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How Transatlantic Workshops and Field Trips Can Make German-American University Partnerships an Active Learning Space

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Ten-day workshops and field trips had a key role in the partnership between a university of applied sciences in East Germany and a small private liberal arts college in North Carolina. This case study evaluates activities and programs from the involved faculty's perspective. The authors look at the underlying institutional processes, they discuss organization and content of the programs, and reflect upon the learning experiences of the participating students. Conclusions are drawn regarding further program development and internationalization strategies.

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This article, D 4-11, has been assigned to:

Chapter D: Learning and teaching
Subchapter D 4: Partnerships

1. Building an Active German-American University Partnership

1.1 Educational Catalysts and Political Challenges

Shared history and sensitivities

When building German-American university partnerships one must consider the wider historical and political context. Although Germany and the United States can look back on a significant shared history (e.g., Nolan, 2012), there may be sensitivities in the relationship between the two countries, even prior to the NSA issue (e.g., Martinelli, 2009). These backgrounds may have an effect on internal university decision-making on both sides of the Atlantic.

Transatlantic politics and university micropolitics are connected

German faculty members must not only compete for financial resources for their international goals, but also they may deal with political or even ideological backgrounds that influence the micropolitics in their departments.

NC Task Force on global education

Despite financial limitations, the desire for institutional relationships with international partners has remained strong in the U.S, particularly in the field of education. In 2011, a N.C. State Board of Education Task Force assessed the state's effort to produce "globally competitive graduates" and released findings in a report that included recommendations that the state make the internationalization of educator preparation a priority by (1) requiring institutions to prepare teachers to use global content, (2) renewing and exploring new Memoranda of Understanding, (3) identifying priority nations for international relationships, and (4) identify partner countries as priority sources for teacher professional development and education exchanges and visits (State Board of Education's Task Force on Global Education, 2013).

Case study and program evaluation

Once a Memorandum of Understanding is negotiated and signed, models and concepts that help make university partnerships productive, active and sustainable are still needed to ensure that students engage in a meaningful learning experience. The following case study and program evaluation (Patton, 2002, pp. 447-452) can be considered as an outline to such conceptualization with regard to methods, academic or cultural content of transatlantic workshops and field trips, which became the supporting pillar of the vibrant partnership between a liberal arts college in North Carolina and a university of applied sciences in East Germany.

1.2 Personal Motivation of Faculty Members as Genesis

In 2008 J. Broecher was searching for American partners to collaborate with the interdisciplinary childhood studies program at his university in East Germany. He was inspired by his own educational studies in the United States. Even though two other American universities were interested in collaborating, neither of these partnerships blossomed as much as the one initiated by a now-retired professor of the liberal arts college in North Carolina. After the Second World War W. Schulz and his family had been expelled from East Prussia to that region where our university in East Germany is located. There he spent his teenage years before he eventually immigrated to the United States.

**Personal backgrounds
of faculty**

While J. Broecher, still teaching at the campus in East Germany, was looking for partners in the United States, his American colleague, back from his trip to East Germany, sent a letter to the German International Office, expressing his wish to collaborate. What followed were phone calls, visits and return visits of faculty members, planning meetings, and finally in 2009 the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding that governed the exchange of students and the financial aspects of the partnership.

**Birth of a university
partnership**

1.3 Imbalance of Interests and Differences in Student Motivation

It soon became clear that there was an imbalance. German students from the childhood studies program, and also from the business or technical programs of that university, showed a strong interest in studying in the United States and were highly motivated to spend a semester in North Carolina.

**German students
comfortable spending
a semester in the
United States**

The students from North Carolina did not show interest in spending an entire semester in East Germany. The same phenomenon could be observed with the two other US-partnerships J. Broecher initiated. Both short-term visits and student teaching abroad present ongoing opportunities and challenges. As noted by Schneider (2003), the majority of American teachers feel that study abroad should be a part of the undergraduate experience, and teacher candidates in the United States indicate they would like to see more opportunities available to them. However, even with interest and positive support, a very small percentage of American education students engage in international study. Institutional and disciplinary barriers persist, and in teacher education in the United States, integrating the time needed for study abroad as well as the international content into the teacher education curriculum has been problematic.

**Study abroad from the
American perspective:
Opportunities and
challenges**

1.4 Ten-Day Workshops and Field Trips as Targeted Framework for Student Exchange and Learning

Responsibility for program organization

A collaborative analysis of the situation conducted by all participating faculty members and International Offices led to the idea of planning ten-day workshops and field trips for American and German students and faculty, on German ground. The German university would handle the organization and preparation as compensation for the German students studying for free in the U.S. The program would be developed collaboratively. The participation of the other two U.S. universities failed, in both years, because of lack of funding. The liberal arts college in North Carolina however had the financial means to participate through institutional support for their Teaching Fellows Program.

1.5 The North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program and the Relevance of an International Experience

Funding through the Teaching Fellows Program

The students enrolled in this program, funded jointly by the state of North Carolina and the university, could afford the trip to Germany, because one international trip was part of the program of study planned to meet their program mission of, preparing teachers who are among other things: competent global citizens.

Teaching Fellows demographically mirror the approximately 80% of America's public school teachers that are from the middle-class, mostly white small towns. They, in most cases, went to predominantly white high schools and have virtually no experience with a culture other than their own (Walters, Gari, and Walters, 2009). One way to help fully prepare globally competent teachers must include an international experience (Hunter et al., 2006). The liberal arts college in North Carolina is committed to providing that experience for the Teaching Fellows.

Significance of classroom observations

In the United States, the more traditional approach to teaching pre-service teachers to become effective teachers includes the use of observations from classrooms. It also includes the use of films of exemplary educators. But what if teachers could visit social or cultural settings that, under ordinary circumstances, they may never have the opportunity to visit? What would happen if education students (i.e., teacher candidates) visited a setting in another country with a different culture? How would that experience benefit these new teachers? (Jakubowski, 2003) That was the focus of the transatlantic workshops and field trips.

Impact of a short-term international experience

The authors also wanted to know the impact of a short-term international experience. Was ten days in another country long enough to make a significant impact on the participants? Willard-Holt (2000)

found, without exception, that students made changes in their behavior because of a weeklong short-term study abroad. Many of the students found that they had pre-conceived ideas that proved to be incorrect. Another positive change experienced by the pre-service teachers was becoming more globally aware. Pence and Macgillivray (2007) also found that students benefited as a result of an international experience. Some of the reported benefits were an increased awareness and an appreciation of a different culture, and increased confidence.

1.6 Differences Between the Participating German and American Students' Fields of Study

The groups of Teaching Fellows from North Carolina came from varied teacher education fields, ranging from early childhood, elementary, special education to high school. The German group consisted of students of childhood studies, an interdisciplinary program of study that comprised children's rights, sociology, health science, political science, and education. The students from North Carolina all planned to work as teachers in their professional lives. The German students, with their Bachelor's degree would try to access national or international administrations, political institutions, social work, public health and educational projects of various kinds.

Teacher education and childhood studies

The challenge now was to create a program that met the learning interests of both groups of students, those from the childhood studies program and those of the teacher education program.

Meeting the learning needs of both groups of students

2. Ten-Day Transatlantic Workshops and Field Trips as a Targeted Format for Student Exchange and Learning

2.1 The Program of May 2010

Cooperatively we developed the following workshop theme: "Childhood and youth education in the German-American dialogue."

Key theme

The German students received English texts during a first meeting. These articles addressed a range of issues in the American education system. We also set up an E-learning platform, where German and American students could discuss their ideas, questions and learning interests. The E-learning platform also contained modules with topics such as: "How to deal with diversity in the classroom? How to deal with challenging behavior and learning problems? How to deal with

Distribution of reading material and installing an E-learning platform

migration backgrounds and cultural differences in the school context? How to include parents?" etc. For each module the first author developed posts to further academic discussions, and motivate the immersion in research articles and text books. A selection of these texts had been also provided to the American students as required reading before the trip.

Coming together as a group, in West Germany

The American group flew into Amsterdam airport, where they visited the Anne-Frank Museum before they continued to Cologne, West Germany. Here, the American group was joined by the German students and faculty. The Germans' limited funding did not allow them to include the Amsterdam-experience in their trip, even though conjoint exploration of the Anne-Frank-House together with the American party would have enriched their cultural and historical experience as students of childhood studies. The group of almost 50 stayed in the youth hostel of Cologne. The location of the hostel was within walking distance to the city center and its cultural outlets and historical monuments. The hostel also provided group members the opportunity to broaden their contacts and interact with others housed at the hostel.

School visits in bi-national groups

The next day the groups split up into small bi-national units and made a series of school visits during the morning and during the afternoon, in the city of Cologne. The schools included elementary, special education, and secondary schools; and were both public and private schools. Students and faculty from both countries went into the classrooms, talked to teachers, students, and school principals about their educational work and the challenges they had to deal with. All the students received a checklist to guide their classroom observations. They also received questions for reflection and open statements to complete as exercises to promote targeted discussion and critical thinking.

Conjoint workshop at the Teachers' College

The following day, the whole group visited the University of Cologne. Staff from the International Office gave an introduction to their programs of study and information about their international activities. That afternoon the group went to the Cologne Teachers' College where the university students that become teachers get a practical training for eighteen months. There we had a three-hour workshop with a team of instructors, from the English department, all experienced teachers, and their student teachers. The team of the Cologne Teachers' College and the university faculty from North Carolina and East Germany collaboratively planned that workshop, during pre-trip planning. The topic, that was supposed to include all the sub-groups, was: "How can we put individualized learning into practice in schools?"

Pre-arranged didactical structure

The Teachers College's team developed the details of the meeting, pre-arranged tables, cards with tasks and themes, and flip charts for presenting and sharing the results in the rotunda of the historical

building. They also graciously provided coffee and biscuits. Contact between the group members was facilitated by an opening “Contact Bingo” game, followed by small group exchanges with the Cologne students sharing their experiences in teacher training, and also whole group opportunities with the mixed group reading and discussing a common text in English (a scene from a play taking place in a classroom). The sizes of the groups were small enough to allow the students to ask questions and have verbal exchanges easily, and “best practices” were discussed and critiqued. The exciting result of this pre-arranged didactical structure, was 100 people working together in the rotunda with an outstanding view over the roofs of Cologne and the river Rhine.

A visit to the old city of Cologne concluded this part of the field trip. The group continued their trip to the East of Germany on a high speed train. The train ride provided an excellent time for the German and American students and faculty to have dinner on board and continue learning about one another, and to discuss experiences from the Cologne program.

Cultural program

In East Germany the American students stayed with host families or student hosts, sharing their apartments. Thus, the American students were fully immersed in the German language, mannerism and culture. In the planning of the program the American students had been put in contact with their German hosts via E-Mail. During the program of 2012 the American students also lived with host families, during the days on the university campus. The “host family” method allows an immersion of the American students into the German culture. According to Pence and Macgillivray (2007) information about the culture is often transferred to the visiting students. During the stay with the host family, the visiting students learn many differences in their own lifestyle as it compares to the host family. Finally, stereotypes often dissolve as the visiting students learn more from their host family.

American students in host families

We had three workshop days on the campus in East Germany. Students and faculty from both countries shared and discussed what they had experienced during the school visits in Cologne. The American and German faculty members gave an overview of the educational systems of their countries. Differences and similarities were discussed, as well as solutions for the educational challenges both countries face.

Workshops at campus

The last stop of the trip was a visit to the city of Berlin. Visiting the Jewish Museum we picked up the thematic thread of childhood under the condition of persecution and the former visit of the American group to the Anne-Frank-House in Amsterdam, Netherlands. The binational groups of students were given small assignments and questions they had to solve as a team while exploring the museum. A group of German students had been involved in the development of these research questions.

Museum visits

Exploring historical backgrounds

During a guided bus tour that followed, the guide talked about the German divide, life in former East Germany, the Soviet political system, the conflicts between East and West, the famous Air Lift the Americans kept up to feed the people of West Berlin during the Cold War, and later the building and breakdown of the Wall. Lastly we went to the Wall-Museum to learn more about the German divide.

2.2 The Program of October 2011

German students traveling with PROMOS

Our second collaborative experience occurred the following October when a group of German students, many of whom had been hosts during the previous May trip, traveled to North Carolina. They flew into the Charlotte airport and were met by the American faculty who accompanied the group to Germany. On the first day the group explored Charlotte, visiting the Levine and Bechler Museums, having lunch and experiencing an American shopping mall. The group then traveled to the university campus for a Welcome Dinner hosted by the Teaching Fellows. On Sunday the group attended a Southern Baptist church service followed by a traditional church dinner. On Monday the German students visited local schools and a childcare center housed in the high school. That afternoon the students attended a class teaching the German language on campus.

Extension of partnership activities

During the trip German students experienced local culture through a visit for lunch at an American pub in downtown Hickory, visiting a science and art museum and a press conference with the Mayor. To conclude the trip the German students attended university classes with their American hosts and had a send-off dinner at a barbeque restaurant where they learned to square-dance. This trip was external to the original partnership agreement and was a spontaneous extension of our partnership activities. It became possible because the German party surprisingly could get financial aid from "PROMOS", a program that has the goal to foster the international mobility of German students. The American partners added generously to their negotiated responsibilities by arranging for accommodation, food and the cultural program.

2.3 The Program of May 2012

Key theme

This time the collaboratively developed topic was: "Education in a globalized world: Our historical backgrounds, the current challenges and how can we move forward?" There were a total of 23 American students on the trip. Within the group one could see three distinct groups: 14 students planning to teach high school whose areas of specialty came from the following: music, physical education, mathematics, English, and history. 7 students planning to teach elementary school; and 2 students studying health sciences who were planning to get a master's degree in a health-related field.

We started with lectures about Germany's cultural history, social reforms and educational efforts of the Baroque period. Then we discussed German Classicism, as well as the downfall of German culture under the Nazis, Socialist education in East Germany and reforms after the fall of the Wall.

Introduction at campus

Lectures and discussions were meant to prepare the incoming students for visits to the Francke Foundation in Halle, and above all to Weimar, the capital of German Classicism. In Weimar, we spent three days in a youth hostel. The first author, who organized the field trip, chose the Francke Foundation in the East German city of Halle because it is part of the historical and educational heritage of that region, and there were also close relationships between the Francke Foundation and certain religious communities in the United States. To clearly convey this to the students and faculty members from both countries, particular guides with an academic background and excellent knowledge of the English language had been hired.

Site visits

Weimar as the primary destination, where the group stayed for three days, had been chosen, because of its salient impact on German culture, education and identity, i.e. Anna Amalia, Goethe, Herder or Schiller (Daly et al., 2003; Gerard, 2012; Henke and Kord, 2000; Lewes, 2012). Later, Weimar was influenced by the "Bauhaus" as well as the philosopher Nietzsche (Young, 2010). Under Nazi rule, Weimar entered one of its darkest chapters in history, the building of the concentration camp Buchenwald (Hackett, 1997; Merseburger, 2005, pp. 342-359).

German culture and philosophy

Prior to visiting Halle and Weimar the American and German students and faculty explored the East German city in-depth, where the university is located. This city of around 25.000 inhabitants has much to offer, from the historical buildings from the late Middle Ages, the Baroque and Classic period to the uniform and monotonous buildings from the Soviet time. The group also visited different types of schools in that East German city, such as preschools, elementary and different types of secondary schools, watched teaching and learning processes in the classrooms, and talked with principals and teachers. At times, bi-national smaller groups visited different institutions. At the end of the day, back at campus, the various groups exchanged experiences and thoughts.

School visits in East Germany

One afternoon, in a large secondary school, one of the partner schools of the East German University of Applied Sciences, a discussion was held with the complete school staff including the principals, the teachers and social workers. Topics of discussion were the changes in the educational system in former East Germany after the fall of the Wall; how the teachers and other school staff personally experienced that transition, and finally managed to deal with the new situation. This issue was also part of the focus during the program of 2010. For one

Education before and after the fall of the "Wall"

of the discussion forums, we had invited one East German faculty member who personally experienced the Soviet period. Many questions could be asked and discussed, looking at the time of transition, after the Wall came down in 1989.

Organized tours and individualized options to explore sites

Focus of the cultural program in Weimar included the Goethe House, the Schiller House, the Wittums-Palais, the Anna Amalia Library and the concentration camp Buchenwald. Tickets and tours had to be reserved ahead of time. At times the group used audio guides in German and English. Smaller, individual groups visited the castle, Goethe's garden house at the river Ilm, the Nietzsche archive and the grave of Maria Pawlowna. On the way back to the East German university city, we visited the historic city of Quedlinburg, with its unique framework architecture. Back on campus, we had a final sharing of experiences and insights from the field trip.

Socializing with each other, transnational communication

The German partners arranged a barbecue evening and invited also the host families, the student hosts and all other persons from the schools and communities that had contributed to the program, to be part of that evening which offered opportunities to talk about many the experiences in an informal manner.

3. Evaluation of Processes, Partnership Activities and Programs

3.1 Institutional Level

3.1.1 Positive Findings

Growth of study abroad initiatives

The higher levels of administration and the International Office of the German university showed great interest and encouraged partnerships with universities in the United States. The two trips by students from North Carolina in 2010 and 2012, and the one trip of German students to North Carolina in 2011, were invigorating to the growth of study abroad initiatives. After the first visit, which included the Director of International Studies from the liberal arts college in North Carolina as a participant, opportunities for students to travel both for short and longer term experiences increased dramatically, as did the number of German students studying at the North Carolina campus. Institutional membership in various consortia and investment in providing more systems and infrastructure has been noticeable.

3.1.2 Challenges

Should the higher levels of administration in a German public university want to bring forward internationalization by negotiating this goal with the ministry of education on the one hand, and writing it down in the contract and goal list of a new arriving faculty member on the other hand, their power to put this into practice is extremely limited. Other faculty members, institutes or departments can thwart and block such initiatives by voting against an intended Memorandum of Understanding or by withholding funds through their majority in the department council. To start the whole process just from the top is not possible in the public German university system.

Top-down or bottom-up?

Some German faculty members may argue that the Bush administration had not signed a certain children's rights paper. This argument can be indeed a strong reason for these faculty members to block any form of academic cooperation with the United States. A strategic alliance with the schools outside the human science department, where people are not so much involved in the micropolitics may allow more reasonable thought about the idea as a whole, and support for the initiative so that it goes through to the university administration. Theoretically, once a partnership is established, usually all schools and departments of a university can act in that framework. A highly competitive climate may result in the department council with regards to receiving funds, which are necessary to put the program into practice. This climate may result in behaviors from those under pressure, such as the German dean of the human science department, not receiving the American delegation, including the American dean, who came to sign the Memorandum of Understanding. Although there were internal politics involved, the Vice-President received the American delegation.

**Strategic alliances
necessary**

To understand the particular dynamic of that case we have to take into consideration not only the internal power struggle and micropolitics, but also the fact that the East German city, where this university of applied sciences is located, experienced a dramatic economic as well as demographic decline and really needed cooperative projects on national and international levels. These projects would ideally include incoming guests, that book hotel rooms, go to the restaurants, go shopping and make the campus an interesting place that attracts students from the Western part of Germany and from other countries, to stay alive and to further develop. Both transatlantic workshops that took place in that city had the full attention of the local people, the host families, the mayor, and the journalists. So the department council fortunately came to the insight that funding the program benefitted not only the university but the whole city and region.

**Significance of internationalization strategies
for East Germany**

Nevertheless the plan to include two other European universities, from Ireland and from Scotland, into the program of 2012, became blocked by the majority of the department council. Even though the students

Power struggles and micropolitics in German university departments

and faculty in the childhood studies and childhood education programs in Cork or Ayr were more than interested in that kind of program, as were the higher levels of administration and the International Office of the German university, the necessary Erasmus agreements could not be signed, because the German department council ultimately rejected the initiative. And this time there was no chance to bypass the blockage through the German business department, because the universities in Cork and Ayr had no business programs. Thus the groups from Ireland and Scotland could not travel and be part of the 2012 program, even if they desired to do so.

Readiness of German faculty members to teach in English or bilingually

The partners put together possible plans of study for a semester for the individual exchange student, which the other side could accept, in order to award the student the credits for the semester. Although this needed a lot of flexibility, both sides made it possible. Thus, the German students who went to North Carolina for a semester received exchange credit for the courses they took. Although there were potential American students interested in taking courses in Germany for a semester, they never chose to participate because their choices for taking classes were extremely limited, even if the classes would formally fit, in terms of curriculum and content, because only a minority of German faculty members in that program of study were able or willing to teach in English language, nor would they teach bilingually.

3.2 Program Organization and Program Content

3.2.1 Positive findings

Designing the program around a key theme

When planning the field trips of 2010 and 2012, key themes were developed cooperatively. The actual cultural and educational programs were then designed around those themes. Both field trips included the exploration of the German educational system in comparison with the educational system in the United States, in particular that of North Carolina. During the first field trip additional topics included political and historical themes from the Third Reich to the Cold War to the fall of the Wall and the realignment and transition processes in East Germany. The second field trip included an exploration of the German classical period but also the corrupting of the Weimar myth by the Nazis. This all worked out well up to a certain point. In the evenings students and faculty sat together over dinner at the youth hostel and discussed the events and impressions of the day. Especially the American students expressed detailed, profound and meaningful thoughts about their observations, impressions and experiences.

Network of partner schools in the city

The support and cooperation of principals and teachers of the German schools participating in the transatlantic workshops were extraordinarily good. The first author had built a network of partner schools in that

East German city to make educational institutions accessible for his own students. Now these schools generously opened their doors to students and faculty from the United States, on the basis of these already existing professional relationships.

Several of the German schools offered the American students and faculty the opportunity to come back for a longer internship or for their research. Indeed, several student teachers from North Carolina returned to East Germany to work as assistant teachers at elementary and secondary schools, under supervision via Skype from faculty from the United States. These students more quickly picked up elements of the German language. They really accessed the foreign setting and moved on to an in-depth experience.

American student teachers returned to Germany

3.2.2 Challenges

During the workshops and discussion forum at the secondary school in East Germany a free and open exchange of experiences and thoughts with the teaching staff was intended. All these teachers had been socialized during the Soviet period. As a second language the students at school had to learn Russian during these times, and not English, as they did in the Western part of Germany. Thus we encountered significant language barriers.

Language barriers during school workshops with teachers

In the preparation for the school visits, workshops and the grand discussion forum at that school the first author, during a preparatory meeting with the school staff, agreed to their wish that the workshops begin with small presentations of their school program and the school's particular pedagogy rather than open discussion, in order to gain some secure ground and later they wanted to try to open up to a more free discussion. What we originally intended, to discuss the time of transition in the school system after the Wall came down, was possible, but only in a very limited time frame, and only with summarizing translations of what had been said.

Limited options for an in-depth discussion

The planning and implementation of the transatlantic workshops on the German side were the sole responsibility of J. Broecher. During the first year, he partly had the support of a research assistant who also took the German students to North Carolina in 2011. In the second year, he had a student assistant available for three months, with a limited workload of hours. While the staff in the International Office of a German university is part of the administration and thus protected against working more than forty hours a week, a teaching faculty member, who is actively working in the international field increases his workload enormously.

High workload of responsible faculty

Personal investment and compensation are not in a balance

Moreover a German faculty member can negotiate some extra pay for his additional work every three or five years. But effort and financial compensation, looking at the many work hours that are necessary to keep such a project going, never can be brought in a reasonable balance. In the end, what counts, is the personal motivation of the individual faculty member, and his own self-management and self-care strategy.

Planning requires vision, patience and flexibility

During both transatlantic programs, that were operated on German ground, the first author was in negotiations with all three US universities he had initiated partnerships with. All three expressed great interest and considered visiting Germany and participating with students and faculty. All three partner universities had specific requests in regard to excursion dates and workshop content. Finally, common ground had been found. However, the dates everyone could agree on fell in the school vacation time in that East German federal state, and all American partners were mostly interested in exploring the school system and getting into the classrooms.

That meant that the school visitation program had to be moved to a different federal state of Germany and it also meant that the first author could not rely on his loyal and supportive network of partner schools. As a substitute the city of Cologne in North-Rhine Westphalia was chosen, because of the professional contacts the first author had there, and also because Cologne is a highly interesting place for visitors from abroad, because of its history and culture.

Unexpected factors may constitute parts of the program

Thus the group from North Carolina booked flight to Amsterdam, then traveled to Cologne by bus, then by train to East Germany, and finally to Berlin, and from there they flew back to the United States. Completely unexpected factors constitute parts of the program. In the end, from the three US-universities, only the liberal arts college in North Carolina participated in the program. During the second year, the first author initially planned for a potential group of 95 participants because at first all three US partner universities were on board.

Starting with a rough sketch, then clear things step by step

Due to the high number of expected participants, an entire youth hostel in the city of Weimar had to be reserved almost a year in advance. It took about three quarters of the year until we found out the true number of participants: 50. In the end, only the Teaching Fellows from North Carolina came. The first author had to talk to the youth hostel's management weekly to update the hostel about the expected group size so that they were able to sell the free beds on the market and at the same time stay on board with us.

Cultural differences

One issue raised with the "host family" method of housing was a cultural difference in itself. The American students come from an area called the "Bible Belt". The importance of religion in this geographic area cannot be overstated. This coupled with the fact that the Ameri-

can students chose to attend a private university sponsored in part by the Lutheran Church posed some logistical concerns. When one American female student was placed with a “host family” that consisted of a student aged male and female it made the female American student very concerned. Reports to the American professors stated that members of the opposite sex all slept in the same one room apartment. The uneasiness of the female American student shows a cultural difference between the two groups even though no inappropriate actions took place. What is acceptable to one may not be acceptable to another.

3.3 Learning Experiences of the Students

3.3.1 Positive findings

During the guided tours of the homes of Goethe and Schiller, the rococo ballroom in the Anna Amalia Library, or the Wittums-Palais, one could observe the students deeply immersed with the audio guides moving from room to room, pausing for example in Schiller’s office, or the famous dining room of Anna Amalia, where the intellectual elite of that time used to meet. The students were also deeply moved by the exhibits and the extensive grounds of the concentration camp Buchenwald, where everybody could move with German or English speaking audio guides in an individual manner.

Deep learning

In addition to the scheduled tours in Weimar, there was also sufficient time for self-scheduled activities for the students. Bi-national groups of students actively explored the city, e.g. the famous crypt. Some single students also made their way to the Nietzsche-Villa. And always there were small conversations inspired by these places and by the young people exploring them.

Exploring the cultural heritage

Perhaps because of the beautiful and sunny May weather, a great part of the informal student activities happened on the green meadows by the river Ilm, very close to the castle and the Anna Amalia library. While students of both nations sat by the cool water of the river to refresh themselves, they vividly discussed the devastating fire in the library in the year 2004. Or they contemplated about the rock of fortune that can be found in Goethe’s garden. It seems that learning can happen very individualized and informally during such a field trip.

Informal sharing of thoughts and experiences

Through the hands-on approach when giving their lectures or moderating discussions about educational topics and challenges on the East German campus, the American faculty members made sure that the learning experience was enriched for everyone. This style of teaching made learning more accessible and sustainable. For instance K. Matthews gave short inputs, made everybody in the audience think about a challenging question and then motivated the listener to share thoughts

Hands-on approach during workshops at campus

with his or her neighbors. The results were written down, collected in plenary discussions, put together on a flip chart and then the findings were put in larger contexts.

East German residents and hosts extremely supportive

The residents of the East German city were extremely helpful in hosting the students and taking them to the various program sites. While the American guests were in town, one had the impression that the whole population participated in the international exchange program. Almost daily the local newspapers reported about the program and the next steps the group had taken. During the first year the mayor gave a reception. He would have done the same during the second year, but the time was needed for the field trip to Weimar. The American students perceived this closeness to and with the residents of that East German city as laudable and a very positive aspect of their experience, regardless if they were hosted in student apartments, family homes with both parents and small children, single adults or elder couples, where the children had moved away and now there was a bed available. In some cases, the American students became so attached to the host family that communication between the two individuals continues nearly two years later. In two cases, German students came to the United States to visit with American students they met during the transatlantic workshop.

Educational goals of the trip

As with any travel abroad experience it should begin with developing educational goals for the trip (Sachau, Brasher, and Fee, 2009). The goals of the 2012 trip for the American students were as follows: Students would gain an understanding of the German culture; Students would observe German schools and be able to compare and contrast the two different school systems; Students would gain an understanding of the German system of public schools; and students would visit and learn the historical significance of key historical sites in Berlin, Halle, and Weimar, Germany. Having a contact at the German University was instrumental in achieving these goals.

Students' comments

Both German and American professors were able to assess their students by their comments in debriefing sessions held at the end of each day. The American professors assessed their students on the last day in Berlin by conducting a more formal sharing and discussion session. Students answered questions highlighting the trip. They were also to compare the cultures of the United States and Germany. Question three was to discuss the difference in the schools. Finally, question four was to get the students' impressions of why the American schools should focus more on integrating the arts like the schools do in Germany. The four American professors each took one of the four groups and discussed the findings of each group after they had time to respond to each question on paper. From all of the entries, themes emerged. The data suggest that the goals for the trip were met, and that the American students increased in their global awareness, appreciation of difference, self-confidence, and were provoked to consider

challenges to preconceived ideas. On the return trip to the United States the American professors asked the students to complete an “I will” statement. An “I will” statement is one that the student will do when they enter student teaching or their own classroom in the near future. Two “I will” statements from students again let us know that they did benefit from this short-term transatlantic workshop in Germany:

“I will teach with a more globally aware attitude and teach my children to appreciate other countries and cultures.”

“I will utilize the philosophical principles of Johann Comenius’ aesthetic, attention to ‘learning by doing’ in my English classroom through a combination of culture, curriculum and change.”

3.3.2 Challenges

The E-learning platform which had been installed to exchange ideas, to learn about the vision and mission of the involved universities, their programs of study, about relevant topics, theories, methods and approaches, was not frequented much by the German nor by the American students, even if the first author and his research assistant made several efforts to update that platform and contribute material, posts and questions.

**E-Learning platform
not much in use**

Also, the recommended readings were not read the way they were supposed to. Each student was asked to choose one article from the field of early childhood education, elementary education, special education or secondary education, read this text and prepare a short presentation of the content for one of the workshop sessions, and talk about his thoughts, findings and questions on that e-learning platform, in advance. This never happened in the expected form. Probably it was too difficult for the students to connect the contents of the recommended readings with the upcoming workshop and field trip.

**Reading materials
must be tailored
more specifically**

In addition many of the German students obviously had difficulties reading the texts that were in the English language. The German students were asked by the first author to give the American group an introduction to the historical and cultural sites the group would visit during the field trip to Halle and Weimar. The idea was to actively include them in the process of planning and filling the program with relevant content.

**Language barriers for
German students**

But the German students’ didactical knowledge and ability to speak English was not always adequate to convey profound cultural and historical content concisely. The low linguistic level of some of the oral presentations, and in addition, the lacking didactic knowledge of the students from the childhood studies program, because didactics

**Introductions by German
students must be
rehearsed**

were definitely not part of their program of study, mainly led them to do PowerPoint presentations. They were not trained to engage in active participatory forms of teaching and learning. So what the German students presented about the life work of Francke in Halle and about the Classical period of Weimar was probably not a very sound introduction to this field of knowledge. It was not more than a first dropping of names. The complexity and deepness of the whole historical and cultural background hardly was brought to the audience. In the future, it probably would be better if these student-led presentations were rehearsed. Students who do not study didactics need a precise input and helpful feedback regarding their own presentations, so early before the upcoming workshops, that they can further develop what they wish to convey and discuss their methods and their own knowledge with the responsible faculty member.

Varying cultural orientations of students

The female German student that served the first author as a paid student assistant regarded it as highly important to spend one of the Weimar evenings in a bar to watch a soccer game with some other students. The unique atmosphere at the river Ilm and the town of Weimar with all its historical traces and references was no longer interesting. Taking individual notes, writing a poem, making a sketch or a drawing, taking pictures with a camera, or contemplating in front of a building, a statue, in a park, all these would have been possible options to communicate with that very particular place and get in touch with it more deeply. Anyway, the soccer game was more important at that moment and filled the whole feeling and thinking of that young lady, and influenced the communication within a sub-group of students.

Challenging student behavior

Some of the students also seemed to be less motivated to learn and to engage themselves toward the end of the program. In the first year, when gathering in front of the Jewish Museum in Berlin, one male German student actively refused to take the work sheet with the prepared questions that were created to explore the museum more deeply and to connect the visit with the theory of childhood studies on the one hand, and with scholastic childhood and youth education on the other hand. The first author had even invited his German students to participate in developing the questions for the visit of the Jewish Museum actively. He had suggested that they connect with the American students and ask them about their own preparations regarding their visit of the Anne-Frank House in Amsterdam. Only one female German student finally made some contributions to that catalogue of questions. Now in the Jewish Museum, many students, from both countries, surely not all of them, did not seem to commit to the questionnaire-guided exploration at all, and raced through the exhibition instead. It seemed more interesting for them to socialize with the other students of the transatlantic group *after this* visit and *hang out*, at least a little bit, in the city of Berlin, and there was not much time left for that.

After the large workshop in the Cologne teachers' college rotunda, many German students from the childhood studies program complained that in the mixed workgroups school and school education as topics had been too dominant and they had not felt valued enough in their status as skilled personnel. One solution could be to coach the students of an interdisciplinary undergraduate program of study, when dealing with graduate students from teacher education programs and/or student teachers, who definitely live in a scholastic world of thinking, to look at and learn to withstand such stresses and to cope with the situation actively and productively. In addition, it might be advantageous to combine students of more similar programs of study into one transatlantic group. Also for this reason an attempt had been made by the first author to include programs of study that integrated childhood studies *and* childhood and youth education, like those mentioned before, from Ireland or from Scotland.

Sensitivities of students from the childhood studies program

The Francke Foundation also had been chosen as destination because of its historical relevance for the childhood studies. Francke's life work is mainly characterized by his social and educational commitment for orphans and children from disadvantaged backgrounds. But the German students did not pick up this theme in discussions during the field trip, as far as the first author was able to perceive, nor in their further studies at campus. Perhaps this also was a result of the lacking historical perspective of the academic childhood studies program. Perhaps these students had no orientation how they could access their intended professional field from a historical perspective. The first author made the same observation regarding the visit at the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the thematic thread of childhood under the conditions of persecution in May 2010. So we must ask ourselves critically, how meaningful and sustainable are such site visits really? What really stays? What really has an effect on the students' thinking, studying, and their later behavior as professionals?

Limitations of the German program of study

Even with encouragement from their instructors, the students from the childhood studies program would not do research on the exceedingly interesting personality of Maria Pawlowna, daughter of the Russian Czar, and benefactor at the court of Weimar during the so-called "silver period", at the beginning of the 19th century. Despite the fact that she founded a vocational school for hundreds of children with spinning wheels, looms and kitchens, and opened a facility for neglected children, a home for old people who needed care, gave jobs to soldiers' wives who were in need of work, even if she promoted cleanliness and hygiene by establishing a public bath etc. (Merseburger, 2005, p. 188), Maria Pawlowna, her life and her social and educational work, was not adopted as an object of research by the German students. Was it because they looked at their studies from a children's rights perspective? *Human beings, also children, have rights that can be claimed, that must be claimed. No longer are people dependent on benevolent royalty.* How can we access an academic discourse from here that seeks truth and that leaves behind ideology? Wide fields of

How can historical backgrounds be accessed?

discussion and reflection open up here, with a lot of material for discourse and debate, and for in-depth research. But how can we move forward from here? How can we bring all these backgrounds to our American partners' attention? In particular the transatlantic framework can drive forward that debate, and make it more complex and dynamic, because of the different attitudes and ways of thinking in both countries, regarding freedom and responsibility of the individual and the role, responsibility and mandate of the state.

**Political ideology
of a human science
department**

It might seem a little bit bizarre that these program elements: childhood and persecution, children from minorities under the conditions of dictatorship, childhood and poverty etc. finally convinced the German department council to fund these field trips. At that point the program had to be communicated in a way that proved high compatibility with the dominant academic and political discourse of that human science department. Weimar was no good argument in that world, because it was associated with *white-bread* and *bourgeois*. Francke worked against poverty. He educated the poor. That fit. But better not talk to the department council about his strict religious background and rough pedagogical methods. Funding strategies in the competitive inner-world of a university on the one hand, and the real will and motivation of the students to immerse into a thematic field, on the other hand, are not necessarily connected. A German faculty member, who is responsible for such a program and tries to bring it to life, might move forward in two completely separate worlds, and follow his own values, with patience and vision.

4. Conclusions and Future Perspectives

4.1 Transformative Potential of the Transatlantic Experience

**Multiple learning
opportunities**

Each part of these programs was a collaborative effort between the partner institutions and provided for the German and American students multiple opportunities for, "increased cultural knowledge, broadened global perspective, and an increased understanding of the value of multicultural education through interaction with children, other professionals, and adults from varying cultural backgrounds" (Cushner, 2007). Research continues to support the idea that students learn a significant amount about themselves and others, primarily by making the effort to understand another's point of view (Cushner and Mahon, 2002). Scholars in transforming education in America encourage students and teachers, "to seek, what is unfamiliar... for the unpredictable or the unexpected. It helps transcend the 'givenness' or the taken-for-granted in our intellectual or cultural world" (Shapiro and Purpel, 2005, p. 289).

A comparative education study trip is one way to foster this sort of learning experience for pre-service teachers. By any definition, the word transformation involves the entirety of that which is transformed. In terms of a system that educates human beings who want to be teachers, the implication is that the mind, body, and soul of those human beings must be considered and included in the transformative process. The results of this transformation cannot be measured with test scores and retention rates, and perhaps not accurately assessed at all by anyone other than the individual being transformed. Experience, which also includes the affective and behavioral domains, is critical to transformative learning. “The role that first-hand experience plays in culture learning has consistently been found to be a critical component to intercultural development” (Bennet, 1993; Cushner and Brislin, 1996 as cited in Cushner, 2007, p. 29). Many of the American students who engaged in the programs of 2010 and 2012 had never been on an airplane before, much less to another country, and some were profoundly affected by the experience. As the American students flew far above the clouds and across the Atlantic Ocean for many hours they seemed to begin to comprehend and consider an American student teacher in Australia’s words, “I learned that the United States is not the center of the universe” (as cited in Cushner, 2007, p. 27).

**Learning through mind,
body and soul**

4.2 Planning With Vision, Patience and Flexibility

The first author learned that it is important to start planning workshops and field trips even though there may still be uncertainties of who and how many participants will eventually join. Over time, the closer it gets to the trip date, commitments and agreements will become more reliable and certain. It is most important that all parties involved work cooperatively and collaboratively step-by-step.

**Cooperative and
flexible planning**

4.3 Running the Transatlantic Program as Regular Credit Course

For the Teaching Fellows from North Carolina, an international trip was a regular required part of their program. Thus it was required for the American students to participate. In 2012 the German students could enroll in the program as one choice in the frame of a compulsory module, and receive credits and grades. The spontaneously born program of 2011 was run in addition to regular classes. During the 2010 program, when the German students could only take the transatlantic workshop as an elective, without credits and grades, it was not at all possible to motivate them to prepare an in-depth content-based input. These students were looking forward to the social experience to be with the American students, but they did not want to immerse in reading or presenting academic or cultural content. For the German university of applied sciences, this means that turning the program into a regular credit course probably is fundamental. Giving grades

**Increased student
commitment**

and credits and, on that basis, having high expectations, will definitely increase student commitment. On the other hand integrating the transatlantic workshop and field trip into the regular teaching workload can definitely be a compensation for responsible German faculty.

4.4 German Universities Need More Effective Internationalization Strategies

Integrating top-down and bottom-up initiatives

German public universities with their particular structure in decision-making still have to find ways how a top-down and a bottom-up approach can be connected better to initiate projects in the field of international higher education. Interior power struggles on the institutional or departmental level, often driven by political ideologies, or mere competition, might be a serious risk that the financial resources, the time resources and the energy and motivation of single faculty members are used responsibly and really have the intended impact. Thus the development of an institutional internationalization strategy (Coelen, 2008) continues to be a challenge for German universities. Of course, leadership plays a key role in this process (see Middlehurst, 2008, p. 16), but in the German public university, there are many leaders, and sometimes they move the wheel back.

Motivation and vision of individual faculty

In the end, as far as Germany is concerned, success largely depends on the motivation and vision, and strategic thinking, of individual faculty to bring things on track, and keep them on track, despite all challenges and resistances. A private American university definitely has better options to move forward in the field of international higher education.

4.5 Ideological Thinking Leads to Limitations of Various Kinds

Limitations through ideology

Our evaluation showed that ideological thinking can have a negative effect, first on the institutional level, when university partnerships are in the making. Second, ideology can also limit student learning. A deeper exploration of the thematic fields, and a free and open academic discourse may be blocked through a program of study that is obviously rooted in a particular political ideology.

4.6 Acknowledging Unexpected Positive Outcomes Initiated by Students

Unexpected positive social outcomes

With the popularity of soccer as an international sport, some of the American students, in their final evaluation, spoke enthusiastically about that evening experience at the Weimar bar, where they watched the soccer game together with some of the German students, even

though this experience did not necessarily fit into the university faculty's definition of history, education and culture, that was the underlying idea of the transatlantic program and field trip. The challenge for university teachers might be to acknowledge that there can be other, student driven, informal and unexpected positive outcomes, social and cultural experiences, that this group of students obviously enjoyed and appreciated. University teachers should value these outcomes as well, even if they are located on a kind of *side track* of the program.

4.7 Necessity of a Well-Planned Didactical Structure

Transatlantic workshops require significant and detailed didactical planning, if they are meant to be a sustainable learning experience. They need to be carefully planned in regard to relevant content and methodology, that is based upon a hands-on and interactive approach to include everyone in relevant and sustainable learning processes. E-learning platforms and reading materials must be tailored precisely and connected with all the other program elements.

Didactical planning

When university teachers would like to see their students drawing, writing poems or journaling philosophical thoughts in the Weimar Ilm valley or in Goethe's garden it probably is necessary to offer the students small workshops or introductions on campus or right there at these inspiring places and show them how they can do that and which steps they must take to come up with good results.

Teach the students creative techniques

Besides their role as instructors and learning guides during such a didactically pre-planned process the university teachers also might serve as role models for that kind of creative communication with the visited places and do drawings or write poems themselves, and share the results with their students, in the evenings at the youth hostel.

University teachers as role models

Not all possible outcomes can be planned and foreseen. The learning and gaining of insights seem to be highly individualized and informal processes. Internal dynamics happen among the participants. Thus, not all learning is detectable, verifiable and auditable.

Significance of individual and informal learning

4.8 Weaving a Network to Connect all Stakeholders

Students and faculty in Germany and in the United States, university departments, university administrations and International Offices, schools and host families, representatives in the fields of politics, public life, culture, travel agencies, youth hostels, funding institutions, etc., all these stakeholders make important contributions to a successful program of this kind. They all need to be integrated and included in an ongoing process of communication.

Ongoing process of communication

Current and emerging technologies facilitate stakeholder communications

Attention to the topic of building transatlantic and global partnerships among universities, and of internationalizing teacher education has become widespread in the United States with the establishment of non-profit organizations supporting these initiatives, as well as the advent of special interest groups within established organizations of educators. With greater use of communicative technologies to unite partners, transatlantic symposia are held more frequently to facilitate dialogue among stakeholders. For established partnerships, opportunities to communicate regularly through online symposia and conferences can improve planning and assessment of the various parts of international experiences. These results confirm that such communication is not only beneficial, but necessary.

4.9 In-Depth Research Might Increase Funding Options

More in depth-research needed

Systematic surveys and follow-up surveys of participating students and faculty would be helpful in the future. We were not able to do this systematically, because of the complexity of such surveys and the already high workload of all involved faculty.

Increasing funding options

Other challenges extend to the American side: The state-funding for the North Carolina Teaching Fellows program, which partially funded the American participants, has been discontinued, and the Teaching Fellows Program of the liberal arts college is coming to a close. New programs for education students at this college that are locally funded are being investigated, but at present plans do not include required international travel experiences that are institutionally funded.

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