojanov (2019, pp. 333 f.) criticizes "a particular pattern of thought that is apparently widespread among school teachers in Germany. According to the pattern, the family socialization provided to every child, along with his or her 'acculturation', determines the child's cognitive potential". Stojanov points out:

"For example, several empirical surveys from Germany illustrate the point that teachers regularly evaluate children from immigrant families of lower social status as being eligible only for low-performance, nonacademic secondary schools without a college track. This holds true even if these children have achieved the same level of knowledge-related abili-



ties by the end of primary school as children from nonimmigrant families who receive college-track recommendations.” (Stojanov, 2019, p. 333)

Children from immigrant families may not be encouraged to show and improve their learning outcomes if they are not supported by engaged teachers. Discussing this, students in teacher education do not only reflect their own view and responsibility, but also the effects of organizational, political and societal relations as well as the fact that not everything that is called pedagogy supports learners’ *Bildung* which makes it necessary to establish critical reflection in schools and teacher education.

“Educational institutions are productive with regard to the symbolic positioning of pupils. These positions – for example, as ‘migrant’ or ‘non-migrant,’ or ‘verbally limited’ or ‘able to speak’ – must be understood as the effects of practices of societal distinction, which, both existing within and extending beyond educational fields such as school-teaching, are taken up and affirmed by pedagogy.” (Mecheril, 2018, p. 131)

In their discussions conference participants can go beyond the training “One step forward” and compare its potentials to those of other trainings. What is the didactic surplus of each training? And where are dangers and challenges? Can we see differences in the way a certain training is exercised and discussed by adults, youngsters or children? In this context the training “Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes” by Jane Elliot can be watched and discussed to focus its critical reception (Leiprecht & Lang, 2001). Jane Elliot encourages the training participants to reflect injustice and discrimination by converting the roles of a dominating societal group on the one hand and a suppressed group on the other hand. While blue-eyed human beings often are white privileged people, they suffer from discrimination during the training. The brown-eyed who are mostly black Afro-Americans receive preferred treatment. Leiprecht and Lang (2001) criticize a kind of authoritarian humanism that fosters what should be overcome: Not the structures of power relations are problematized and overcome by the training, but only the target group of discrimination changes in an unrealistic dichotomous social concept that neglects the complexity of transcultural societies.

This argumentation can be discussed in meta-reflective video conferences, problematizing multidimensional structures of power relations and finding future strategies for social responsibility in an inclusive society and its improvement by didactics and education (Swertz, 2021). Video conferences offer room for debate and exercise before students of teacher education act in practice, where they may harm children and youngsters because they are not yet professionals. Even in times of school practice similar video conferences can be established to watch and discuss transcultural trainings as an introduction into the mutual reflection of teaching practice concerning transcultural aspects. Through watching and discussing training situations students can be encouraged to problematize their own school practice.

## 5 Critical Reflection for an Inclusive World: Retrospect and Outlook

Transcultural trainings can be reflected to realize that dealing with diversity is a matter of power relations harming particularly children and youngsters who suffer from ignorance, discrimination and educational injustice. Thus, the discussion of transcultural trainings should be essential in teacher education supporting self-reflection, empathy and critical judgement, but also the awareness of contingency as well as educational, organizational, societal, and political entanglements.

In analogy to societal ambiguities learners can problematize ambivalences of digital domination and participation, autonomy and (stigmatizing) observation in online conferences offering technical creativity and freedom on the one hand and algorithmic supported surveillance on the other hand. Here learners should be encouraged to deal with the scenario in an empowered and resilient manner without neglecting uncertainty and limits of autonomy. Digitality and transculturality are essential future topics that can be combined to shape participatory learning scenarios in school and university, if learners are acknowledged as vulnerable persons with dignity. By gaining insight into the possible problems and prospects of – especially disadvantaged – learners in school, (prospective) teachers can try to find adequate ways to support them.

Video conferences offer the possibility of reflective distance and an as-if-room, where learning and teaching situations can be exercised, using digitality not to support a pseudo-cybernetic learning of mere internalization, but cocreative discussions in different social formations that encourage critical (meta-)reflection. Living in a world of discrepancies and conflict this can help to shape a human future and to encourage children and youngsters to realize this reasonably and responsibly.

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# Learning to See – The Mapping of Inclusion as a Tool for Internationalization of Teacher Education in the Area of Inclusion and Inclusivity

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## Abstract

This text starts with a paradoxical observation: While education has almost always been associated with the broadening of perspectives and, also geographical references, the aspect of internationalization only plays a fringe role in teacher education. As such, the very people responsible for eliciting transformative processes in learners and students are stripped of that very resource and experience. Therefore, this text as well as the project outlines (the Mapping of Inclusion, MoI) address this problem by presenting a possibility to enrich teacher education with international perspectives. The thematic focus is set on the field of inclusion and inclusivity as this area exhibits a large degree of thematic divergence depending on the cultural and geographical background. By employing mechanisms related to Open Educational Resources and Practices, the MoI provides students possibilities to engage with internationally-oriented contents but also partake in the endeavor of mapping the multiple and diverse understandings and realizations of inclusion.

Keywords: virtual internationalization, cartography, inclusion, student research, open educational resources, OER

## Outline

1. Internationalization, Teacher Education, and the Art of Seeing – Introduction
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3. Introducing the Mapping of Inclusion (MoI) Project
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5. Conclusion

„The only true voyage of discovery [...] would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes.”  
Marcel Proust, *La Prisonnière*

## 1 Internationalization, Teacher Education, and the Art of Seeing – Introduction

This text discusses the benefits of internationalization efforts in teacher education as well as a tool which may help to diversify teacher education in that regard. The necessity for doing this is rather surprising as the introductory quote by Marcel Proust is considered by many to be a truism: traveling and/or seeing different places is often assumed to correlate with a widened perspective as well as an open mind – a prerequisite for education. As such, educational endeavors and traveling appear to be a natural fit. In his considerations regarding *Bildung* (see also Redecker, 2024, in this anthology), Humboldt stresses the point that the entire endeavor is about the ascertainment and acquirement (*‘Erfassung und Aneignung’*) of the world (cf. Dörpinghaus, 2015, 467). On the same subject, Hegel argues that *Bildung* is about estrangement and atonement (*‘Entfremdung und Versöhnung’*) (cf. Sandkaulen, 2014) – perception, foreign elements, and transformation seem to go hand in hand. Therefore, unsurprisingly, the concept of the *Bildungsreise* (cf. Schäffer, 2000) tries to cater to the implicit promises of personal growth and a widening of the personal horizon through traveling.

The discussions briefly outlined above are not limited to the German discourse as Kottler (1998) first introduced the concept of *transformative travel*, which he considers to be a process of (self-)actualization of “something missing” initiated and powered by “intellectual curiosity, emotional need, or physical challenge” (Kottler, 1998, 26). The idea of transformative travel has been developed further and is regarded as the “result of a process that begins with some type of experience that does not fit within the boundaries of the traveler’s assumptions, expectations, worldviews, or cultural paradigms” (Robertson, 2002, 4). Hence, it ultimately elicits transformation and growth. As such, the idea of traveling has also globally found its way into schools and further educational arrangements as field trips, school trips, or the like and can be considered a common practice, which “help students play with concepts, activities often not possible in the classroom” and thereby make “[e]arlier course content suddenly [...] relevant as students assimilate and accommodate new understanding and cognition” (cf. Behrendt & Franklin, 2014, 236).

In line with these tentative observations, the process of learning and growth has been framed by developmental psychologist Jean Piaget (1975/1954) as an interplay between assimilation of new perceptual impulses and accommodation thereof in gradually more sophisticated conceptual structures. Following the Piagetian line of thought, development, learning, and growth always occur in relation to the perceived environment “and it should be noted that the Piagetian environment was an emergent property of exploratory behavior, rather than an objective given” (Peterson & Flanders, 2002, 433). Later psychological research has confirmed these insights and further argues that the cerebral structure responsible for memory and the retrieval thereof op-

erate like a cognitive or mental map (cf. O’Keefe 1990), in which structures of the map are consulted and either validated or revised depending on the corresponding experiences. Russian neuropsychologist E. N. Sokolov (1969) argued in similar fashion by claiming that the nervous system was primarily a malleable, internal mechanism trying to model the external world (cf. also Peterson & Flanders, 2002). Updates of the internal structures may occur through refinement of the existing model or by changing the “principles by which such information is handled, so that the process of regulation will prove more effective” (Sokolov 1969, 683) – “[t]he parallelism with Piaget’s thought is clear” (Peterson & Flanders, 2002, 434), yet this detour into psychological research also illustrates that the introductory quote by Marcel Proust is literally true. Depending on what human beings have seen and experienced, the mechanisms by which they perceive, understand, and incorporate these things alter – they, quite literally, see the world with different eyes. This even goes so far that some scholars argue that the very act of seeing is a mere reflection of a person’s goal structure as every ‘object’ could be perceived in an almost infinite amount of ways (cf. Medin & Aguilar, 1999).

So far, an interdisciplinary argument has been sketched out that diverse environments/inputs result in personal growth or – following the psychological lingua – in a more sophisticated mental map about the world. As such, it can be argued that a finer as well as more well-developed mental map should be considered a valuable resource for different reasons: Firstly, less surprises – mismatches between the map and reality – occur, which contributes to feelings of security, calmness, and well-being (cf. Hirsh, Mar & Peterson, 2012). Secondly, even when such surprises occur, the remaining structures (the ones not affected by the surprise/external shock) can be consulted to work a way around and ultimately integrate the anomaly into one’s structures. Given these benefits, it should be considered self-evident, that especially teachers require diverse inputs during their preparation and training. But instead, the academic as well as practical phases of teacher training appear to be very goal-directed (i. e. regarding the subjects/courses to study or skills to acquire) and, if any, barely incorporate aspects from outside the national school system as teacher training and schools in general (re-)produce a national primacy regarding their focus and outlook (cf. Neuhaus & Jacobsen, 2022). As such, teacher training strips itself of valuable resources, as alternative ways of seeing and thinking are actively excluded and the mental maps of teacher training graduates are not as sophisticated and far-reaching as they could be. The act and art of seeing schools and teaching from a widened perspective should be part of teacher training curriculums but somehow it is not. This lack of preparation can manifest itself in feelings of insecurity (cf. Dicke et al., 2016) as well as a lack of options at hand.

In the following, this chapter will present the *Mapping of Inclusion* (MoI) project (section 3) which addresses these shortcomings by providing a place and space to share and engage with student outputs from the field of inclusion. Prior to the presentation of the MoI, it will be argued that inclusion and internationalization require such a project by sketching out diverging understandings of inclusion from different regions and states (section 2). The MoI will also be connected to approaches of Open Education as well as Open Educational Resources (section 4). The chapter ends with a summary of key findings and results.



## 2 Seeing Inclusion Differently from an International Comparative Perspective

When it comes to challenges for education, inclusion is one of the main demands for proper teaching. Even though the claim itself might sound alike in many countries, the ways of how to realize practices of inclusion differ broadly amongst the global educational systems.

Looking at German developments from a diachronic perspective, it can be noted that the concept of inclusion has been in competition with the concept of integration for years; in this context, the demarcation was never clear. In some realms, both terms were used “synonymously” (translated from German: Hinz, 2002, see also Reiser, 2003). According to Hinz (2002), the term “integration” can be characterized by the following exemplary features: Children are classified along the “two groups theory (i. e. disabled/non-disabled)” (Hinz 2002, 11) and resources are provided “for children with disabilities” (Hinz, 2002, 12) (critical discussions by Biewer & Schütz 2016, 125). Another demarcation criterion between integration and inclusion was that in the integration discourse often the medical model – disability as an ontological construct rooted in medical conditions and diagnoses – was used. The inclusion discourse rather referred and refers to the social model; disability as the result of social arrangements which are not aligned with the needs of specific populations (cf. Biewer & Schütz, 2016, 125). However, these differences are not consistently pursued by scientists either; Heimlich’s (2015, 118) concept of integration, for example, also includes other dimensions such as cultural heterogeneity. It is precisely here that the weakness with regard to a semantic differentiation becomes apparent. Particularly “influential” in the discourse on integration is the definition of Feuser (1995) to which Heimlich (2015) refers, according to which integration is defined by the fact that “[...] all children and pupils play, learn and work in cooperation with each other at their respective developmental level [...] on and with a ‘common object’” (translated from German: Feuser, 1995, 173, after Heimlich, 2015, 118).

From an international-comparative perspective, it is striking that even in the European area, very different understandings of inclusion are rampant. The understandings partially disagree as well as interfere with developments in Germany. For example, Anastasiou, Kauffman, and Di Nuovo (cf. 2015, 3) note for Italy that the term “*integrazione scolastica*” is clearly more influential in the discourse than the concept of inclusion, even though there are efforts here to use the concept of inclusion more strongly. With regard to Sweden, Barow and Berhanu (2021, 6) conclude that no uniformized definition is currently available. The authors state that with the concept of integration there is an established predecessor in the field, which also has overlaps with the concept of inclusion (Barow, Persson & Allan, 2015, 199).

These preceding remarks about differences amongst the countries can serve as hints for variances and ambiguities of the concept of inclusion from a historical and synchronous comparative perspective. In view of the above-mentioned findings, the ambiguity of the concept of inclusion is widely discussed in the research literature:

Löser and Werning (2015, 17) refer to a “diffuseness of the concept of inclusion” (German: Diffusität) in the national and international discourse, Neuhaus, Pieper, and Schäffer-Trencsényi (2023) point to a “fuzzy concept” in view of the variances of the term. According to Biewer and Schütz (2016), the “English-language educational literature (...) often uses inclusion and ‘inclusive education’ synonymously” (translated from German: Biewer & Schütz 2016, 124). Furthermore, Biewer and Schütz (ibid. 124) state, referring to the English-language discourse, “The use of ‘inclusion’ is diverse and there is no single consensus definition. Often, ‘inclusion’ stands for a development process that leads to more educational rights for marginalized groups” (translated from German: Biewer & Schütz, 2016, 124).

### 3 Introducing the Mapping of Inclusion (MoI) Project

The previous sections highlighted the gaps with regard to the internationalization of teacher education. Furthermore, it was shown that a stronger contextualization of the inclusion discourse is of particular importance for (future) teachers (for further theoretical considerations of internationalization in context of inclusive teacher education see Müller, 2024, in this anthology). These challenges are addressed by the project ‘Mapping of Inclusion’ (MoI), which is theoretically based on a so-called “broad understanding of inclusion” (cf. Textor, 2018). It does not only consider the dimension ‘disability’, in contrast to the ‘narrow’ concept of inclusion, but also other dimensions that differentiate people, such as socioeconomic differences, gender, age, and cultural background (for discussion: Heimlich, 2015, 124; Hardy & Woodcock, 2014; Werning, 2014; Textor, 2018). This perspective avoids an analytical narrowing, is internationally connectable, and therefore necessary for an international-comparative research approach, and furthermore avoids stigmatization and discrimination due to a strict categorization into ‘healthy’ and ‘sick’. In this context, inclusion is understood more comprehensively than in its exclusive reference to school settings. In the generalization to inclusive education, we refer to Biewer (2010):

“Inclusive pedagogy refers to theories of education, upbringing and development that reject labels and classifications, take their starting point from the rights of vulnerable and marginalized people, advocate for their participation in all areas of life and aim at a structural change of regular institutions in order to meet the diversity of preconditions and needs of all users” (translated from German: Biewer, 2010, 193 after Biewer & Schütz, 2016, 125).

The project presented here takes the multiplicity of the inclusion concept seriously as it tries to provide a cartography of the different facets. Driven by a communal effort and tied back to higher education teaching settings, it attempts to integrate students into the decentral effort of mapping the different branches and ideas related to the *fuzzy* concept of inclusion.

The MoI was initiated in 2022 and has been funded by Bielefeld University within the framework of the ‘Qualitätsfond Lehre’. The aim of the project is the innovative extension of teaching-learning methods in the university context. The project is driven by the working group around Michaela Vogt from Bielefeld University<sup>1</sup>. It is initially focused on educational science topics, but the technical applications also offer further impulses that can be used outside the discipline’s boundaries.

Mentioning just some of the advantages of the project, it enables the participants to develop a broad and reflexive understanding of inclusion based on international insights and comparisons. Furthermore, the MoI also recognizes world regions in particular that have been neglected so far, such as the global South (Tröhler, 2023). To this end, students are also encouraged to overcome narrow geographical perspectives and look beyond Europe. Following the presentation of Weidemann (2010), we see the teaching project as a useful approach to promote intercultural learning (Bolten, 2010). Research in comparative education, for example, still shows a significant imbalance in favor of considering North America and Europe, although changes are increasingly taking place in these discourses as well (Tröhler, 2023). The idea of ‘Open Education’ which also recognizes the social responsibility of science for society, is also reflected in the fact that the products are published under creative common’s licenses. This also enables further work and updating of the products, that are made publicly available on an online platform based on ‘Taskcard’<sup>2</sup>. For describing the MoI on a practical level, the platform will in the following be described from two perspectives: From the perspective of the recipients and the product producers.

### The Mapping of Inclusion from the recipient perspective

For recipients, who want to gain high quality knowledge on inclusion, the platform shows a map of the world, where collected academic writings and presentations about inclusion and exclusion all over the globe are linked to the areas of the world. Each product – papers, presentations etc. – is represented by a pin on the world map. When clicking on one of these pins, further information about the academic products appears. Also, the products themselves can be downloaded as each product is published under creative commons licenses. As a measure for quality assurance, all of works have been reviewed by academics before being uploaded. In addition to the pins on the world map, project results can also be displayed by keyword search, that is based on several search categories: The first category includes the country reference, the second focuses on educational institutions, divided into kindergarten, elementary school, secondary school, vocational training, and higher education. A final categorization is ‘Society and community’, which includes contexts such as family, peers, leisure clubs, and business institutions.

The topics covered by academic products on the platform are thematically quite divergent: There are products about educational policy and inclusion in Canada and

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1 The working group around Michaela Vogt includes the research assistants: Marlene Pieper, Till Neuhaus, Mark Schäffer-Trencsényi and Christoph Bierschwale. At this point we would also like to thank the assistants Elora Sadiki, Magdalena Klaes and Michael Koppel for their active support.

2 Link to the webpage: <https://uni-bielefeld.taskcards.app/#/board/4505ad07-311a-4c38-b585-8121bc384124/view>

South Tyrol, but also about neo-institutionalist research on challenges in realizing inclusion. Additionally, a lot of selected facts about educational systems are present on the platform – not only from North American and European Context, but also, for example, from China and India.

### **The Mapping of Inclusion from the producer perspective**

Also, within the framework of the MoI, it is possible to switch sides and to become a producer – based on extensive guidelines and also, when needed, with personal assistance from the project team. This allows individual students as well as docents from different universities to refer to the MoI and to make their products (more) available to the public as well as to other academics and students. Assistance for the barrier-free creation of teaching and learning products as well as quality criteria, i. e. instructions on design, language, and scientific conventions, are provided on the platform<sup>3</sup>. In addition, a step by step instruction on how to upload a product published under creative commons licenses has been put online; accompanied by relevant documents and additional instructions for product producers. This step by step description gently guides the producers through the process of uploading their product properly for the review process and does not overwhelm them with too much information.

When it comes to the relevance of the MoI for different teaching and learning formats for teacher education, it can serve as platform and source in many ways. The tool in its current form can be integrated into any teacher training seminar that deals with the topics of inclusion and/or international-comparative educational research. In topic-related seminars, the MoI can be combined with different assessment formats, presentations, and group works. Either students are advised to do research on the platform and to analyze certain topic areas on the platform (perspective: recipients), or the students themselves create high quality products as researchers and authors (perspective: product producers). In addition, individual students can use the platform independently from teaching courses to share academic products they are especially proud of, for example bachelor's or master's thesis. Finally, the core idea of a thematically organized platform which enables pronounced searching activities as well as the possible to share self-produced products can also be used in different contexts and subjects. Lastly, the materials in the digital platforms can be used for meta-analysis.

### **Limitations and Hurdles of the Mapping of Inclusion**

Along with the benefits of the MoI come the challenges of the costs for the support and maintenance of the IT infrastructure. Also, the collection of academic products with an appropriate level regarding quality sometimes becomes difficult. Likewise, the recruitment of new docents for the expansion of the MoI – on the recipient as well as producer front – can be considered a viable challenge. Additionally, the products need to be supervised extensively and subjected to a quality check at the end, which requires personnel as well as time resources. Another huge area of challenges does come along with

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3 <https://www.uni-bielefeld.de/fakultaeten/erziehungswissenschaft/arbeitsgruppen/ag11/moi/>

dissemination and visibility of the platform, which incurs costs for advertising measures, such as workshops.

As steps of further developments, the platform will be fed with additional academic products about inclusion around the world. It also will be made completely available in English and will be disseminated amongst interested docents, researchers, and students for increased visibility. Another important aspect of the platform is its combination with the OER discourse and a reflection on creative commons licenses and their effects.

## 4 How to Engage Students in the MoI by Focusing on OER?

The MoI as a teaching concept links the mapping of international perspectives on inclusion with an infrastructure to actively engage with these perspectives. But how exactly can the MoI platform and procedures contribute to the goal of fostering *internationalization at home* for all of the students? The project is based on the supposition that such a learning experience cannot consist of the mere acquisition of inclusion-related information from other countries and school systems but needs to build on the active engagement with international bodies of knowledge. Therefore, the MoI returns to principles of Open Education to encourage these critical reflections. Open Education as a concept has impactful tools at its disposal to act as a vehicle to benefit internationalized teaching and learning experiences, especially in the digital realm. Due to the multiplicity of actors involved and practices created, Open Education cannot be precisely defined (cf. Cronin & MacLaren, 2018) since various interpretations and understandings are present in a widely diverse movement (Iiyoshi & Vijay Kumar, 2010). Identifying a key tenet of Open Education, however, Iiyoshi and Vijay Kumar agree on the idea that “*education can be improved by making educational assets visible and accessible and by harnessing the collective wisdom of a community of practice and reflection*” (2010, p. 2, emphasis in original). According to the Cape Town Open Education Declaration (2007) this is to be achieved by:

“creating, using, adapting and improving open educational resources; embracing educational practices built around collaboration, discovery and the creation of knowledge; and inviting peers and colleagues to get involved”.

The project in general already builds on these principles through its focus on student outputs, their contribution to an ever-growing open knowledge hub, and the referencing of each other. There are two levels on which the principles of Open Education promote the project’s goal.

First of all, Open Education enables internationalized teaching and learning on a *practical and technical level*. The idea of Open Educational Resources (OER) supports this notion. OER are “learning, teaching and research materials in any format and medium that reside in the public domain or are under copyright that have been released under an open license, that permit no-cost access, re-use, re-purpose, adaptation and

redistribution by others” (UNESCO, 2012 OER Declaration). Students contribute to the MoI as a knowledge hub by having their work published under an open license. Moreover, the idea of OER allows students to access products from their peers and process, modify or remix them (i. e. combine them with further openly licensed content). In this way, OER and the principles of Open Education are a key tool in enabling the discourse on inclusion in an international context to be anchored and sustained in teaching and learning settings. Openness in this sense is the foundation for collaboratively thinking about international perspectives on inclusion in teaching and learning. Furthermore, Open Education is to be understood as a contribution to the deeper educational process in the sense of *Bildung* (cf. Pieper, Neuhaus & Vogt, 2023). The MoI is not primarily to be considered as a repository or archive for students’ outputs, but rather as a teaching and learning concept for internationalized Higher Education. Thus, Open Education also functions as an impactful tool on a *conceptual level*.

As the focus is on the publication of student products, “learner-generated” (Hegarty, 2015, 9) contributions and thus the own creation of (educational) resources are at the center of the project. This is where the participatory element of Open Education is realized. We argue that *learner-centeredness* enables learners not only to process an established canon of knowledge about inclusion but encourages them to create space for their own reflection processes, especially when outputs are being created around individual interests. This approach is grouped around the idea of *knowledge creation*, which is a process parallel to knowledge consumption through which students “shape the public knowledge commons of which they are a part” (DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017). Given that Open Pedagogy – as a pedagogical perspective on Open Education – empowers learners “to shape the world as they encounter it” (ibid.), the MoI aims to become a basis for a deeply contextualized learning about inclusion in an international context and to initiate (self-)reflexive learning processes. By acknowledging that knowledge “is co-constructed, contextualized, cumulative, iterative, and recursive” (DeRosa & Jhangiani, 2017), the MoI explicitly invites *dialogic and connected* engagement with the content of other users and contributors.

Open Education contributes on a practical and conceptual level to the functioning of the MoI and creates a framework for Open Educational Practices, which can be defined as involving students in “active, constructive engagement with content, tools and services in the learning process, and promot[ing] learners’ self-management, creativity and working in teams” (Geser, 2007, OLCOS Roadmap 2012, p. 37).

## 5 Conclusion

The project outlined in this chapter addresses this shortcoming of current teacher training programs. The *Mapping of Inclusion* is an internationally-oriented project which can be incorporated into current teaching programs/courses and aims at widening the scope and horizon of future teachers – an *internationalization at home* so-to-speak – in the field of inclusion and inclusivity as this field (still) poses high demands

and is accompanied by an abundance of surprises. As such, the MoI's goal is to equip students with insights and approaches from around the globe regarding inclusive practices and theories. Thereby, the MoI does not just widen students' perspective on inclusion but also opens up alternative ways to see, think, and ultimately act differently in their teaching practice – as argued, this process is primarily driven by the provided inputs, ergo the *act and art of seeing*.

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# Projects of Internationalization in Context of the German Association *Lehrerinnen und Lehrer ohne Grenzen*: An Interview with Wiebke Enders

THOMAS BÜRGER, WIEBKE ENDERS

## Abstract

In recent decades, unidirectional development assistance has primarily focused on emergency relief, such as the immediate alleviation of hunger, thirst, and current dangers like floods, earthquakes, or war. Ensuring and delivering this aid is a significant achievement of global players in the field of development assistance. However, sustainable development cooperation, especially in the realm of basic education, has received insufficient attention (for basic consideration of sustainability in context of teacher education and internationalization see Buddeberg et al., 2024, in this anthology). This can be attributed, as this article also suggests, to the fact that donors are more easily inclined to support the mitigation of immediate crises than long-term and perhaps less media-worthy endeavors.

## Introduction

The organization *Teachers Without Borders* counters this trend by striving to implement sustainable projects that provide children and youth with access to basic education. Since the founding of the organization in 2021, it has managed to establish a variety of long-term, diverse, and personal networks in which education-oriented projects have been realized and financially supported. In such cases, the organization can act as a network facilitator and help turn abstract ideas into successful realities.

As the initiator, Ms. Enders, makes clear in the interview, a concrete and personal connection to people motivates students to get involved in the organization. Prospective teachers also gain a deeper insight into transcultural educational processes. The international perspective simultaneously raises awareness in a vivid way about the necessity of engaging with current educational issues in one's own country as well as international challenges. Students and teachers alike discover that educational work need not be confined to the classroom; rather, anyone can take the initiative to shape the world.

## The Interview

*Ms. Enders, 2021 you founded the organization “Teachers Without Borders”. What was the impetus for you to engage in this manner?*

According to UN estimates, currently more than 260 million children and adolescents lack access to basic education. This is a shocking figure resulting from decades of misunderstood development aid that underestimated the importance of educational opportunities. The consequences for these children and young people are catastrophic, with their lives marked by poverty, hunger, exploitation, and premature death. Giving education a voice, making it heard, was the original goal of the organization. This can only be achieved through a global network and concrete, tangible collaboration. Inspired by the example of “Doctors Without Borders”, it is about more than just providing financial support to educational institutions in developing and emerging countries; it’s about direct collaboration, taking into account the specific life and learning context.

We are facing immense global challenges, such as the impact of climate change. To address these challenges, we need the knowledge, creativity, and responsibility of all people – in short, the participation of everyone. If we cannot provide access to education for all children, they will not be able to shape or collectively implement tomorrow’s solutions. These global challenges are recurrent in the curricula of various disciplines in general education schools, framed by concepts like ESD (Education for Sustainable Development) or SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). However, while global issues are discussed in the school context, the reality is often excluded from the classroom. Yet, digital media holds great potential for this opportunity: to integrate the everyday lives of Kenyan students, for example, into the classroom and thus experience the effects of climate change with regard to water scarcity firsthand. This authenticity motivates a unique engagement with the topic, as it demonstrates global interconnectedness and leads to real collaboration. Based on my own experiences in educational aid projects worldwide and the observed impacts that can originate from classroom implementation, it was important to me to establish the organization.

*How did it all start in concrete terms?*

The association was founded on September 3, 2021. When choosing the name, we deliberately sought the analogy to “Doctors Without Borders” to clearly convey the orientation and objectives of the organization right in the name. While our organization’s name has become a bit more cumbersome due to gender sensitivity, this was important to us because educational poverty is predominantly a female issue and, consequently, equal opportunities for women and men are still far from reality in the 21st century. Since the idea of founding the organization had been maturing for some time, I had already established numerous contacts with educational aid projects worldwide in which I had been personally involved or which I had become aware of through organizations like Soroptimist or press reports. We reached out to these existing projects, and they were enthusiastic about the networking concept of the organization and the aggregation of our educational concerns. This is how our global network grew and continues to grow.

At the beginning, in addition to the organizational aspects of founding an association, our focus was on public outreach through digital media, including our website, as well as through in-person fundraising events, which built trust in our work through personal contact. We also began working on our first educational projects, such as a project with a Cameroonian school that focused on addressing colonial history, enabling a shift in perspective through collaboration between students from Cameroon and students from Hamburg. We also initiated the first construction projects, such as the construction of a new school building at the Sushrusa Deaf School in Bali. Of course, our communication structures had to grow and be optimized initially to ensure that the intended close contact with our network partners was successful.

Today, our global partners regularly come together in our board meetings. Here, we reflect on past projects, plan the deployment of volunteers on-site, and discuss future engagements.

#### *What were the initial goals?*

Naturally, we wanted to grow as quickly as possible, especially in terms of membership numbers. However, our enthusiasm didn't translate exponentially into membership applications. Attracting members has proven to be challenging to this day, even though we deliberately chose a low membership fee to attract as many members as possible – aiming for quantity to make education more audible.

It became evident that people are reluctant to make binding commitments and prefer to donate sporadically. The latter poses a challenge for us in terms of planning, as all our projects are designed for the long term. It has been and continues to be a crucial goal to have a sustainable presence in the educational context and, consequently, in society. In local educational projects, we achieve this through our own involvement in each respective country or through our volunteers who become aware of us through the name of the organization and also engage on-site. We also aim to anchor our mission in the awareness of (potential) donors, members, and in the didactic-methodical discourse, thus giving education a voice worldwide. A particular focus is on connecting schools and life contexts, making global learning authentic, concrete, and tangible.

#### *What changes have occurred in recent years?*

As the organization is still relatively young, we are also learning about optimal communication structures, improved public relations, and optimized project planning. Collaboration within the network requires a great deal of flexibility from all participants. The life context of people and, consequently, the framework for our educational engagement, are subject to various country-specific, socio-cultural realities, and often significant, sometimes very negative changes (e. g. Afghanistan). In these situations, it is crucial to respond to these changes in the best possible and sensitive way in the interest of the children and young people and to work together with all stakeholders to find solutions. One thing is clear: education cannot be seen as omnipotent but is conditioned by the life context of both educators and learners. We do not impose our Western ideas of

education and our didactic-methodological approaches on our network partners. Instead, we aim to provide impulses to develop the best possible educational approach through collaborative discourse – education is situational.

*How do specific project initiatives come about?*

In most cases, network partners approach us directly and report their needs. For example, our partner school in Afghanistan needed a stable power supply to use the digital learning environments we provided. For this specific purpose, we were able to generate donations to install a solar power system. Many project initiatives also result from collaboration between schools. In the “Water Resource” project, a science-focused class at the Wilhelmshaven Gymnasium wanted to consider the global issue of water and directly engaged with students from the “Little Angels” school in Mombasa. The testing kits required for a scientific discourse on water quality were donated to the school in Kenya. The results led to the joint development of a wastewater treatment plant, which was then implemented locally at the “Little Angels” school.

*How do you find staff for the project, both in Germany and abroad?*

Thanks to our organization’s name, contributors now reach out to us. Many students, trainee teachers, and educators from all federal states contact us and express their interest in getting involved in our projects abroad. We are happy to facilitate their participation because the involvement of volunteers on-site is crucial for raising awareness of the organization and for close collaboration with our project schools. Through coverage in blogs, press articles, radio interviews, social media, and so on, the organization’s work becomes visible. For the volunteers, it’s also an experience that underscores the importance of the learning context and, by looking beyond their own horizons, leads to an expanded understanding of their own profession. These experiences will undoubtedly contribute to fruitful didactic and methodological approaches in implementing curricular content with global significance. Abroad, it’s our partner schools that are part of our network through their engagement, and they collaboratively shape and accompany planned projects with their staff.

*To what extent can students benefit from engaging with this for their own beginning professionalization, which begins with studying to be a teacher?*

Engaging in international projects, as supported by the organization “Teachers Without Borders,” broadens students’ perspectives on their own profession in many ways. For me, it’s crucial that students understand teaching and learning as situational and context-dependent. This supports reflection and evaluation processes in their own professional daily lives and the continuous individual professional development demanded by the profession. Experiencing global issues in their complexity and worldwide scope with all my senses, such as the water issue, allows me as an educator to emphasize such topics with a completely different, personal urgency. Furthermore, students benefit from the necessary, immediate engagement with different cultures, worldviews, and values. In collaborative work, there is always a sensitization to the

needs of others as well as one's own needs. Both aspects are of enormous importance when considering the daily professional life of educators. Students particularly benefit from the concrete on-site project work, which encompasses all elements of future project planning within the framework of modern school teaching. In addition to the content development and didactic-methodical considerations, which often require a high degree of flexibility from students due to the local circumstances, it particularly involves cost calculation, possible media design and support, and international discourse. International professionalization in teacher education, through the change in perspective it entails, provides new impetus for the (future) shaping of one's own professional career and imparts consolidated and intensive core competencies of modern pedagogical work. It's certainly a "win-win" situation for both sides of the international discourse.

*Do you have specific examples from your teaching experience in higher education?*

One concrete project currently in planning revolves around the significance of seagrass meadows in the context of climate change and the carbon dioxide cycle – a globally relevant topic. The local Institute for Chemistry and Biology of the Marine Environment (ICBM) at the University of Oldenburg has established a research group on this subject. From the existing results, a children's book has already been created, which, after translation into the local language, will serve as the basis for an extended project at our network school in Mombasa. The focus here will be on the field of science communication in the broadest sense, since didactic issues are inextricably linked to the fundamentals of science communication and vice versa, which is underlined in particular by new formats in digital media. In this project, teacher trainees will collaborate with students in grades 10 to 12 to develop didactic materials on this topic. This includes media formats such as science blogs, videos, and more, which will also be integrated into the curriculum. Together, teacher trainees and students will create a teaching unit for students in Mombasa, which they will then independently test and evaluate there. It's a completely new approach that encompasses various "educational bridges" and expands "peer teaching" approaches in an international context. Undoubtedly, this envisaged project with the University of Oldenburg is an example of "Science Action in Schools for Sustainable Development". Not only the learning process of the participating students and pupils is sustainable; also, the developed teaching series will be used sustainably and through teacher training offers of the students to the teachers in Mombasa also utilized in the long term in the local schools. This pilot school will certainly act as a beacon, spreading the developed content to other schools. The developed unit will also be used locally in elementary schools, and teacher training sessions on the topic are planned to contribute to the dissemination of the content and teaching materials.

*To what extent could similar projects also be initiated in cooperation with other universities (and is this desired)?*

It would be highly desirable if the potential of internationalization in teacher education, such as the approach described earlier, would also be anchored in other universities.



We are currently making intensive efforts to involve the organization in various universities in Germany and Switzerland, explicitly emphasizing the potential described earlier. Developing teaching units in an international context offers the opportunity for collaboration on a global scale at eye level and a closer interconnection of educational actors worldwide. We would be pleased if international higher education didactics could work closely with us. This way, we could consolidate and initiate potentials and initiatives, learn from each other and with each other to jointly moderate “educational bridges” (between schools and universities) on both a national and international level. This would significantly accelerate the growth of the international educational network with the common goal of making the right to education effective for every child.

*What do you wish for the future of the organization?*

The organization emulates a great role model with its name, and I would be delighted if we, too, could look back on such a success story in 50 years as “Doctors Without Borders”. Until then, it will undoubtedly be a long and not always easy journey. It would be wonderful if we could find many supporters along the way who join us in giving voice to education, which has deserved it since time immemorial: as the crucial key to self-determined life, as a prerequisite for jointly solving the critical global problems of our time, and as the engine of any change towards a free and peaceful world.

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# Potentials and Barriers of (Virtual) Internationalization of Teacher Education

ANNIKA BRÜCK-HÜBNER, ULRIKE BEATE MÜLLER, ANJA SEIFERT

Keywords: international mobility, intercultural exchange, intercultural competencies, virtual mobility, virtual exchange

## 1 Introduction

It has been said that the major global challenges of this century can only be overcome by close cooperation between international partners (Wit & Altbach, 2021, p. 44). To do this, all actors involved need global knowledge, diverse (intercultural) skills, openness to the world and an awareness and understanding of intercultural similarities and differences (c. f. Osakwe et al., 2022, p. 25). According to the German Rectors' Conference (HRK, 2017) students shall be equipped “adequately to practice responsible global citizenship” by developing intercultural competences, intercultural communication and critical reflection of their own perspective (ibid., p. 3 f). Referring to teachers and teacher education in specific, teachers not only have to deal productively with the increasing heterogeneity of the student body in schools, they also have the task of adequately preparing students for life in a heterogeneous society and – in the sense of global citizenship – of developing them into responsible, tolerant and interculturally competent adults. The Council of the European Union maintains cross-border mobility – either virtual, blended or physical – as a valuable opportunity and a powerful learning experience for teachers and trainers (2020, p. 5). The aims and advantages of internationalization, particularly in teacher education, are clearly stated (Falkenhagen et al., 2019; Kricke & Kürten, 2015).

The anthology “Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education: Theories, Concepts and Practical Approaches of Virtual, Blended and Physical Mobility” has presented an overview and a concrete insight into different levels of internationalization in teacher education – theoretical foundation, conceptual approaches, and formats of virtual, blended and physical mobility. Through a structure and elaboration like this, the anthology intends to make an important contribution to promoting the internationalization of teacher education in Germany and other countries. A wide range of possibilities for the (virtual) internationalization of teacher education is presented and opportunities and limitations are discussed in various ways.

This article intends to systemize and bundle experiences gathered by the authors of the anthology. For this purpose, all contributors of the book were invited to a web based written interview in January/February 2024 in order to reflect on and explain

their very personal motivation for their commitment to the internationalization of teacher education, as well as the opportunities and limitations they see as the key factors of internationalization. The teams of authors were asked to have at least one person per contribution take part in the survey, 18 of the 42 authors completed the survey. As the survey was anonymous, no further information on the participants can be provided.

## 2 Reasons for Personal Engagement to Internationalize Teacher Education

In the first question, the authors were asked to indicate the most important aspects for them personally about why they engage for the internationalization of teacher education. The answers can be systemized into seven categories:

### 1. Promoting a global mindset (broaden horizon and reflection)

The most common reason given by 15 of the participants in the study (83 %) for their commitment to greater internationalisation of teacher education is that they want to help students – but also, through the multiplier function of (future) teachers, society as a whole – to develop a global mindset and awareness, and to see school and social issues not only from a local, but also from an international and global perspective, e. g.:

“[...] Ultimately, the overarching goal is to cultivate a global mindset among educators. This mindset goes beyond the classroom, instilling openness, tolerance, and a genuine appreciation for diversity. By embracing internationalization in teacher education, we equip educators with the tools to shape a new generation of students who are not only academically proficient but also culturally sensitive and globally aware.” (P2)

“Worldwide exchange of experiences, questioning national barriers and categorizations, working against discrimination and othering, education for a transcultural world (teachers as multipliers).” (P8)

In this context, internationalization is linked to the hope that it will enable “learning from one another”, e. g.:

“We know that school systems around the globe are very diverse and so is teacher education. Internationalization gives us a chance to see where we stand, to see what other ways of teaching and learning there might be and to learn from each other [...]” (P12)

“[...] Sharing knowledge and experiences in this manner enables a broader perspective on the work being done domestically and facilitates learning from mistakes made elsewhere.” (P13)

As a central prerequisite for this, some participants of the survey also name the need to broaden the own horizon and to reflect on one’s own location and perspectives. This is where an understanding of “Bildung” comes into play, which has already been ex-

plained in greater depth in other contributions in this anthology (see e. g. Brück-Hübner, 2024; Redecker, 2024; Vogt et al., 2024), e. g.:

“It is important for me that all students get in touch with international perspectives on the contents they deal with, that they interact professionally with pedagogues from other countries and that they reflect on their own perspectives [...]” (P11)

Some of the survey participants’ own internationalization experience also plays a role in this aspect, e. g.

“The most important aspects for me personally to advocate for the internationalization of teacher education are: my personal unforgettable and enriching experiences during stays abroad. And that I experience the same enthusiasm from students who talk about their semesters abroad and the extent to which this has shaped them personally and opened their eyes professionally [...]” (P7)

“[...] I have experienced the positive effect that stays abroad have on personal development and personal attitudes [...]” (P15)

## 2. Promoting the development of students’ intercultural/diversity competencies

In close connection with the first criterion, five participants (27%) also named the specific goal of teaching their students intercultural skills and encouraging them to deal productively with diversity, e. g.:

“For me, the internationalization of teacher training is of increasing importance in view of the growing multiculturalism of society and the associated increase in heterogeneity in schools. Intercultural skills can only be “taught” to a limited extent, they can best be learned and promoted through intercultural exchange [...]” (P9)

“[...] Especially for language teachers, I find it very important to gain international experience as intercultural (communicative) competence is embedded in the school curriculum but cannot really be taught/learned without international contact and exchange.” (P12)

The objective of promoting intercultural skills was also addressed in numerous contributions in this anthology (e. g. Sauer et al., 2024; Schultheis, 2024).

## 3. Opportunity for intercultural exchange and to build networks

The establishment of international networks and intercultural exchange is named by four participants as a motivation for internationalization, e. g.:

“[...] Building international networks and collaborations is another key aspect. The connections formed between educators, institutions, and researchers transcend borders, leading to collaborative projects and partnerships. This not only enriches the professional development of teachers but also contributes to the development of global perspectives in teacher education curricula [...]” (P2)

“Networking with colleagues from different countries”. (P3)

Morbach et al. (2024) examined the form such networking can take at lecturer level in this anthology.

#### 4. Personal competence development/professionalization

Four participants also emphasized that they are committed to the internationalization of teacher education because they find it enriching for themselves and their own skills development and professionalization, e. g.:

“In addition, I find the collaboration with international colleagues very appreciative and there is always something new and interesting to experience and learn [...]” (P7)

“Personally, I also find internationalization extremely exciting. Working with colleagues from abroad as well as with (international) students is stimulating and inspiring and I also really enjoy it. I’m constantly learning new things and also making progress in my own professionalization [...]” (P9)

This aspect was also discussed in some of the practical examples in this anthology (e. g. Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024; Renner, 2024).

#### 5. Promoting the development of language competencies

Two participants named the promotion of language skills as a reason for the commitment to internationalization. The gain is not only limited to the students, but also includes the gain for the lecturer:

“[...] Language proficiency is a natural byproduct of exposure to international contexts. Teachers and students alike benefit from improved language skills, a valuable asset in today’s globalized society. This linguistic diversity adds depth to the educational experience, fostering effective communication and understanding [...]” (P2)

“[...] Communicating in English is also a great exercise that I find enriching [...]” (P9)

The argument that (virtual) international courses promote the development of language skills has been emphasized in many of the contributions to this anthology. Particularly noteworthy is the contribution by Bellet (2024), whose project focuses on the goal of preparing students for learning in multilingual classrooms.

#### 6. Idealism/Desire to make a difference

Another perspective that is mentioned as a reason for the commitment to internationalization is the desire to make a contribution. One participant emphasized that he/she finds the topic of internationalization important and therefore wants to work to contextualize it:

“[...] An efficient internationalization of teacher education needs proper conceptions, which I want to contribute to.” (P11)

Another participant opens up the perspective even further and talks about the ideals he would like to pass on:

“[...] Last but not least, I am personally guided by an idealistic idea, namely to contribute to peace, tolerance and understanding through my work in internationalization.” (P7)

## 7. Prepare Students for the global job market

A final perspective put forward by one participant is that he would like to support students in qualifying for the global job market:

“[...] Moreover, an internationalized teacher education system prepares educators for the global job market. The skills and perspectives gained through international experiences make teachers more adaptable to different educational contexts, expanding their career opportunities and making them valuable assets in an increasingly globalized workforce [...]” (P2)

# 3 Chances for (Virtual) International Teacher Education

Secondly, the authors were asked to describe the most important chances for (virtual) international teacher education that they currently see. Many aspects were stated to be relevant for students and educators, some only for either students or educators. The answers can be put into six categories:

## 1. Change of perspective

Almost every second participant (8 of 18, 44%) described a change of perspective that he/she thinks to be an important chance, e. g.:

“[...] have the opportunity to expand or change their previous horizons and understanding.” (P7)

“To overcome the national perspectives of the national educational systems.” (P1)

## 2. Chance to work sustainably

8 of 18 (44%) participants indicated chances, which they especially see in using virtual formats of internationalization (see e. g. von Lieres & Lang, 2024; Wild, 2024; Nierste, 2024b; Kaiser & Biehl, 2024; all in this anthology). All of them address aspects of sustainability in sense of a broad concept referring to sustainability of resources:

“Virtual international teacher education programs enable location-independent cultural exchange and, moreover, are resource-efficient.” (P4)

Additionally, accessibility, inclusivity, and flexibility can be regarded as interrelated with sustainability and are mentioned in this context as well. The aspects of sustainability and inclusion have been reflected in relation to internationalization in other articles of the anthology as well (see e. g. Buddeberg et al., 2024; Morbach et al., 2024; Müller, 2024; Seitz & Demo, 2024; Vogt et al., 2024).

Examples for this are the following statements:

“Accessibility to a broad group of students (finances, organization, inclusion of people with disabilities.)” (P16)

“[...] digital flexibility of time and place.” (P8)

### 3. Fostering intercultural competencies

Intercultural Competencies were seen by 5 of 18 (28 %) participants as an important gain for students and for educators, e. g.:

“For me, internationalization has the great potential to prepare student teachers more sensitively for exchanges with people from other cultures or with other cultural backgrounds [...]” (P9).

“[...] Moreover, virtual international teacher education promotes cultural exchange and understanding. Through virtual classrooms, educators can expose themselves and their students to diverse cultures, languages, and teaching styles. This exposure nurtures cultural competence, an essential skill for educators in today’s interconnected world.” (P1)

### 4. Chance to exchange and network internationally

Some participants (4 of 18, 22 %) highlight the opportunity to exchange internationally, as other articles in this anthology have also discussed (see e. g. Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024; Bürger & Enders, 2024):

“[...] networking and connecting worldwide (especially with students who do not have the means to travel abroad), exchange about commonalities and differences in teaching and learning.” (P5)

“[...] fosters a global community of educators who can easily exchange ideas, share best practices, and collaborate on projects.” (P1)

### 5. Improve language abilities

A chance to improve language competencies is seen by three participants (17 %), which is described in the following statements:

“[...] Furthermore, virtual international teacher education enhances language proficiency. Engaging with peers from different linguistic backgrounds on virtual platforms provides an immersive language learning experience. This linguistic diversity not only improves communication skills but also enriches the overall educational experience for both teachers and students.” (P1)

“I see the most important chances of internationalization in teacher training in general in the possibility for students to come into contact with other languages [...]” (P7)

### 6. Improve personal competencies

Further single contributions show a chance for personal competence development:

“[...], increase in flexibility when you are confronted with unforeseen situations [...]” (P5)

## 4 Barriers for (Virtual) International Teacher Education

In addition to all the advantages that are seen in the context of internationalization in teacher education and that are attributed to higher education didactic events in the context of internationalization, there are difficulties and obstacles in the concrete imple-

mentation (see also e. g. Bartels et al., 2024; Brück-Hübner & Nierste, 2024, both in this anthology).

The third question of the survey dealt with the most important barriers of virtual international teacher education that the authors currently see.

### 1. National orientation in teacher education's policy

One important problem area mentioned by about half of the participants (n = 9; 50 %) focuses on the national orientation of teacher education and the resulting structures and framework conditions. In Germany in particular, federalism is already making it more difficult to organize teacher education across state borders. The problem is becoming even more difficult across national borders. In many cases, genuine internationalization is not desired or is made more difficult by educational policy requirements. This also includes the fact that universities in Germany not only have a different division into semesters or trimesters compared to European or international countries and thus different start and end times of studies, but that there are already differences within the federal states referring to rhythms and curricula, e. g.:

“I see the biggest hurdles for the internationalization of teacher training in Germany in general as being the federal state-specific requirements for teacher training. The picture is similar worldwide: the study structure and curricula are very different, which makes direct comparability difficult. Therefore, methods beyond direct comparison are a promising approach. Furthermore, the organizational effort, different semester times and study requirements, financial resources, linguistic and intercultural difficulties as well as the political situation in some countries represent obstacles to the internationalization of teacher training that should not be underestimated.” (P7)

“We know that school systems around the globe are very diverse and so is teacher education.” (P 13)

Some answers point out very decidedly that how the regulations are dealt with depends on the respective location, country, region and also university, and that socio-cultural differences also play a role in how freely the requirements are dealt with. In addition, legal hurdles and problems are mentioned such as regulatory barriers as described in the following statement:

“Additionally, socio-political factors can impede international collaborations. Regulatory barriers, visa restrictions, and geopolitical tensions may limit the mobility of educators and hinder the seamless exchange of ideas and best practices on a global scale. Furthermore, the effectiveness of virtual international teacher education depends heavily on the willingness and commitment of educational institutions and policymakers to adapt and invest in this mode of learning. Resistance to change, traditional mindsets, and budget constraints can act as formidable barriers to the widespread adoption of virtual international teacher education initiatives.” (P 2).

The challenges of quality assurance and mutual accreditation are also closely linked to the national orientation of higher education e. g.:



“The absence of a universally recognized framework for evaluating and accrediting virtual international teacher education programs is another challenge. This lack of standardization may lead to disparities in the quality and recognition of virtual initiatives, impacting the credibility and transferability of acquired skills and knowledge.” (P2)

“Lack of accreditation and lack of support from home university.” (P 4)

The strong national orientation can also lead to a lack of institutional recognition of internationalization, e. g.

“Currently, virtual international teacher education is not established enough. In Germany especially, we are very conservative when it comes to teacher education. In many specialist areas, the idea is widespread that an international mobility is not necessary because Maths, for example, is the same everywhere in the world [...]” (P5)

In this context, internationalization often also competes with other key issues that are of national importance, see e. g.

“[...] competition between internationalization and other important topics such as teacher shortages, digitalization and inclusion [...]” (P15)

This also has an effect on the general willingness and interest of student teachers to participate in internationalization measures, e. g.

“Students might not always see the benefit in internationalising themselves. They are neither interested in going abroad for studying nor in virtual formats.” (P17)

In this anthology, the central importance of framework conditions and their influence on internationalization measures has been pointed out in many of the contributions. The articles by Nierste (2024a) and Brück-Hübner & Nierste (2024) are particularly important here.

## 2. Organize a fitting cooperation

Closely related to the first challenge is the second central challenge associated with the (virtual) internationalization of teacher education: 50 % of the participants stated that finding a suitable cooperation across borders is not so easy. The factors that have to fit are manifold, including suitable university framework conditions, e. g.:

“[...] a fit for official module/course descriptions [...], teaching periods, grading systems and criteria, attendance [...]” (P12)

But also convictions, e. g.:

“You need [...] a system of joint values and aims.” (P1)

“Different attitudes towards learning, teaching and the aims of education [...]” (P8)

as well as organizational factors, such as the time difference, e. g.:

“Moreover, coordinating schedules across different time zones presents a logistical challenge, making real-time engagement difficult.” (P13)

### 3. Technical Resources, problems and competencies

50 percent of participants of the survey (n = 9) also address technology-related challenges in their boundaries. The frequency can also be explained by the fact that virtual forms of internationalization were the focus of an excessive amount of attention in this book compared to others. This criterion can be divided into different sub-categories.

On the one hand, it is about the basic equipment and availability of technical devices, but also about the stability of the Internet connection, which is a prerequisite for virtual forms of internationalization to take place at all, e. g.:

“Limited internet connectivity, restricted access to computers or other digital devices can hinder the implementation of virtual teaching methods [...]” (P 5).

“[...] participants need to have a reliable internet connection as well as a camera and microphone to ensure they are clearly visible and audible to others [...].” (P13)

The digital divide and the lack of digital skills on the part of both lecturers and students also play an important role.

“[...] You need digital skills [...].” (P2)

This is also accompanied by the challenge that different universities work with different tools and systems, which in turn makes collaboration more difficult, e. g.:

“[...] Another barrier is the lack of standardized technology infrastructure and digital literacy across educational institutions globally. Inconsistent access to high-quality digital tools and insufficient training in utilizing virtual platforms can hinder educators’ ability to fully leverage the benefits of virtual international teacher education.” (P2)

“[...] administrative restrictions like access (login-in) to course rooms [...].” (P14)

### 4. Language barriers

A key challenge identified by 8 of the survey participants (44%) is speaking, teaching and learning in a foreign language, e. g.:

“The biggest barrier is certainly language. I notice this time and time again when talking to students – but also lecturers. I often stumble with the language myself and it is simply much more difficult than communicating in German. This is probably one of the main reasons why it’s not so easy to motivate enough students to take part in the courses.” (P9)

“Additionally, language barriers can hinder communication and collaboration among participants, as not everyone may be proficient in the common language used, often English.” (P13)

In addition to the general challenges of communicating in another language, the different professional vocabularies and understandings associated with the individual constructs, which differ internationally, also play a central role (see also Seifert, 2024, in this anthology).

“Specific languages and national foci of didactic material for university teaching which makes it hard to refer on from an international point of view.” (P6).

### 5. Support for the lecturers

Five of the participants (28 %) in the survey also emphasized the lack of suitable support services for lecturers. They relate to different areas.

Firstly, the implementation of (virtual) international courses is challenging and requires decisive didactic expertise, which must be imparted, e. g.

“[...] the lack thereof, the acquisition of skills for university lecturers with regard to didactics in virtual, international teaching settings [...]” (P 7)

Secondly, the large amount of work involved in running (virtual) international courses is emphasized, for which there is unfortunately too little assistance from the universities, e. g.:

“[...] organizing and conducting virtual international teaching is much more time-consuming than “normal” seminars, and especially in COIL seminars, agreements are not always made without conflict. It takes a lot of work to coordinate the respective interests and needs in such a way that everyone continues to get along well and the cooperation is productive [...] Due to the high workload, the lack of support from the universities is also a challenge for me as a lecturer. We have to keep finding new funding for tutorial support, for example, and there is also no reduction in workload at other levels (e. g. reduction in teaching load). – I can therefore understand very well if colleagues are not willing to make this great effort.” (P8)

In addition, the desire for more support in the international search for partners, the support by language development and the provision of technical equipment is also mentioned, e. g.:

“[...] the opening up of opportunities for university lecturers to find international partners for virtual cooperation, the support of foreign language skills of university lecturers and students as well as the provision of technical equipment.” (P 7).

The support structures needed for (virtual) international teaching have also been analyzed in depth by Brück-Hübner and Nierste (2024) in this anthology.

### 6. Successful intercultural exchange

The final category named by four participants (22 %) is the challenge of a successful intercultural exchange – especially in the virtual space, e. g.:

“[...] While virtual platforms provide opportunities for cultural exchange, they may not fully address the complexities of diverse cultural contexts. [...] the nature of virtual interactions may sometimes limit the depth of personal connections and networks formed between educators. The absence of face-to-face interactions can make it challenging to build strong, lasting professional relationships and collaborative partnerships, which are often crucial in the field of education [...]” (P2)

“Lack of personal interaction (depending on the methods used) [...]” (P16)

Cultural differences in particular can lead to conflicts and make cooperation more difficult, e. g.:

“[...] Cultural differences also play a crucial role, as varying norms and expectations can lead to misunderstandings or conflicts, impacting learning outcomes [...]” (P13)

This challenge is also affected by more organizational factors, like e. g. “Time zone differences” (P4).

## 5 Discussion

This article has presented current reasons, chances and barriers for (virtual) internationalization of teacher education, which have been reported by 18 people with experiences in international teacher education (see figure 1).

Reasons for Personal Engagement	Potential	Barriers
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Promoting a global mindset (broaden horizon and reflection)</li> <li>2. Promoting the development of students' intercultural/ diversity competencies</li> <li>3. Opportunity for intercultural exchange and to build networks</li> <li>4. Personal competence development/ professionalization</li> <li>5. Promoting the development of language competencies</li> <li>6. Idealism/ Desire to make a difference</li> <li>7. Prepare students for the global job market</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Change of perspective</li> <li>2. Chance to work sustainably</li> <li>3. Fostering intercultural competencies</li> <li>4. Chance to exchange and network internationally</li> <li>5. Improve language abilities</li> <li>6. Improve personal competencies</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. National orientation in teacher education's policy</li> <li>2. Organize a fitting cooperation</li> <li>3. Technical resources, problems and competencies</li> <li>4. Language barriers</li> <li>5. Support of the lecturers</li> <li>6. Successful intercultural exchange</li> </ol>

**Figure 1:** Overview of the results of the authors' survey

The responses of the anthology's authors who took part in the survey show that there is a clear overlap between the reasons for personal commitment and the potential attributed to internationalization measures. It is also noticeable that most of the authors name several reasons at once. One particular focus – in the sense of the didactic double-decker – is on promoting a global mindset and diversity of perspectives as well as on acquiring skills for dealing with an intercultural classroom. In addition to the perspective on students' skills development, numerous authors also emphasize that

they themselves also benefit from (virtual) internationalization formats and find them personally enriching. Thus, the greatest potential of (virtual) international teacher education is seen in a widening of people's perspectives – students and educators – and in the development of intercultural competencies. Kricke & Kürten (2015) refer to an opening of perspectives through international exchange. The development of intercultural competencies has been stated to be an essential aim of internationalized teacher education (HRK, 2017; Janert, 2022; Pachler & Redondo, 2015), which research has proven to be achieved indeed (European Union, 2019; DAAD, 2023; Kercher & Schifferings, 2019).

The limitations mentioned relate in particular to factors that have an external influence on international courses. Above all, the strong national orientation of teacher education and the associated (political) framework conditions, and the establishment of successful cooperation and dealing with technical challenges are the most frequently named barriers of (virtual) internationalization of teacher education. In addition, teaching and learning in a foreign language is cited as a further hurdle. There is also a desire for more support for lecturers in the (didactic) planning, organization and implementation of international courses. Finally, the authors surveyed also emphasized that it is a major challenge to enable successful intercultural exchange – especially in the digital space (see figure 1).

## 6 Conclusion and Prospects

The contributions to this anthology have impressively demonstrated how diverse the practice of (virtual) internationalization of teacher education is. The numerous experiences as well as the statements of the internationalization-experienced authors of this anthology not only point to a comprehensive potential for a stronger internationalization of teacher education, but also demonstrate the conviction with which practitioners are committed to the implementation of (virtual) internationalization. In many cases, it is clear that there are always external constraints that limit freedom of action and can therefore also prevent innovation. However, the common voice that emanates from the contributions in this collection shows that greater internationalization of teacher education is a worthy goal that can make a central contribution to improving teacher education and, above all, to more peace, justice, and inclusive societies.

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How can internationalization be implemented in teacher education? While internationalization is an important issue in higher education, it is particularly important in the field of teacher education because teachers need to deal productively with the increasing heterogeneity of the student body in schools. They are charged with preparing students for life in a diverse society and developing them into responsible, tolerant, and interculturally competent adults.

Therefore, the anthology provides an overview and a concrete insight into different levels of internationalization in teacher education. It integrates theories, conceptual approaches, and different forms of virtual, blended and physical mobility to construct a future-oriented education of teachers. This will not only broaden the academic and cultural horizons of both students and future teachers, but also contributes to a more inclusive and dynamic educational environment.