



Intellectual Output 4 - Pilot Reports

INCLUDING DIVERSITY PERSPECTIVES IN THE COURSE “CONTINUING EDUCATION IN UNIVERSITY DIDACTICS” (HDW) | FH JOANNEUM

Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project “Diversity Capacities - Improving the Capacities of Adult Education Institutions to Successful Dealing with Diversity”

Grant Agreement Number 2018-1-AT01-KA204-039271



The publication was developed under the framework of the Erasmus+ Project “Diversity Capacities - Improving the Capacities of Adult Education Institutions to Successful Dealing with Diversity (DivCap)” (2018 - 2021)

The programme is a partnership of the following organisations:

FH JOANNEUM - Institute of Social Work, Graz, Austria

Cramaris societ3 cooperative sociale, Tolmezzo, Italy

DAFNI KEK, Patras, Greece

Fundaci3n Docete Omnes, Granada, Spain

Obrtni3ko u3ilište, Zagreb, Croatia

Participatie in Diversiteit, Enschede, Netherlands

Volkshochschule Hannover, Germany

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Graz, 2021

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Photo by Scott Webb on Unsplash

Project Information

Information on the project is available at the project website:

<https://www.diversitycapacities.eu//>



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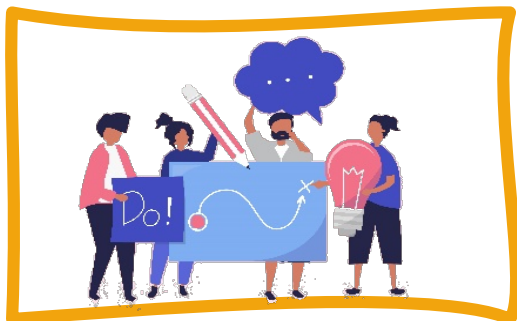
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The “Diversity Capacities- Improving the Capacities of Adult Education Institutions to Successful Dealing with Diversity - DivCap” project, Grant Agreement Number 2018-1-AT01-KA204-039271 has been funded through the European Commission/Programme Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships for Adult Education with the support of the Austrian national Agency. This publication reflects the views only of the authors and the numerous participants who engaged with the Project. As such the commission cannot be held responsible for the contents of this publication or indeed the use of the information it contains therein.

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Exploring and enhancing the competences of trainers

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The Organisation

FH JOANNEUM is a University of Applied Sciences in Graz, Austria. It runs the course “Continuing education in university didactics” (Hochschuldidaktische Weiterbildung / HDW) for teaching staff.



1. Introduction

The goal of the DivCap project is to promote inclusion and diversity in adult and higher education organisations. In the first phase of the project, in each partner country two educational organisations were analysed regarding the status of their diversity orientation¹. In the case of Austria, the case studies were done at FH JOANNEUM - University of Applied Sciences (FHJ) at the Institute of Social Work (ISA) and the Institute of International Management (IIB). Based on the findings, recommendations were developed. One of the recommendations related to further spread, intensify and strengthen measures to promote diversity across FHJ. Therefore, for the implementation of activities during the second phase of the project, the topic of diversity was explored in the context of the course “Continuing education in university didactics” (Hochschuldidaktische Weiterbildung / HDW). Through this approach, faculty staff across FHJ could be reached, and the awareness raising wasn’t limited to staff of two institutes. In addition, however, staff members of both of the involved institutes during the first phase of the project, also took part in HDW. Hence, the collaboration between the institutes and dealing with diversity issues, was also pursued further. Special thanks for the cooperation also go to the Head of IIB, who is also the scientific director of HDW.

Resources

1. For further information, see the DivCap project website:

<https://www.diversitycapacities.eu>



2. High-quality teaching as one of the key missions of FHJ

FH JOANNEUM - University of Applied Sciences (FHJ) is a higher education institution in Styria / Austria. FHJ consists of six departments with specialisations in computer science, engineering, environment & society, health, management and media & design. It runs 50 bachelor and master degree programmes. Around 4.800 students attended the programmes in 2019/2020. Additionally to teaching, the university's key mission also includes research and continuing education. FHJ has 746 employees and 1.180 external lecturers².

When dealing with diversity orientation in an educational organisation, different levels and areas should be considered, such as the institutional framework, human resources, or the educational process (see the [questionnaire](#) developed for the analysis of diversity in adult education institutions during the DivCap project)³.

At FHJ, as a tertiary educational institution, one of the main purposes is to educate students in different fields and study programmes. In the following, the focus will be on the role of the teacher. The teachers or lecturers need, besides their professional expertise, didactic competences for successful teaching. In particular, good teaching skills are required, and FHJ offers several programmes to ensure a high quality of teaching. For example, each year at the “Didactics Day” aspects of university teaching are addressed and selected FHJ teachers are honoured with the “Teaching Awards”. The division “ZML - Innovative Learning Scenarios” supports and advises staff as well as students, in all fields of online teaching. Due to the COVID-19 shift to distance learning, the demand from teachers for their services was very high and they offered indispensable support. In particular after the shift to distance learning from one day to the next in March 2020; but also in the following months, since distance learning had to be carried out in the winter and summer semesters 2020/21 as well.

Resources

2. FH JOANNEUM (n.d.): Wir machen unsere Zukunft FH JOANNEUM. Annual Report 2019-2020, Graz/Kapfenberg/Bad Gleichenberg, p. 16

3. For further information see the DivCap project website:
<https://www.diversitycapacities.eu>



2.1 The Course “Continuing education in university didactics / HDW”

One key component for ensuring good teaching at FHJ is the course “Continuing education in university didactics” (Hochschuldidaktische Weiterbildung / HDW). The programme supports lecturers in optimising their teaching. It lasts for three semesters and is organised on a part-time basis, to enable faculty staff to complete it alongside their teaching and research responsibilities. It is a mandatory programme for faculty staff, newly employed lecturers are automatically registered for the course. Recognition of previous knowledge in didactics can be requested. Usually each year a new cohort of max. 16 participants starts.

The programme consists of three modules:

- Basic Module A: Planning of University Teaching (3 ECTS)
- Basic Module B: Implementation of University Teaching (6 ECTS)
- In-depth Module C: Reflection on university teaching (dealing with conflicts, diversity, ethics of science) (3 ECTS)

Also, before the COVID-19 induced distance learning and working from home, the programme was organised in a combination of attendance days and e-learning with self-taught units.

3. Diversity @ HDW

3.1 Aims and approaches

The DivCap team member and facilitator for the implementation of diversity orientation aimed at enhancing awareness about diversity issues in teaching amongst the participants of HDW. She did this in two different roles: in the cohort of HDW 15 she was a participant herself, while in the cohort of HDW 14, she acted as a speaker in Module C. To reach the aim of enhancing awareness, discussions and reflections were initiated and concrete approaches how to include diversity perspectives in the teaching were developed and presented.

Through adopting a diversity perspective, consciousness about diversity in the lecture room is generated, by naming and recognising differences. By addressing the issue, the aim is to raise awareness of the fact that the backgrounds of students at FHJ are diverse. This is emphasised by the statement of Leah Carola Czollek & Gudrun Perko:

“There are no gender-neutral spaces. There are no homogeneous spaces. The fact of gender and diversity (plurality, heterogeneity) should therefore also be taken into account in didactic.” (Czollek / Perko 2008, p. 7, translated into English for this report). Considering the background of diverse students would contribute to a more inclusive access to Higher Education (HE). It aims at promoting equality of opportunity for all people and students, regardless of their age, gender, religion, skin colour or socio-economic background.

Resources

Czollek, Leah Carola; Perko, Gudrun (2008). Eine Formel bleibt eine Formel... Gender-und diversitygerechte Didaktik an Hochschulen: ein intersektionaler Ansatz. Alker, Ulrike; Weilenmann, Ursula (Eds.): Schriftenreihe Gender Mainstreaming und Diversity Management, Band 1. Wien



3.2 Module A and B: exploring diversity

The DivCap team member was a participant of the cohort HDW 15 in the winter and summer term 2020/21. 16 faculty staff members from different institutes across all of the six departments of FHJ participated in the course. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the workshops that are usually conducted on site at FHJ, had to be held online.

Module A and B took place with the focus on the planning and implementation of higher education teaching. Here the DivCap team member was able to introduce the topic of diversity orientation in discussion forums and exchanges. And the topic of teaching heterogeneous groups was also briefly addressed by one of the HDW lecturers. Different positions became visible in the discussions and exchanges. For some of the participants it was the first time they had dealt with the issue. Some were reluctant to see the relevance, since in HE institutions standardised requirements prevail and no differentiation can be made. It was not seen in the responsibility of the lecturers to take different skills levels into account or meet the students, where they are. Furthermore, it was stressed that there are too few time resources for such differentiated preparation of a course. On the other hand, some lecturer acknowledged the relevance of the topic and shared their approaches.

Relevance of specific diversity dimensions

When dealing with diversity, the question which diversity dimensions are relevant and should be considered, needs to be answered in relation to the context. When it comes to awareness about diversity dimensions, perceived dimensions that were addressed in discussions during the HDW course, were gender and the educational background.

For example, an exchange took place on the topic of gender. It was noted that female students often stay in the background and that the male students take over the leading positions, such as presenting the results of working groups or taking over the group leadership. Here one suggestion was to rotate the roles in a group and that each student has the experience of leading the group.

In particular at the beginning of the studies in the Bachelor programmes, students bring with them different knowledge, depending on the schools they attended before higher education. In Austria the upper secondary school system leading to a general higher education entrance qualification (Matura) distinguishes between two main paths: Academic Secondary Schools (Allgemeinbildende Höhere Schulen / AHS) and Colleges for Higher Vocational Education (Berufsbildende Höhere Schulen / BHS) such as Business Colleges or Technical Colleges.

Therefore, for example students of technical courses who attended a Technical College, already have prior knowledge of the subject, just like students in management courses who attended a Business College. Usually, lecturers are confronted with students from different schools mixed in one course.

The heterogeneity is even greater among part-time Master students, where in addition to the different educational backgrounds, there are also different professional experiences.

One strategy shared is to inquire about previous experiences and knowledge of the students at the beginning of the course. And the further planning of the course is adapted to the result of the survey. Another approach is to facilitate peer learning. This can be done in group work, where the group assignment is done consciously, e.g. students with less and more previous experience work together in a group and learn from each other.

Strategies for dealing with heterogeneous groups that have different levels of previous knowledge:

- Inquire about the previous knowledge at the beginning of the course and adapt the further planning according to the result of the survey
- Facilitate peer learning (e.g. through mixed groups)



Including diversity perspectives in the design of a Master Course

Module B is concluded with final presentations of the participants at the HDW conference at the end of the summer semester. Two participants from the Institute of International Management and the DivCap team member from the Institute of Social Work decided to focus their group presentation on diversity orientation in teaching. Based on theoretical considerations, they shared a concrete example how diversity-conscious teaching can be taken into account through the example of a Master course.

The online conference of HDW 15 was an open event, the invitation is sent out to all staff members and students at FHJ. During the HDW conference, the team gave a 20 minutes presentation. And then during a 45-minute session participants of the event could “visit” the speakers at their “market stall” and an open discussion took place.

Rationales for the relevance of diversity in HE teaching

At first, the presentation set out the reasons why diversity perspectives are relevant for teaching in HE. Since the society is heterogenous, also the lecture rooms are composed of students with different backgrounds. Different diversity dimensions should be considered, as laid down in the "Four-Layers of Diversity Model" by Lee Gardenswartz and Anita Rowe (1998). Considering the background of diverse students would contribute to a more inclusive access to HE.

Furthermore, it is a contribution to professionalisation and part of quality development (Czollek & Perko 2008). HE institutions are required to take the anti-discrimination legalisation as well as policies for HE development and strategies into account (Bundesministerium für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Wirtschaft / BMWFW 2017).

Real case example: Business Lab & Company Dialogue

As a real case example, the team chose a new course to be held in the new Master Programme “Global Strategic Management”. The “Business Lab & Company Dialogue (B-Lab & CD)” will take place in the 2nd semester starting in winter term 2021.

The B-Lab & CD is a project lecture that aims at supporting students on how to link the knowledge gained within previous lectures with skills learned in the practice. Students will collaborate closely with companies and apply their gained knowledge in the 1st semester with a focus on their chosen study tracks, as well as the fundamentals of project management and digital teamwork in practice. In (digital) project teams, students will work on projects and experiments, develop potential solutions and prepare pitch decks or presentations to be presented in front of public audience.

The B-Lab & CD was selected, since the course includes a variety of elements that might be relevant for other lectures as well. It is a combination of instructor-coaching lecture, company interaction, individual and group work, and presentations.

"Setting our minds to include diversity perspectives in a more pragmatic way in our lectures, brings not only value to the students, that I am positive will feel themselves seen and belonging. But it opens up to us teachers, a great opportunity to learn from the diverse student population we have in our classrooms".



Statement of the HDW 15 team member
“Diversifying the Business Lab”

Based on a literature review and theoretical approaches, the team developed strategies how to consider diversity in selected elements of B-Lab & CD.

Four elements were chosen to be addressed for the case:

- Company Selection & Interaction
- Team Composition for Group Works
- Leadership & Engagement of Team Members in Group Work
- Methods & Materials

In the following a short summary of the results is given on how to consider diversity in these elements. The power point presentation and handout are available for download, see the Annex for the link.

Considering Diversity in Company Selection

- Step 1: Identification of relevant diversity dimensions
- Step 2: create a short list with companies considering the selected dimensions and contact the companies to invite, align and fix the project / case
- Step 3: develop a code of conduct, for creating a good, safe and stimulating work and study environment

Considering diversity in Team Composition

- Step 1: Identification of relevant diversity dimensions for Team Composition
- Step 2: Pre-Lecture anonymous survey for the students
- Step 3: Team composition done by lecturer based on received survey results

Considering diversity in Team Leadership & Engagement

- Rotation of team roles
- Mixed-assessment (individual & group)

Considering Diversity in Methods & Materials Selection

- Use a mix of different methods
- A toolbox with categorized learning materials by prior knowledge level
- Resources from male and female experts, authors from different cultures / continents

“Our lessons learnt during the process of our engagement with the topic of diversity-conscious teaching:

- The definition and selection of the relevant diversity dimensions in relation to the actual context we are dealing with, is crucial. This should be the starting point of the process. It is important, to define the relevant dimensions for the specific lecture and class room setting.
- Furthermore, we realized that what we learned during HDW Modules regarding planning of HE teaching and method implementation is also relevant for diversity-conscious teaching. Using a variety of methods and materials is helpful and supports an inclusive approach to teaching.
- Moreover, we realized that we have already integrated elements that support diversity in our previous teaching. But that was done more intuitively. Now we can base and explain our teaching practices on theoretical understanding.
- These learnings are based on the planning process of the course. The Business Lab will be run in the next academic year, so we have no concrete results yet regarding the actual implementation.”

Statement of the HDW 15 team “Diversifying the Business Lab”



3.3 Module C: reflecting about diversity

Module C of the “Continuing education in university didactics” is a lecture series on three topics: dealing with conflicts, diversity, and ethics of science. Furthermore, structured reflections and peer coaching are also part of the module.

Two DivCap team members facilitated the course on diversity in the summer semester 2021. First, a lecture introduced the topic of diversity, covering definitions, diversity dimensions (incl. visible and hidden dimensions, social attributions and stereotypes associated with dimensions), reasons to consider diversity, different levels (strategic HE planning, concrete course level), as well as different approaches of awareness (cognitive and emotional level).

In a second part, in small groups the participants had the opportunity to reflect about their personal experiences and approaches on two levels: regarding diversity aspects of their students and diversity aspects in their role as a teacher. See the concrete reflection questions in the Annex.

Some points raised in the plenum discussion were:

- Finding a balance between recognising differences and colour-blind approach
- Diversity dimensions are not an issue, the academic performance is the main focus
- Students speaking in regional dialects of German and associations made with the dialects
- The younger generation is used to operating in diverse groups
- Students lack of language proficiency in German, which leads to problems in their academic performance
- Discrimination of students in searching for internships because of their ethnic background

“We have started a new module on diversity in the framework of our mandatory program on professional education for lecturers called “Hochschuldidaktische Weiterbildung”. From now on, the topic of diversity will remain a core topic in the program on didactics and learning and teaching.

Through this new module, the awareness of our faculty on the issue of diversity has grown, and throughout the next years all faculty members will have to attend and actively participate in the module on diversity in our university.”

Statement of the scientific director of HDW



„Successful academic careers need inclusive environments and speakers with the ability to adjust to diverse audiences. Therefore, special formats are essential to guide professionally through this complex world of multidimensional individualism.“

Statement of the DivCap member involved as speaker in the diversity session in Module C



4. Elements in the teaching process for a diversity-conscious approach

Different elements in the teaching and learning process need consideration and were explored regarding diversity orientation during the piloting in the Modules of the course “Continuing education in university didactics”:

Students

A reflection about the composition of the students regarding diversity dimensions was initiated. The aim was to enhance the awareness, that students are diverse in lots of different aspects. One dimension that was considered in particular important is the previous knowledge and experiences students bring with them. Furthermore, the gender dimension was noted. Other dimensions were not in the focus of attention, but would need further exploration, e.g. migration background or disability. One reason might be the often homogeneous composition of the students. Another, that there is little awareness of different experiences of minority groups.

Teachers

The previous experiences and approaches to the topic of diversity and diversity orientation of the teachers were reflected and discussed. Besides personal experiences, the professional culture and the self-image as a university teacher also play an important role with respect to the attitude towards diversity-consciousness.

Course

Different approaches for an inclusive teaching and learning environment were explored. Taking into account diversity orientation in each stages of the teaching process is important. Already in the first stage of the planning, during the designing of the curriculum or choosing assessment practices. Furthermore, when selecting teaching contents and materials, diversity considerations should be taken into account. These considerations also should guide the second stage, the implementation, the concrete interaction with the students. Didactic principles that also promote inclusive teaching are e.g. variety of methods and activation of students.

Through the real case of a Master course, an example was explored how to include diversity perspectives for a concrete lecture. For those who are interested in exploring approaches for their own courses, further information can be found in the reference section of the handout. It would go beyond the scope of this report to go into more detail here.

Framework conditions

The conditions under which the planning and implementation of teaching is carried out, need consideration as well. Time resources are often scarce. Therefore, differentiated preparation and addressing different needs is often considered not feasible. And on the other hand, the standardised procedures in a formal educational institution also limit the scope for differentiated approaches. The way forward will be to explore, find and create space for new solutions, and creative possibilities.

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6. ANNEX - Good Practice Examples

6.1 Presentation and handout “Diversifying the Business Lab”

Sandra Meier, Helga Moser, Ligia F. Pasqualin (2021): Diversifying the Business Lab. Including diversity perspective in the design of a Master course.

The presentation and handout for the Online-conference 15. Hochschuldidaktischen Weiterbildung / Continuing education in university didactics are available for download at the DivCap website:
<https://www.diversitycapacities.eu/pilot-reports/>

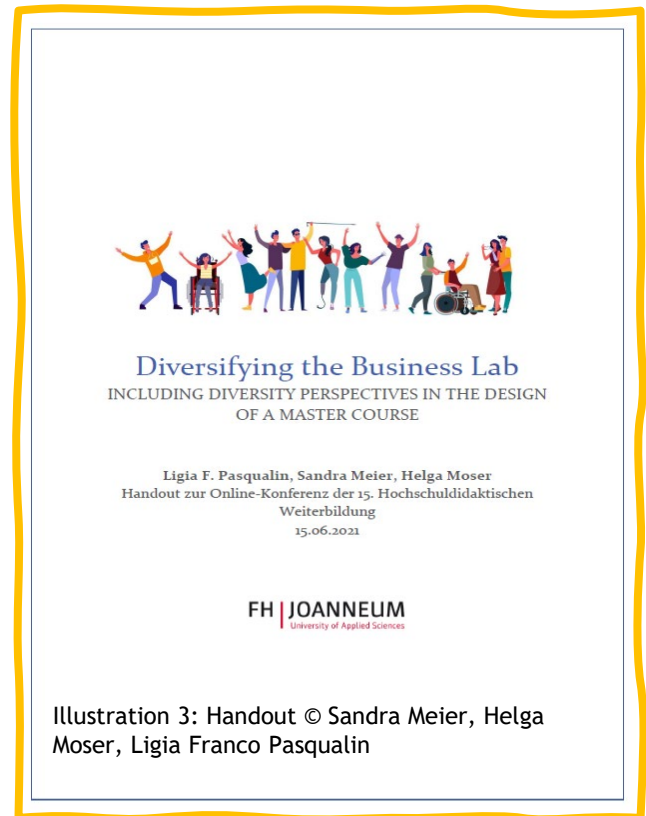


Illustration 3: Handout © Sandra Meier, Helga Moser, Ligia Franco Pasqualin



Illustration 4: Presentation © Sandra Meier, Helga Moser, Ligia Franco Pasqualin

6.2 Reflection Questions for lecturers

Diversity @ Students

- ✓ Which diversity aspects characterise the students in my course?

Diversity @ Teachers


- ✓ Which aspects of diversity characterise me?
- ✓ How do I perceive my role and function as a teacher?
- ✓ External perspective: my assumptions about how students perceive me?

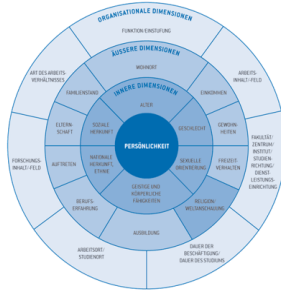
INSTITUT FÜR SOZIALE ARBEIT

Fragen für Reflexion & Austausch Diversität im Lehrsetting

Diversität @ Studierende

- Welche Diversitätsaspekte kennzeichnen die Studierenden in meiner LV?





Diversität @ Lehrende

- Welche Diversitätsaspekte kennzeichnen mich?
- Wie nehme ich meine Rolle und Funktion als Lehrende*r wahr?
- Außenperspektive: meine Vermutungen, wie mich die Studierenden wahrnehmen?




Illustration 5: power point presentation slide with reflection questions © Helga Moser



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