



Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education

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



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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.

Schlagworte: international cooperation seminar; blended learning; inclusive education
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Teacher Education – Thinking Globally and Learning Internationally

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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 multiculturality, there is a trend towards internationalization in teacher education (Falkenhangen, 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 & Bransford, 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.¹ 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 competencies² 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 competence³.

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-

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 meetings⁴. 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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

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 adaptions 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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