



Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education

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



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

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Schlagworte: internationalization@home; teacher education; intercultural competences; global education
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Teaching in a Global World: Internationalization in Pre-Service Teacher Training – The IPC Project

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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. 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

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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-Hübler, 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 Brömsen (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 edu-

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); Natalia 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 Natalia 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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