

„SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION AS AGENTS OF CHANGE“: A VIRTUAL SEMESTER ABROAD FOR INDIAN AND GERMAN EDUCATION STUDENTS

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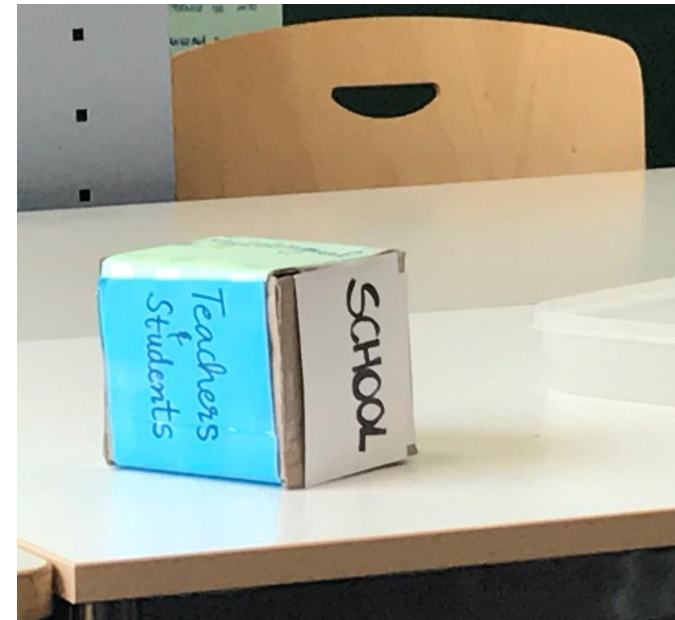
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Background to the project

Diversification and new information technologies have become integral features of societies and their educational systems all over the world. The world of learners and teachers has become highly diverse and interconnected as ***a result of migration, globalization and digitalization***.

In this regard, the development of ***intercultural competence*** is often discussed as one of the most important skills ***in teacher training***, (cf. Byram, Michael, 1997; Ilse, Viktoria; Keßler, Jörg-U. 2017) which can be acquired effectively by means of ***collaboration between students*** studying in different cultural settings (cf. Thanh, Pham Thi Hong 2014: 11-23).

Genesis of the project

Blended-learning approaches seem to have proven particularly relevant in **such intercultural and collaborative environments**, as they can offer tools for communication, interaction and shared learning between students and teachers in different countries (c.f. So, Hyo-Jeong; Bonk, Curtis 2010: 189-200).

The courses presented, evaluated and discussed are developed and implemented in the context of a project funded by the **Baden-Württemberg-STIPENDIUM for University Students - BWS plus programme**, a programme of the **Baden-Württemberg Stiftung**.

(<https://www.bw-stipendium.de/en/students/bws-plus/> (last accessed 2019/11/10)).

The project also promotes collaboration between **Ambedkar University Delhi and Ludwigsburg University of Education**.



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Ambedkar University Delhi

Genesis of the project

Beginning in winter term 2017/18, ***Ludwigsburg University of Education, Germany and Dr. Ambedkar University Delhi, India*** have been cooperating in the ***creation of a virtual semester abroad*** for their education students.

- Both universities have identified a significant number of ***students who - for various reasons - cannot manage a full semester abroad.***
- A major focus of this joint project is on ***providing those students with a sensible opportunity of gaining international experience and learning with and from international partner institutions without necessarily having to spend a full semester in another country.***

Design of the collaboration

The key question of the project is *how Schools of Education in India and Germany can perform as agents of change in diverse and digitally connected societies.*

Therefore the partner Universities developed
(a) collaborative, interactive and blended-learning courses and
(b) Summer Schools focusing on the theme of diversity and resilience in educational and social contexts in both countries.



(a) Approaching the virtual semester abroad

(a) Blended learning classes based on a mutual platform

Approximately 50% of the course sessions were conducted in classroom settings, whereas the other 50% were carried out online, individually or in collaborative teams consisting of students from India and Germany.

The online content was designed to

- (1) present course topics from an Indian and German perspective;*
- (2) to offer input from proven experts;*
- (3) to establish the foundations for collaboration;*
- (4) to encourage interaction between Indian and German students.*

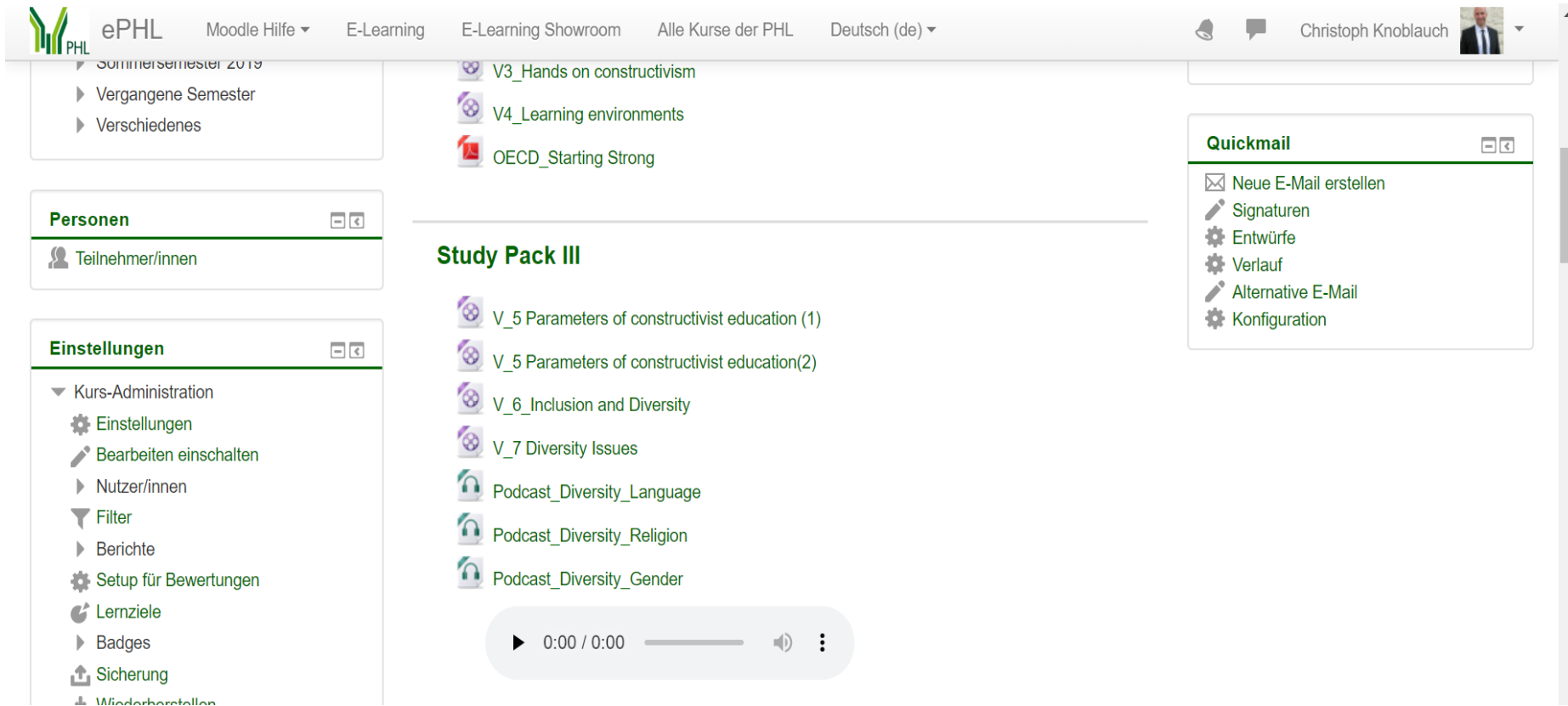
(a) Approaching the virtual semester abroad

To these ends

- (1) videos of Indian and German professors teaching in teams were used;***
- (2) a podcast with experts was made available;***
- (3) common issues were presented through a selection of pertinent literature;***
- (4) teams of Indian and German students were set up in order to develop joint projects.***

In a collaborative setting, students were asked to interact online, using communication tools of their own choice. The participating universities and professors established a common ground for the discussions, providing contacts and communication technologies.

(a) Approaching the virtual semester abroad



The screenshot displays the Moodle LMS interface for PH Ludwigsburg. The top navigation bar includes the ePHL logo, Moodle Hilfe, E-Learning, E-Learning Showroom, Alle Kurse der PHL, and Deutsch (de). The left sidebar contains a course tree with 'Sommersemester 2019', 'Vergangene Semester', and 'Verschiedenes'. Below this are sections for 'Personen' (Teilnehmer/innen) and 'Einstellungen' (Kurs-Administration, Einstellungen, Bearbeiten einschalten, Nutzer/innen, Filter, Berichte, Setup für Bewertungen, Lernziele, Badges, Sicherung, Wiederherstellen). The main content area shows a list of study packs: V3_Hands on constructivism, V4_Learning environments, OECD_Starting Strong, and a section titled 'Study Pack III' containing V_5 Parameters of constructivist education (1), V_5 Parameters of constructivist education(2), V_6_Inclusion and Diversity, V_7 Diversity Issues, and three Podcast_Diversity items (Language, Religion, Gender). A media player is visible at the bottom of the study pack list. The right sidebar features a 'Quickmail' section with options like 'Neue E-Mail erstellen', 'Signaturen', 'Entwürfe', 'Verlauf', 'Alternative E-Mail', and 'Konfiguration'. The user profile 'Christoph Knoblauch' is shown in the top right corner.

(b) Approaching the virtual semester abroad

(b) Summer School

Part I: September 30th to October 11th, 2019 in Ludwigsburg



https://www.bw-stipendium.de/das-programm/aktuelles/aktueller-artikel/diversitaet-im-klassenzimmer/?no_cache=1

(b) Approaching the virtual semester abroad

Setting of the Summer School:

- Eight students and three faculty members from AUD collaborated as exchange visitors with seven faculty members and eight students of LUE.
- The activities focused on developing students' capacities and intercultural understanding on the theme '**Resilience in Education**'.
- Resilience is discussed as a multidimensional concept explored in different disciplines from varying vantage angles.
- Additional programme with site-visits in the greater Stuttgart area (e.g. a secondary school, an excursion, etc.)

(b) Approaching the virtual semester abroad

Understanding:

- **Resilience** is understood as the capacities and processes by which school students and educators collectively negotiate everyday situations and dilemmas in educational contexts.

Main Aims:

- a) engaging with different theoretical and practice-based perspectives on resilience in education drawing from the German and Indian educational contexts; and
- b) developing the participants capacities to nurture resilience in their educational practice.

Evaluation and discussion of the findings

- Pre-test study, focusing on the initial stages of the *co-operative, interactive and blended courses* AND the first *Summer School* in Ludwigsburg.
- Creative *multi-method design* in order to create a flexible research process and to produce various findings.
- Focus 1: *Balance of online and classroom learning, resulting learning strategies and attitudes towards the blended learning setting in general,*
- Focus 2: *Online learning preferences, specific forms of digital collaboration and the concrete use of online tools, perceptions of change within learning strategies and attitudes.*

Evaluation and discussion of the findings

Quantitative study:

- ***“Collaboration with internationals was very helpful for their learning.”*** 76% strongly agree and 24% rather agree.
- ***“The balance between online and classroom learning was good.”*** 42% strongly agree and 29% rather agree.
- ***“I learned new techniques of learning in the courses.”*** 54% strongly agree/38% rather agree.
- ***“I appreciate the independent ways of learning”*** 61% strongly agree/31% rather agree / ***“I appreciate flexibility of the blended design”*** 69% strongly agree/23% rather agree.
- ***“I developed my learning skills during the courses”*** 33% strongly agree and 41% rather agree.

Evaluation and discussion of the findings

Qualitative study:

- Students seem to value blended learning in general, mostly discussing the benefits of self-regulated learning, interaction and the diversified working options.
- Students report that they appreciated the clear structure and the tasks of the online content provided “... *because they were very helpful as a kind of guidance through the content and stirred my attention to the central themes of the videos.*”
- The reassessment and reconfiguration of one’s own opinions and ideas seems to be highly appreciated: “... *for me it was getting to know new numerous different points of views and insights on opinions of other students (...) because it required me to reassess my own ideas and enabled me to make additions and changes accordingly.*”

Qualitative study:

- The online inter-action takes place via student-controlled tools like Skype and WhatsApp. This seems to be especially productive when it is prepared for and guided by online content and tasks: “... ***what do I think and then also to listen to the others’ answers. So “wow” what did the others think about this questions and how different it was.***”
- Independence and self responsibility: “...***we had the chance to work on our own, completely independent of time and place, which was good. And afterwards we could share in class our solutions and our thoughts (...).***”
- Critical reflection: The courses use the online content only as a preparation for classroom discussion and collaboration but not as an option to develop new (digital) content.

Evaluation and discussion of the findings

Qualitative study:

Specific gains of the Summer School

- *"I especially appreciated the group tasks and intercultural communication tasks because it helped us know about the socio-cultural dynamics of each other's country."*
- *"When students from two diverse cultures brainstorm together, in concentrated, time-bound sessions towards a single goal, the process serves as an engine for a creation of meaning that is composite yet nuanced, a complexity of ideas that would perhaps be missing if the source came from a single context."*

Evaluation and discussion of the findings

Critical reflection:

- The courses use the online content only as a preparation for classroom discussion and collaboration but not as an *option to develop new (digital) content*.
- The Summer School should feature a *more blended course for preparation*.
- Moodle seems to work well but *usability* is a problem.

Evaluation and discussion of the findings

Triangulation:

- (1) The participating students ***show positive attitudes towards the blended-learning design of the courses.*** This seems largely due to the mix of digital learning and classroom discussion, as well as the structure of the courses.
- (2) The findings indicate that students highly value the ***collaborative and interactive approach*** of the courses and Summer School.
- (3) The findings indicate that ***students develop their learning skills*** and acquire new learning techniques in the blended and collaborative setting of the courses. Students report that they use the provided online content and tasks in a ***flexible and largely independent*** manner.
- (4) Real face-to-face interaction via Summer School is highly appreciated.

Findings

Blended collaborative learning environments in intercultural settings are in need of a structure which enables students

- (1) to find themes and prepare topics individually through online content and tasks;*
 - (2) to share their perspectives in class and via online interaction;*
 - (3) to develop shared knowledge through collaboration in class and online;*
 - (4) to develop new content and tasks for themselves and others;*
 - (5) ...to also meet face to face.*
- *The design of our cooperative project has sparked a new discussion of curriculum development in both universities*

Summer School

Part II: March 15th to 28th, 2020 in Delhi



“Our encounters with the world are transformative in that they are mediated by “self-alienation,” that is, alienation from our taken-for-granted and habitual self-understandings. (...) Bildung refers to the active and receptive self-other relation implicit in educational process.”

(Humboldt, Wilhelm von 1793: Theorie der Bildung des Menschen)

Curriculum Development and the implementation of key structures for (tele)-collaborative approaches in both institutions appear as a logical and necessary next step!



Minke Jakobi, M.A.
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