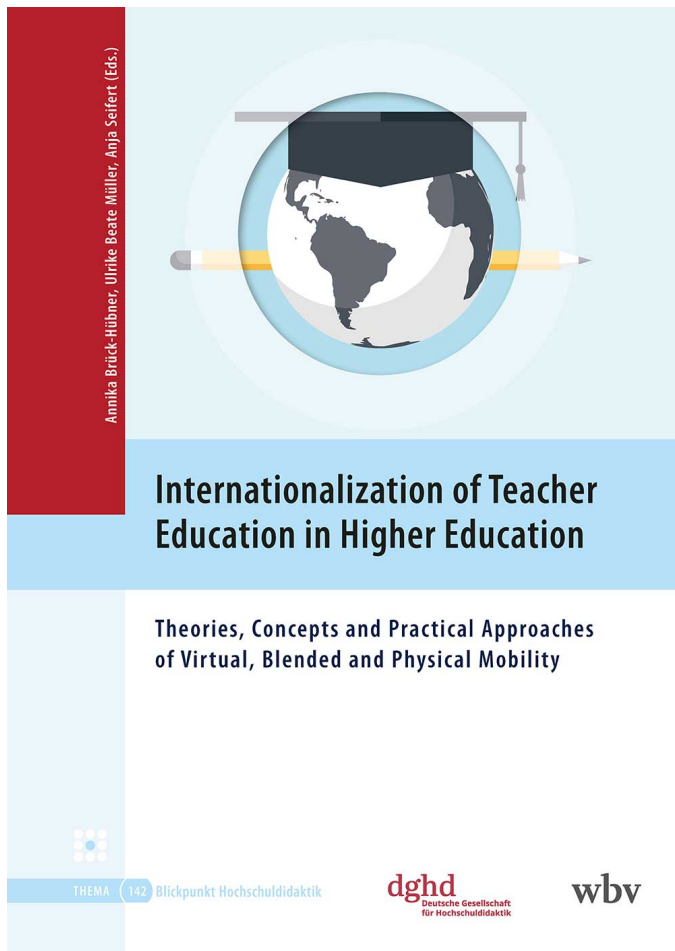




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Schlagworte: german schools abroad; teacher education; blended mobility

Zitiervorschlag: Kaiser, Katrin & Biehl, Christiane (2024). *Blended Mobility Format of Continuing Education Links School Teachers of German Schools Abroad and Students of Teacher Education of the University of Cologne*. In Annika Brück-Hübner, Ulrike Beate Müller & Anja Seifert (Hg.), *Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education: Theories, Concepts and Practical Approaches of Virtual, Blended and Physical Mobility* (S. 181-188). Bielefeld: wbv Publikation. <https://doi.org/10.3278/I77352W018>

E-Book Einzelbeitrag
von: Katrin Kaiser, Christiane Biehl

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

aus: Internationalization of Teacher Education in Higher Education (9783763977352)
Erscheinungsjahr: 2024
Seiten: 181 - 188
DOI: 10.3278/I77352W018

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 format¹ 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-

1 The efficacy of blended mobility formats has already been analyzed (e. g. Olearczyk, et al. 2019; Perföls, 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 ²
- 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:

² 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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Authors

Kaiser, Katrin, M. A., deputy director Department International Mobility and Coordination Internationalization of Teacher Education University of Cologne at University of Cologne (Germany).

Biehl, Christiane, M. A., deputy director Division International Affairs and Head of Department International Mobility at University of Cologne (Germany).