



Can we enhance intercultural reflexivity through virtual intercultural exchange? – A case study

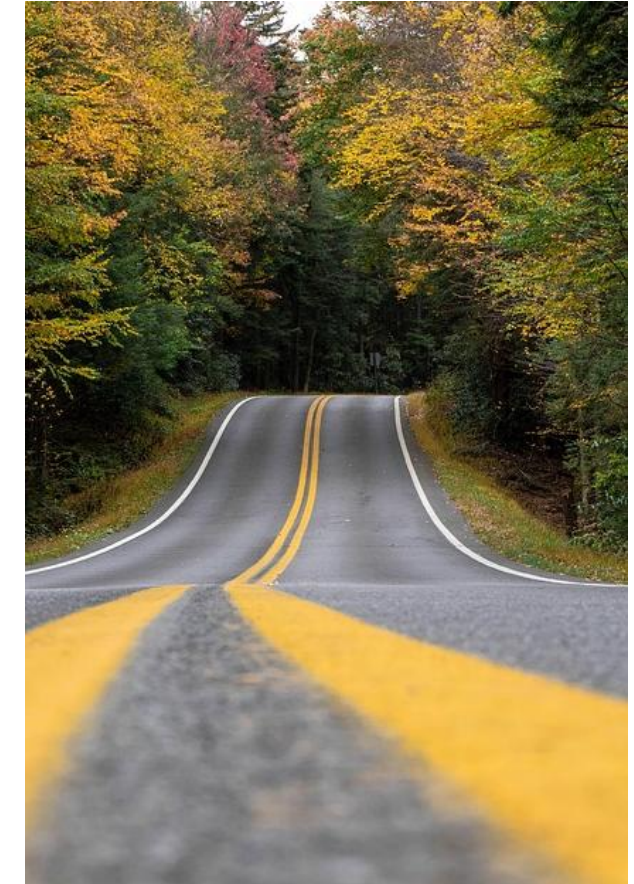
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1. Starting Point: Diversity in Classrooms

Increasing interculturality & heterogeneity

(see e.g. Sieber & Mantel 2012; DAAD 2013; Brück-Hübner et al. 2024; Seifert 2024)

Teachers should...

- (1) ...deal productively with (intercultural) heterogeneity in the classroom
- (2) ...prepare learners for life in a multicultural society (“Global Citizenship”)

Teachers need...

- (1) Global understanding & mindset
- (2) Intercultural & communication skills





2. Intercultural Learning

Dimensions of culture (Kohls & Knight, 2007)

“Visible” and “observable” elements (e.g. behavior, actions, words, body language)

“Hidden” and difficult to access elements (e.g. perceptions, beliefs, attitudes, values)

Goal of intercultural learning:

Impart knowledge and skills that enable learners to understand other cultures, and to interact (successfully) with people from other cultures (Lane, 2012)





3. Reflection and (Intercultural) Learning

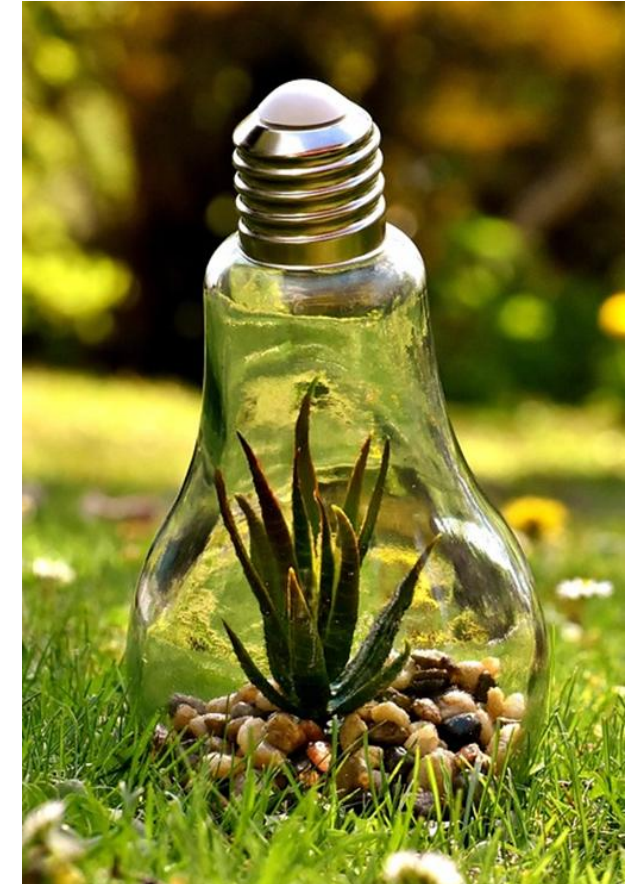
Attitudes of prospective teachers are often static (see e.g. Heinrich et al., 2013)

Important Concepts (Selection):

- “Bildung” (e.g. Koller, 2023; Thompson, 2009)
- “Learning through experience” (Dewey, 2000/1919)
- “Interactive Constructivism” (Reich, 2007)
- “Transformative learning” (Mezirow, 1997)
- “Experiential learning” (Kolb, 1984)

Thesis:

For intercultural learning in higher education, we need *authentic* spaces for experience and reflection wherever possible.





3. Reflection and (Intercultural) Learning

“physical mobility” vs. “virtual mobility/exchange”

Expansion of the *virtual internationalization* of university teaching (see Liu & Gao, 2022)

Potential (selection) (see Brück-Hübner, Müller & Seifert, 2024)

- Expansion of subject-specific and interdisciplinary (especially intercultural) skills
- Multi-perspective examination of learning content
- Establishment of global networks
- More inclusive, cost-effective, flexible, and sustainable than physical mobility





3. Reflection and (Intercultural) Learning

“physical mobility” vs. “virtual mobility/exchange”

Question: How can “virtual exchange” contribute to the promotion of intercultural skills and intercultural reflexivity?

Research: Promoting intercultural skills in virtual teaching is possible – but not without certain prerequisites:

“[...] Students do not develop intercultural competences automatically once they access the internet [...] and teachers must take a proactive approach to ensure that a COIL project results into students` intercultural learning.” (Fukkink et al., 2024, p.772)





3. Reflection and (Intercultural) Learning

Thesis: Key factors for promoting intercultural learning processes:

- (1) Creating a climate of trust
- (2) Promoting (informal and formal) exchange
- (3) Encouraging discomfort, contradictions, and changes in perspective (“spaces for experience”; content selection)
- (4) Promoting and demanding individual and collaborative reflection
- (5) Linking back to theory and research

(see Brück-Hübner, 2024)



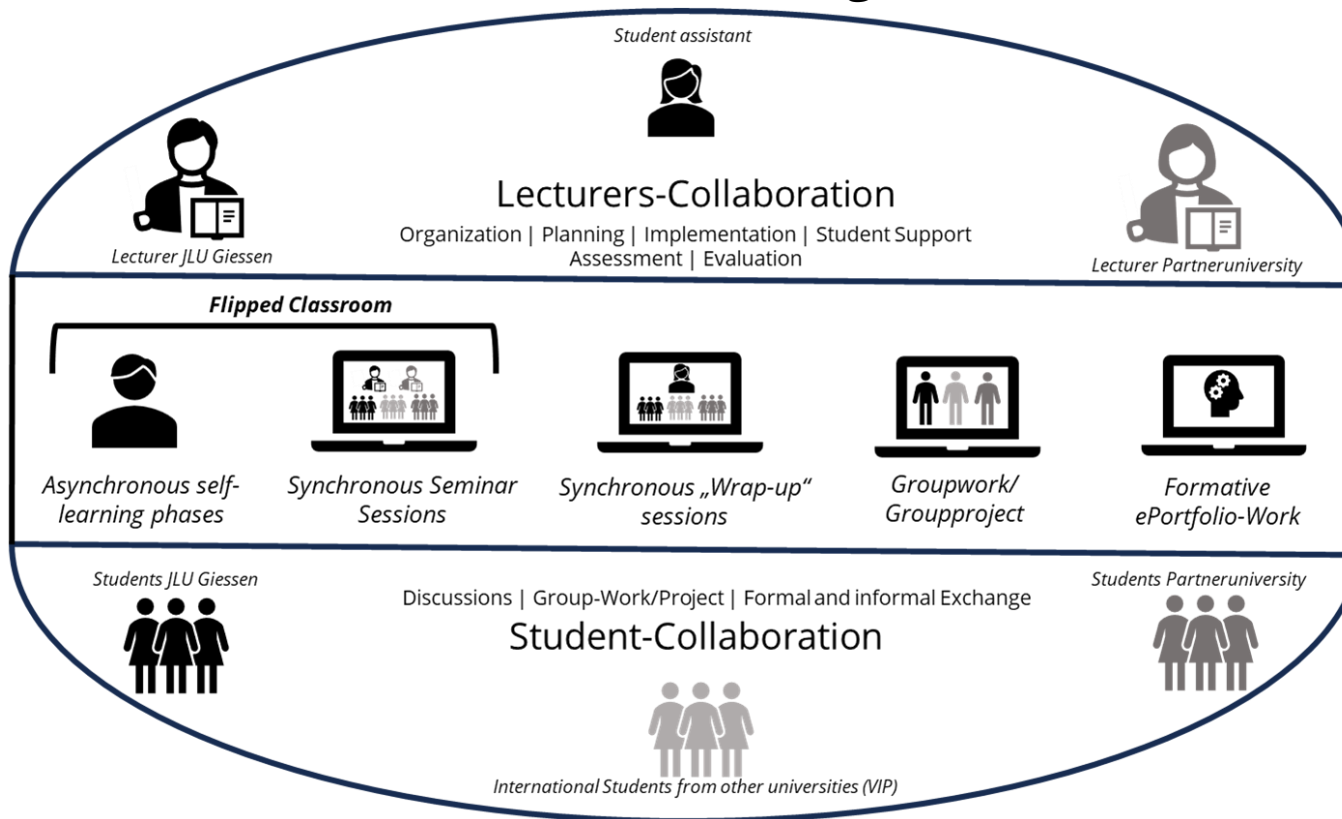
Research is needed to further develop a “didactics” for virtual international teaching that promotes reflexivity and intercultural learning among students





4. The VIEW-Seminar

VIEW = Virtual Intercultural Exchange Worldwide



Publications:

- Brück-Hübner, A., Müller, U., Joseph, T., Tuul, M., & Licht, F. (2024): <https://doi.org/10.3278/I77352W013>
- Brück-Hübner, A. & Müller, U. B. (2024): <https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839469385>



4. The VIEW-Seminar

**“Virtual International Exchange Worldwide:
Intercultural Communication and Inclusion in Global
Educational Contexts”**

Summer Term 2023



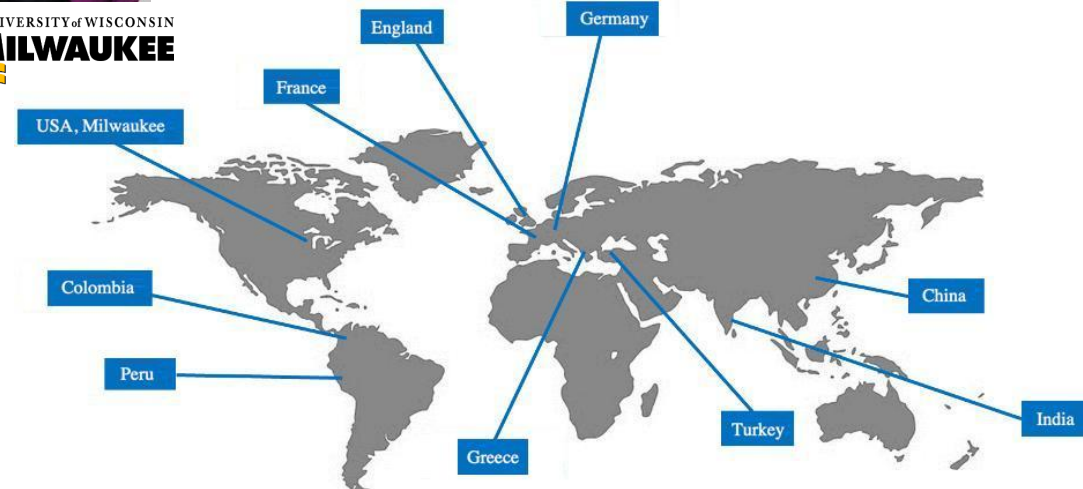
Tatiana Joseph
Lecturer



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Felicitas Licht
Student assistant





4. The VIEW-Seminar

Reflection in the VIEW-Seminar

- ePortfolio with weekly reflection tasks (“Prompts”)
- Introduction to the content of “good” reflection →
- Language: Choice between German, English and Spanish
- Reflections as part of performance assessment (quality not quantity/ content)

3 Levels of reflection according to Keller (2015, p. 11):

Level 1	Descriptive (e.g., look back/ tell what happened).
Level 2	Reflexive (e.g., establishing and analysing connections; reviewing the validity of one’s own knowledge/perceptions, etc.).
Level 3	Critical reflection (examining and testing whether, for example, insights/attitudes are justified and consistent; arriving at one’s own insights based on acquired knowledge; adapting behavior to newly learned information).



5. The Case Study

Roles:

Lecturer, researcher, and university educator

Questions:

- (1) Do virtual international seminars promote intercultural reflexivity among students?
- (2) Which (didactic) factors influence the quality of student reflections?

Data basis and methodological approach

- Evaluation (pre- and post-survey) → descriptive statistical analyses
- Student e-portfolios → Qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2016; Gläser & Laudel, 2010)



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Please indicate to what extent you have learned something by taking part in the seminar. I have learned something concerning...	disagree	rather disagree	so and so	rather agree	agree
... international and intercultural perspectives	0	0	0	23% (3)	77% (10)
... different learning cultures and concepts	0	0	8% (1)	23% (3)	69% (9)
... the reflection of other perspectives	0	0	0	31% (4)	69% (9)

n = 13 (german students only)



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Level 1

Descriptive (e.g., looking back/ telling what happened)

“[...] communication went pretty smoothly and was enjoyable throughout. There were more intercultural differences than similarities, I'd say, but it was interesting to learn about those. I don't think that anyone saw an issue in that. There were also some similarities, which was good to see as well. Overall, we could agree on the importance of intercultural communication” (VIEW_St_V)

“[...] Today's topic of inclusion once again provided a very exciting perspective and insight into the structures of other countries. During the group discussions, some similarities but also differences were identified. It became clear that inclusion must also be given greater focus in teacher training to enable teachers to feel more confident about it in the future.” (VIEW_ST_S)

“The dialogues in the breakout rooms were interesting. Both similarities and differences in certain culturally determined behaviors were revealed. Most of the differences concerned food and eating habits between the cultures of Germany, France, the USA, and Colombia. Similarities were found in greeting strangers.” (VIEW_ST_HMA_1)



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Level 2

Reflexive (e.g., establishing and analyzing connections; reviewing the validity of one's own knowledge/ perceptions, etc.)

"I have found that intercultural reflection on customs is not always easy. I found it particularly difficult to name typical things and customs from Germany, as many things are a matter of fact for me. Today I learned that intercultural reflection can start with even the smallest things and that things that are taken for granted in one culture can be handled very differently or very similarly in other cultures." (VIEW_St_Si)

"The exchange was very interesting because we were able to talk about similarities and differences regarding the topic of inclusion in different countries. This showed me that there is room for improvement in how inclusion is handled and implemented, not only in Germany but also in other countries. This helped us to discuss these shortcomings in our countries in more detail and to express our concerns and feelings about them. The exchange showed that this topic is still a major work in progress worldwide, which gave the impression that it may be possible to work on it together globally and that countries can benefit and learn from each other in this area [...]." (VIEW_St_B)

"I found the position game in today's seminar session very exciting. On some points, I initially assumed that the crosses would be close together. However, after all the crosses had been placed, the opposite proved to be true. I learned once again that you can't judge others based on yourself and that there are different perspectives on numerous aspects around the world." (VIEW_St_Si)



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Level 3

Critical-reflective (checking and testing whether, for example, insights/ attitudes are justified and consistent; arriving at your own insights based on acquired knowledge; adapting behavior to newly learned information)

"[...] It made me conclude that we always have to think about different cultural aspects but also can't leave out the individual that is part of the culture, yes, but also has their own specific ideas that might be rooted elsewhere. We just have to stay open minded and listen to what the other has to say and take them seriously while showing respect for them and their culture just the same." (VIEW_St_V)

"[...] I sometimes I catch myself thinking that my way is the only right way. I think that's because I always think carefully about how I can do something in the most effective and productive way. Sometimes, however, other things take priority, such as interpersonal exchange, and it doesn't matter how quickly the task is completed. Here, I need to learn to be more open to the opinions of others and to be willing to try a different approach. This often leads to a much better result than if I had worked through everything in the most disciplined way possible." (VIEW_ST_R)

"[...] The feeling of being afraid to speak in front of or with people is new to me, as I have never experienced this in my native language and have never had any problems with it before. I think it is important that I remember this feeling and situation, as in my future professional life there will also be communication situations with people who do not speak to me in their native language and who may feel similarly uncomfortable [...]." (VIEW_St_Hi)



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Level of reflection: Frequency distribution

Field	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
Intercultural learning/ intercultural communication	30% (n=55)	28% (n=52)	42% (n=79)	n=186
Group work/ exchange in breakout rooms	54% (n=39)	17% (n=12)	29% (n=21)	n=72
Seminar design	51% (n=35)	32% (n=22)	17% (n=12)	n=69

Number of ePortfolios analyzed: 19



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Level of reflection & prompts

Prompt	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total
How would you describe the communication [...] today? Did you experience intercultural similarities and/or differences?	55% n=16	38% n=11	7% n=2	n=29
What are your short-and long-term goals for developing intercultural competence? What resources/ opportunities/ experiences will you need to accomplish these goals?	0% n=0	7% n=1	93% n=13	n=14
What lessons do you take away from this seminar that will be helpful in your future teaching?	7% n=1	0% n=0	93% n=13	n=14

Number of ePortfolios analyzed: 19; focus on “Intercultural Learning/ Intercultural Communication”



5. The Case Study

Key Results

Level of reflection & university affiliation

Institution	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Total codings	Mean value codings	Students/analysed eps
UWM	32% n=10	35% n=11	32% n=10	n=31	7,75	n=4
JLU	27% n=38	29% n=41	44% n=62	n=141	12,8	n=11
Others	29% n=7	29% n=7	42% n=10	n=24	6	n=4

Institution	Median				
	1	1,5	2	2,5	3
UWM		n=1	n=3		
JLU			n=7	n=1	n=3
Others	n=1		n=2		n=1

Number of ePortfolios analyzed: 19; Focus on “Intercultural Learning/ Intercultural Communication”



5. The Case Study

Key Results

- Virtual international teaching can promote intercultural reflexivity among students
- Analysis of VIEW ePortfolios:
 - Prompts/reflection prompts influence the quality of reflections
 - Institutional affiliation influences the frequency and quality of reflections
- Further indications: Methods used may make a difference

*"[...] I found the **position game** very exciting. It made it clear to me that even in our seminar, people have such different opinions. I noticed that no one answered any question in the same way. Opinions differed greatly on every question. That's why intercultural reflection is so important. To enable different cultures to coexist successfully, everyone must reflect on themselves so that no one is discriminated against [...]."*
(Student, ePortfolio, VIEW seminar, 2023)



5. The Case Study

Outlook

More in-depth analyses are planned to examine the extent to which the quality of reflection is related to the following factors

- Language/Language Level
- Scope of reflections
- Topic of the event session (see e.g., Bird et al., 2020)



5. The Case Study

Methodological Reflection

- Self-report/reflections: Actual transfer cannot be verified
- Assessment context: Social desirability?
- Small sample size
- Exploratory/qualitative study → no “representativeness”



6. Conclusion & Outlook

“The reflections and the content studied were powerful in making me think about myself as a teacher and my social context. It was a process of confrontation and awareness of all the work I must do if I want to generate social changes with my profession [...] I enjoy the virtual classes and the opportunity they give us to overcome space barriers. I liked finding a climate of understanding, respect, and sharing. And what better way to learn about other cultures than with people from different cultures? .” (VIEW_St_Mo_1)

“[...] The seminar also provided many chances to reflect [...] this critical thinking skill is very important for future teachers because we should question our own practices and strive to improve them. We can make a change if we, as future teachers, change our own practices.” (VIEW_St_Mö)

- Virtual international courses are a good (low-threshold) way to promote intercultural reflexivity among learners. The potential depends on the course being designed with appropriate teaching methods in mind.
- Further research is needed into the didactic design possibilities of virtual international teaching that creates opportunities for reflection and learning that are as authentic as possible.



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