Chapter 2
Intercultural Collaborative Learning Scenarios in E–Business Education:
Media Competencies for Virtual Workplaces

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ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with a learning scenario that has been developed for the acquisition of e-business competencies in various organizations. A constructivist cross-teaching-approach as well as the results of the empirical research derived from of a virtually realized interregional cooperation between a German and an Austrian university concerning business sciences from winter term 2010/11 and summer terms 2012 and 2013 are presented. A teaching-learning situation was created where learners can collaborate in virtual communities that come close to the reality of globalized business. The students worked out an e-business case study in interregional learning groups. The particular interest within the evaluation of this study lies in the virtual collaboration of the interregional study groups and the communication media used but also in the effect the intercultural didactic scenario has on heterogeneous study groups.

INTRODUCTION

The starting point for the considerations in hand is the development of a learning scenario for business education at an academic level that meets the requirements of a rapidly changing economic environment characterized by globalization. Globalization needs collaboration, which means that in a multinational setting traditional issues of collaboration are exacerbated because of language and culture. This changing environment is characterized by an entry of collaboration in virtual
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and intercultural teams into everyday working life, which is due to the globalization process. Currently an increase in the interest of researchers concerning such forms of virtual collaboration can be observed (Fischlmayr, 2009). The teams in question are composed of members from different institutions in a geographical distance and sometimes even have different native languages. The institutional, cultural and curricular differences in the virtual teams mirror the real-world diversity (Brooke et al., 2010).

What follows, from what has been stated above, is that collaboration has become an essential skill, necessary for the employability in globalized economy. For higher education this implies the necessity of new learning strategies such as collaborative learning. However, one of the problems that occur in this regard is how to create learning settings that improve collaborative learning. The learning environment has rapidly changed in recent years, whereby especially Web 2.0 technology has brought new suggestions for creating new and innovative learning scenarios. One of the most popular Web 2.0 technologies are wikis, which promote communication, collaborative authoring and information sharing (Sulisworo, 2012).

Within the framework of their education students have to acquire the necessary skills for their employability in a globalized environment, such as collaboration and media competency. Thus a learning scenario was developed, which shall be presented in the following, in which different learning groups of different institutions and locations have to work jointly and collaboratively on a learning task, a case study, which additionally has to be documented in a Web 2.0 tool (wiki). Furthermore this learning scenario is being discussed against the background of constructivist learning theories. In an accompanying study the different learning styles of the students are documented and taken into account during the analysis and evaluation of the findings.

The chapter »Learning setting and its application« will show a teaching and learning scenario with its technical environment that applies the didactic models discussed in the chapter »Background«. The project was developed also to elaborate measurable effects and to learn how to improve and extend this setting to make it more effective, less complex and generate additional benefit.

BACKGROUND

Beginning with a very critical point of view concerning media (-technic) conveyed learning, which started with educational television (Brown, 1987) after that developed into distance teaching (see. Mittendorfer, 1995, Bourdeau & Bates, 1997) and more complex conveyance via online learning, there have been distinct reservations towards the approach of online teaching until the element of interaction in a virtual learning environment was elaborated. Thereby learners interact and collaborate on learning assignments within a virtual learning environment.

Johnson et al. figured out in the Horizon Report that collaboration is a critical skill for employees (Johnson et al., 2012, p. 6). Within globalized economy, the ability of collaborating in various different groups becomes a key competence. Thus it seems useful, to create and establish learning settings that facilitate the ability of working in a team. At least since there is a massive need for virtual communication in this globalized economy, also virtual learning is accepted widely – mostly as a part of a blended learning approach. As cross-linked development