

Organizing transnational co-creation online

Context

In the transnational scientific project ConnEcTEd, subgroups IO 5 and 6 aimed to foster international collaboration in the development of digital tools for teacher education. By bringing together project partners from various countries and educational systems, the initiative sought to collaboratively develop and enhance course concepts, strengthen coherence in teacher training, and integrate best-practice examples and insights from different national contexts. Initially envisioned as an only partially virtual collaboration, the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions necessitated a full transition to an entirely digital mode of cooperation. Thus, the project partners faced the complex challenge of acquainting themselves with models of coherent teacher education within their own curricular and institutional frameworks. This involved discussing, analyzing, and comparing the strengths and weaknesses of each approach, identifying transferable elements, and engaging in a creative process to synthesize these findings into publishable and disseminable materials – all within a purely digital, virtual work environment.

Working mode in cycles – a model

To organize the work, a structured process consisting of several differently oriented work cycles was employed:

First and foremost, particularly considering the different national contexts, it was essential to **define key terms** to ensure a common foundation for understanding. To achieve this, it is advisable to consult relevant, especially internationally-focused reference literature. In this specific project, IO 1 provided significant groundwork. In the **first cycle**, a series of online meetings were held in which local course concepts and ideas were presented in turn. The initial exclusive focus on **individual, purely local ideas** served not only the important aspect of providing a platform for each project participant and introducing themselves as a person in the interest of team building, but primarily the function of familiarizing with the respective national and local contexts: Without a systemic understanding of the interrelationships of an educational measure in each university context, adopting concepts runs the risk of creating incoherences (see below, challenges).

Following the first cycle, a **subsequent stage** of the work involved a more collaborative and brainstorming-like approach. This free-flowing process aimed to identify overlaps and intersections between the individual projects. The goal was to uncover relevant content connections that showed promise for closer examination and further development. During this stage, participants engaged in discussions to determine which of these identified intersections had either the most significant content potential or were relevant to the highest number of individual ideas and contexts. This consensus-building exercise helped shape the planning for the second cycle.

In the **second cycle**, the focus shifted thus towards **transversal topics** related to multiple local projects. To organize the work, individual project partners took on leadership roles in subgroups, either because they possessed specific expertise regarding the cross-cutting theme or because it was particularly relevant to their local contexts. The subgroup leaders organized a **series of thematic online meetings**,

inviting project partners to decide whether the topic was relevant to them and whether they wished to participate. These meetings were supported by relevant research literature, and when available, local expertise from third parties at the respective universities was sought, even if they had not previously been involved in the project.

Subgroups met to discuss the topics, share insights based on their local (context-dependent) experiences, and further develop their understanding of the cross-cutting themes. Following the meetings, key findings were disseminated among the entire consortium to ensure broader awareness and integration of the results into the ongoing project work. This collaborative approach facilitated the exchange of ideas and expertise, leading to more comprehensive and effective outcomes in the development of the project.

In the **third step**, the focus returned to the **individual projects** or project ideas, which were developed or further refined by local teams individually. The insights gained, particularly from the second cycle, were incorporated into this process. Through the work carried out thus far, participants gained knowledge about the priorities and expertise of the other projects and developed personal familiarity with each other. As a result, it became easier for them to operate as a community of practice: when specific questions arose during the development of their own projects, team members could effortlessly reach out to partners within the consortium for guidance and support. This ongoing collaboration and exchange of expertise allowed project teams to address challenges and enhance their work by drawing on the collective knowledge and experience of the entire group. This approach ultimately led to more effective and well-rounded project outcomes that benefited from the diverse perspectives and expertise within the consortium.

Challenges and success factors: lessons learned

There is high potential for transnational collaboration on teaching concepts and the adoption of innovative ideas from other teacher education systems (or educational systems in general). By engaging in transnational conceptual cooperation, educators and institutions can share best practices, learn from each other's experiences, and co-create more effective and, additionally and above all, 'internationalized' teaching concepts. A significant by-product in terms of internationalization can be a deepened understanding of global educational challenges and the creation of transnational communities of practice – as it was the case in ConnEcTEd project.

When planning transnational conceptual project work in the context of higher education, experience in ConnEcTEd project work shows that it is essential to consider several crucial factors:

– **Context-dependency:** Teaching concepts are embedded within curricular contexts (e.g. varying CK, PK and PCK progression, teaching methodologies, assessment practices and regulations), which explain why specific measures are effective, particularly in best-practice examples that often succeed due to their alignment with local needs and contexts at least as much as they do because of their scientific and didactic quality as such. Therefore, it is vital to ensure maximum transparency regarding the respective contexts. This transparency enables the appropriate selection of elements for co-creation, which should never be adopted unchanged but must be systematically and systemically adapted. To illustrate this with a simple and rather obvious example: Particularly concerning the vertical coherence of a course, it

is crucial to consider the foundational knowledge that participants bring from previous stages of their studies and their willingness and/or ability to draw upon this knowledge.

– **Institutional policies:** Universities implement different administrative and legal frameworks, which initially influence the feasibility of teaching concepts at a practical level. For example, interdisciplinary co-teaching concepts require educators to have the support of their university and faculty, ensuring that the time invested in co-teaching formats is fully, rather than halved, credited towards their teaching obligations. These frameworks also affect the conceptual planning level, as they determine the extent to which project partners can engage in transnational co-creative processes, considering the time, commitment, and career-related recognition involved. An example of this is whether the development of teaching concepts and transnational exchange are valued as much as publishing scholarly articles in scientific journals. Another example could be the question of whether it is at all permissible to share content from local courses and concepts with stakeholders from other institutions (*see IO5 & IO6 unit on open policies and OERs in ConnEcTEd toolkit*).

– **Personal priorities and capacities of the participants:** Each individual has unique interests in the project, and possible contribution varies due to individual professional and personal priorities. Furthermore, the work rhythm is influenced by the academic calendar and lecture periods at their respective universities. It is crucial to anticipate and respect these differences, as accommodating diverse needs and constraints is essential for fostering a successful and inclusive collaborative environment.

– **Technical prerequisites:** While it may seem trivial, it is vital not to overlook the need for one or more functional and accepted technical platforms for real-time as well as asynchronic collaboration. Usability, personal preferences, and, importantly, technical or administrative constraints imposed by the universities play a crucial role in this matter. An example of such restrictions includes those related to data protection or cybersecurity. Ensuring that the chosen platforms meet these requirements and are user-friendly for all participants is of paramount importance for the efficiency of collaborative efforts.