

Educational Animations in Inter- and Monocultural Design Workshops

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Abstract: How can intercultural action competence be encouraged in design students? In an intercultural workshop environment, accompanied by an empirical evaluation, the aim is to study and test what motivates participants to work in mixed-nationality teams. The experimental approach of my intercultural design workshops (since 2009) is based on progressive education, less on rational-scientific problem-solving strategies. The “problem” in intercultural and monocultural communication is not external; it is an internal part of our individual and culturally influenced diversity. The content, method, learning world and final design are developed using action-based, constructivist didactics. The tutor is more adviser and observer than teacher or trainer. The method aims to advance intercultural competence thus diminishing cultural and individual barriers. Participants encounter international working methods and design styles, enhancing their professional motivation. The research uses qualitative/qualitative surveys, action-research case studies, interview videos to explore design approaches in intercultural workshops. That animation as a medium motivates participants to join the intercultural workshop was not confirmed. However, the workshop format as a key factor generating sustainable interest in learning was very well received. The concept has proved its merit, and workshop participation unquestionably led to an increase in intercultural media competence, flexibility, tolerance and communication skills.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Starting-out Situation

The teaching methodology for design is not very well-developed in comparison to other academic areas such as the natural sciences or the humanities. Teachers of design generally work out their teaching approach individually and on their own. An exception here are the experimental design schools guided by pragmatism like Bauhaus (1919–1933), the Black Mountain College (BMC, 1933–1956) and the Ulm University of Design (HfG Ulm, 1953–1968). The teaching of design mostly develops within a performance-related intertwining of theory and praxis. At the turn of the 19th to the 20th century, the Arts and Crafts Movement created counter-concepts to the mechanical forms of production that emerged in an industrializing England (William Morris), thus kicking off a move towards new educational concepts in the area of the applied arts right up to Bauhaus. Progressive education (John Dewey) and the system

design of Ulm’s HfG with its orientation towards the natural sciences followed. In the context of global digitization, the Design Thinking Method emerged in the 1990s; it uses the creative-intuitive and analytical problem-solving approaches of common interactive design processes.

1.2 Purpose/Didactics

Educational models that have a conceptual influence on my intercultural workshops can mainly be found in the action-based progressive education of John Dewey, who provided the theoretical background for the didactics applied at Black Mountain College. What is more, I refer to Wolfgang Klafki’s competence model of critical-constructive didactics as well as Georg Auenheimer’s guiding principles for intercultural education.

Culturally conditioned behavior is appropriated automatically and subconsciously in childhood in a similar way to learning one’s mother tongue. The acquisition of language and culture are closely linked

to one another and children learn them through interaction with their parents and their environment. When we learn a foreign language as adults, we have to learn vocabulary, grammar and phrases and become familiar with an alien cultural context. Our acquisition of the foreign language is initially passive. We understand some of it, but we are only able to articulate in the new language at quite a low level – often a disadvantage from only having learned the language in a school setting. A period spent abroad helps, and “learning-by-doing” makes it easier for us to immerse ourselves in a new language. “Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results” (Dewey, 1916, chapter 12, section 1, para. 3).

This well-known quote is from the American philosopher and progressive educationalist Dewey (1859–1952) who campaigned for democratic, self-determined and self-regulating education. His model of democratic education, which initially focused on reforming education in schools, was later expanded to include a theory of holistic aesthetic experience (Dewey, 1934). Dewey’s name is closely linked to the pedagogical experiment undertaken at the art and design school of Black Mountain College (1933–1956), which strived for an education that was interdisciplinary and sought to teach not only theoretical, but also practical skills, that could also be applied in everyday life.

But what goal are we pursuing when we learn a new language? We might be preparing ourselves for a period of stay abroad, either professionally or privately, which means we want to be able to make ourselves understood in a new language region – independently without an interpreter or a guide – and by doing so expand our current room for maneuver. The acquired language skills are often a door-opener and allow us to learn more about the country and its people firsthand and perhaps also experience what social issues and topics play a role in the respective situation in the respective foreign country. As a result, we can become more involved and, by taking part in joint activities, experience a feeling of belonging.

The German educationalist and educational reformer Wolfgang Klafki (1927–2016) names the following principles as goals in the context of his “critical-constructive didactics”: self-determination, co-determination and solidarity (Klafki, 1995: 97). This places him within the humanistic educational tradition which, in turn, is founded in the understanding of education in the antique. The aim of education here is to strive to improve oneself and to acquire the ability to shape oneself and to assert

oneself in order to be able to play an active role in a western-style democratic state governed by the rule of law as a politically and socially responsible citizen.

Klafki has had a considerable influence on German educational reformers since the 1970s. Inspired by his definition of competence, a competence model is applied to the present day, particularly in the area of life-based subjects [Sachunterricht], which places action competence at its core, alongside professional competence, social competence, problem-solving competence and personal competence. With professional competence, the learner acquires specific knowledge and skills; with problem-solving competence s/he solves problems in a target-oriented manner; with social competence the learner acquires team skills, learns to be adaptable and assertive. Learning to take on responsibility for oneself, to motivate oneself, to reflect and to recognize one’s own value system comes under personal competence.



Figure. 1: Model of competencies after Klafki

Both Dewey’s and Klafki’s ideas about learning have influenced educational reforms, and what they have in common is that they placed the experiences of the learner, his/her democratic education at the center of their work, and that they are both practice-oriented and action-oriented. Even when we leave our original cultural environment, for example to work or study abroad, the main thing is to act in a praxis-oriented manner in a new and different learning environment. In preparatory courses, of course, we can learn the basics of a language, knowledge about geography, politics or culture, but we ultimately have to take that leap into the abyss, because there is no other way for us to experience a new cultural environment individually and subjectively. We subject ourselves to an iterative process and by doing so we gain intercultural action competence which, however, requires an intercultural sensibility.

Auernheimer’s guiding principles of intercultural education are particularly suited to the group my

teaching addresses, namely students taking part in workshops and excursions, as they do not intend a permanent integration into a “foreign” cultural environment: “Vital to intercultural education are the recognition of differences and an awareness of disparity” (Auernheimer 2012:59).

“Higher-level goals are:

- enabling intercultural understanding
- enabling intercultural dialogue (Auernheimer 2012:20).

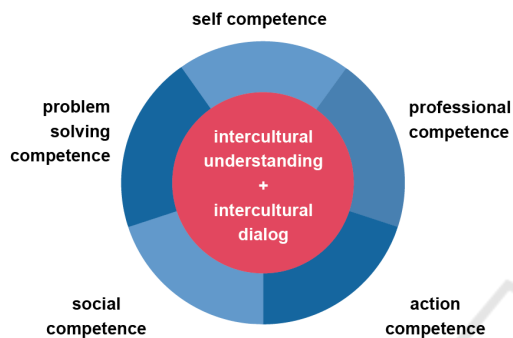


Figure. 2: Model of competencies extended by intercultural competence after Auernheimer

However, decisive for a dialogue with people from another cultural environment is not only that we first of all know and reflect on our own culture – but also know and reflect on ourselves as individuals.

The focus of intercultural competence is self-competence and self-awareness.

It really begins with looking at ourselves first, and working from there to find differences and similarities between cultures. You have to understand your own culture before you can have a meaningful dialogue with a person from a different culture. An analogy is, that you have to know your own language well to learn a new language.

First comes intercultural understanding, which means an understanding of and respect for other cultures and the ability to change one’s own perspectives. This is followed by an intercultural dialogue focused on a willingness to cooperate and an awareness of one’s own cultural orientation system. Let me give you an example: As a German I expect everyone to be on time. But I understand that time here in Indonesia – especially in a private situation – can be seen as “jam karet”, which literally means ‘rubber time’. So, being aware of this, I can take this into account and not feel offended if someone is more than 15 minutes late, which is kind of seen as the maximum waiting time in Germany. This understanding enables me to have a dialogue that is

not biased in a pejorative sense right from the outset, even if my guest comes an hour too late, for example.

1.3 Content/Subject Matter

In a workshop lasting four days, design students and design lecturers from different cultural groups, most of whom are meeting one another for the first time, work in project teams that are together for a limited time. In addition to improving communication skills, the objective is that participants acquire and exchange specialist knowledge and that they develop design products. In a situative context, what results is a temporary association in the form of a community of praxis; the aim being that a common denominator is created that brings together the cultural characteristics and national idiosyncrasies of all students taking part. In the sense of advancing intercultural communication skills, the following key question is core to finding a subject matter for the workshops: What makes us different from one another and what connects us?

Superficial knowledge of a foreign culture can lead to stereotypical expectations and prejudice. As we all have more or less entrenched notions about the respective other culture, these are a good starting point for a constructive dialogue. The choice of topics in my intercultural workshops should ideally contain cultural traits and national idiosyncrasies of all the students involved. The key question when looking for subjects is what makes us different and what connects us? Also very important are what mutual prejudices and stereotypical images we have and how we deal with these.

While preparing for a workshop with San Francisco State University in 2011, German students made a video that takes a humorous look at automatically generated search predictions in Google provided by the autocomplete widget. The following search question was entered into Google: Why are Germans so ... These were automatically completed by Google using a search algorithm based on popular search queries. Five adjectives were displayed in the following order in a dropdown list: Why are Germans so rude, smart, tall, weird and hot. This list does not remain constant, because Google changes its types of predictions repeatedly and, of course, these also reflect current popular trends. Using the Google search as a tool to illustrate prejudices was an interesting contribution to the kick-off session. In the intercultural workshop, stereotypes and prejudices in the areas of eating styles, ecology, family, patriotism and the military were examined and creatively illustrated in the form of animations.



Figure. 3: Automatically generated search predictions in Google, 2011

Another topic of my workshops is proverbs. The first intercultural design workshop that used proverbs was conducted in Ulm with German-Egyptian students in 2010 (see <https://intercultural-design-workshop.de/TiM2010/>). Proverbs are very rich in illustrating the cultural background they come from, e.g. the Indonesian proverb “Ada hari ada nasi.” what literally means “If there is a day there is rice.” While this is a first step towards understanding a cultural area where rice is the main source of food, that does not clearly explain its meaning to people from another culture. Proverbs are like icebergs: one tenth of their meaning is above the water surface, therefore a conscious thing, while the other nine tenths belong to the realm of the unconscious and include tradition, religion, geology, agriculture, political and social reality, economy and progress. Finding a way into the unconscious realm of a culture is exactly what examining proverbs aims to achieve. When the students exchange ideas, talk with one another and ask each other questions, this gives them an awareness of individual and cultural differences. Only then can a visualization emerge that leads to the design. The English equivalent of the previous proverb is "Tomorrow is a new day", which expresses a positive view on the future, in the Indonesian example by saying that there will be something to eat tomorrow. (see <https://intercultural-design-workshop.de/TiM2014/>)

Another team of students chose the Javanese proverb “Banyak anak banyak rejeki”, which literally means, the more children you have the richer you are. It refers to the reason why people have so many children in emerging countries. “Rejeki” is Javanese and means ‘wealth’. At first glance, this proverb seems almost anachronistic, as family planning programs already arrived in Indonesia quite some time ago. However, less so in rural and underdeveloped regions. The birth rate per woman was 2.3 in 2017 (Fertility rate, total, (2017). Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.TFRT>.

IN?end=2017&start=1960&view=chart). During the workshop, the German and Indonesian students worked with one another in dialogue to develop further levels of meaning for the word “rejeki”, such as ‘happiness’ and ‘blessing’. This solved the dilemma that was caused by the initially narrow level of meaning of the wording used in the proverb and provided freedom for the students to take creative approaches when developing the storyboard. Since there is no English equivalent for this proverb, a bilingual solution was dispensed with and the emphasis was placed on finding metaphors. Interestingly, the two levels of meaning, wealth and happiness, were visually linked, which can be seen in the following storyboard.



Figure. 4: The Indonesian proverb: Banyak anak banyak rejeki – The more children you have the richer you are. Workshop participants: Alditio, I.; Blome, C.; Holzner, B.; Parmungkas, R.; Sekartaji, G.

Proverbs are very useful for learning more about cultural differences and similarities. In an animation that was produced in a workshop in Ulm in 2017 together with students from Greece, Indonesia and Germany, not only equivalent proverbs were used but also 3 different alphabets such as the Greek and the Latin alphabet and the ancient Javanese script.

In this animation, students used the English proverb “When it rains it pours”. In German we would say, “Ein Unglück kommt selten allein”, which means “Misfortune seldom comes alone”. In Indonesia it would be, “Sudah jatuh, tertimpa tangga pula”, which literally means, “A person slips, and a ladder falls on them”. In Greek the equivalent is: “Éspase o diáolos to podári tu.” which means “Once the devil breaks its leg ...” In total, five different languages were used to express a similar feeling that is triggered by a situation that is different in each case due to the cultural background. (see <https://intercultural-design-workshop.de/TiM2017/>)

1.4 The Medium of Animation

Narrative concepts that use language, writing and metaphor in equal measure are open to interpretation and discourse, and are therefore suitable as intercultural topics. Translating this into design praxis means realizing a narration or story using time-based media such as video or animation. In addition to using animated images, typography plays a central role here. It is a component of all international design education, and all workshop participants are familiar with the syntactical and semantic dimensions of script. In the intercultural workshop, the Latin alphabet with the world language English create a common denominator, but cultural areas that use other systems of writing are excluded. That is why – depending on where the participants originate from – other systems of writing like Arabic, Greek and Javanese are also used.

The medium animation, and especially type in motion, provide the students with an accumulation of experience and knowledge (developing ideas, storyboarding, storytelling, illustration, handling software and concept development) and this is what makes shared praxis so valuable. It integrates the personal experience of the individual, the perspective of the international team and the need of the participants to arrive at a creative and completed design product.

If animated proverbs are taken, then the challenge is for the students to work out the content and the relevant keywords. In the 2017 workshop in Ulm, a team chose the following proverb:



Figure. 5: The Javanese proverb “Cedhak kebo, gupak” written in Javanese script

It literally means, “If you are close to the buffalo, you will be exposed to the mud”. The English equivalent is, “If you lie down with a dog, you will get up with fleas”. In the implementation part of the workshop, writing became a picture and the students used nothing but a pictogram to convey the message in the proverb. At some points in the animation it appears as its typograms, i.e. text images, lined up next to each other. At other places letters move and become independent beings like flies, a dog and a buffalo. (see: <https://intercultural-design-workshop.de/TiM2017/design3.html>)

Kinetic typography brings form and content into a context that evokes associations and emotions. Received in a similar way to logo types, the name of

the company and the look and feel of the font and color are all perceived simultaneously. In addition to the creative means of color, font style and font size, the kind of movement depicted also plays a role. It underscores the statement and meaning of the creative means being used. Kinetic typography is well-suited for title sequences in films, logo animation, TV advertising, branding for TV channels, advertising banners, animated and interactive infographics, etc.

In kinetic typography or type in motion, two media are brought together: the typeface as a traditional and the moving image as a contemporary and mostly computer-generated information medium. In this way, animated typography bridges the gap between the linear text, which is understood sequentially and according to rules, and the image, which the viewer interprets as a simultaneous whole without any time delay whatsoever. The market researcher Burkard Michel writes with reference to Gottfried Boehm: “Unlike in language, there are (almost) no syntactic rules for images in the sense of a grammar that could structure the relationships between the individual picture elements in a way that leaves no room for ambiguity. The ‘pathway’ through the picture is therefore largely determined by the recipient.” (Michel, 2004). This means that the viewer has greater freedom of interpretation and can play a stronger role when viewing an image than when reading a text. Against this background it is understandable that pictures are more interesting and easier to remember for the viewer than words. The attention-capturing capacity is increased even more when it comes to moving images, which are used in marketing and advertising. It is well known that a PowerPoint presentation is more attractive and interesting if it contains images, animations and videos.

In the 1980s, the media philosopher Villem Flusser already predicted that digital images would replace writing in the “Telematic Society”. He describes the historical development from prehistoric pictograms to linear writing and back to the digital image as follows: “As the alphabet originally advanced against pictograms, digital codes today advance against letters to overtake them.” (Flusser, 2011).

At this point, we should take a closer look at how attractive the moving image is from an educational point of view. In my workshops, the aim is to acquire intercultural competence in the context of design, which means the learning goal is not only intercultural dialogue but also developing the ability to jointly create a design work. In the workshops, students from different cultural backgrounds meet for

the first time and are supposed to work together 'out of the blue' as it were. It has been my experience since 2014 that the majority of the workshop participants are willing to do so, and their main motivation is to get to know students from other cultures. But I will say more about participant evaluation elsewhere. Nevertheless, in the 3-4-day workshop all participants go through a process of development to become a team that is worth taking a closer look at.

The model of group development by psychologist Bruce Tuckman is widespread in corporate communications and in education. It differentiates between the following 4 phases: Forming, Storming, Norming and Performing (Tuckman, B. W, 1965). I linked this model, which was developed especially for small groups, with the concrete design process and the work results. My question was: How does kinetic animation influence the intercultural team-building process? The following description is based on observation and on video interviews of the participants. (see: <https://intercultural-design-workshop.de/TiM2015/video.html>)

1.) Forming: The approach taken by the team members and their communication focus from the beginning on the given topic. In the team, the extent of the work is limited by means of brainstorming and mind-mapping. If, for example, a team is to animate proverbs in a meaningful way, it must first agree on the cultural significance of the existing references to everyday life and culture in order to then work out keywords or key images. During this process, the team members get to know one another and their style preferences, personal, culturally conditioned modes of behavior and are friendly and reserved.

2.) Storming: In this phase, roles are allocated, but conflicts are also dealt with. The team often finds that working methods are very different due to their cultural differences. If a clearly structured and conceptual approach encounters a more creative and spontaneous approach, this can lead to misunderstandings and can cause friction. In this phase, different design and illustration styles are tried out and animation sequences are looked at which still remain open for the time-being, but also show that the new group development phase has begun - at the latest when the students are storyboarding the animation.

3.) Norming: At this point, the team has been brought together by the joint process the

participants have been through, and all of the roles and work packages have been allocated so that each team member knows what to do. There are those responsible for project management, conception, illustration, realization and presentation. At the media level of animation, the team agree on certain formal procedures and styles. Animation only works if a certain logical animation principle is adhered to. On a formal-aesthetic level, these are the 12 basic principles of animation developed for Walt Disney animations (Thomas F., Johnston O, 1995). The design work will only have a convincing quality if all team members pull together in terms of content and form, and if they can rely on each other as a team.

4.) Performing: This phase marks the realization. As typography - in addition to its pictorial quality - always contains comprehensible information as well, it is also necessary to agree on the communication goal in the final phase. If necessary, movement sequences might have to be optimized in iterations so that the message can be conveyed in the best possible way. All team members feel committed to the common goal, have learned about their strengths and weaknesses and have also spent social time together. They bring their enhanced intercultural communication skills to the team, become more creative, flexible and, in the best-case scenario, organize themselves.

A typographic animation always tells a story, and this means it is a medium where it is not possible to simply divide the entire project up into modular work packages. That would be much easier to do, for example, with an analog poster series or a card game. In such cases, each team member could design a poster or a card and all they would have to do would be agree on a common design style. Telling a story together based on kinetic typography and visual pictograms or illustrations promotes digital media literacy which, in a global world, draws on diverse cultures (See Buckingham, 2013).

2 RESULTS/METHODS

But how do the participants themselves assess and evaluate the intercultural design workshops? The workshops are evaluated on an ongoing basis using quantitative questionnaires, whereby the focus is placed on the design praxis, not on the scientific evaluation.

A total of 221 students from Indonesia, US, Egypt, Finland, Russia and Greece have participated in my workshops since 2009. Most of the workshops were equal in numbers, in the sense that half of the participants came from Germany and the other half from a foreign partner university. One exception was the 2017 workshop, where 3 nations participated: Greeks, Indonesians and Germans. The ratio of women to men was almost balanced at 52% to 48%. 51% of the participants were between 20 and 23 years of age and 33.8% between 24 and 29 years of age. The remainder were distributed somewhat evenly up to the age of 38.

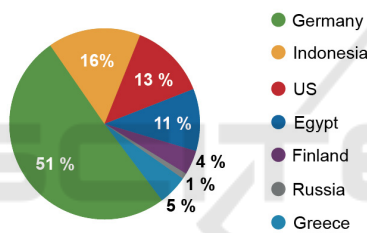


Figure 6: Distribution of nations in the intercultural workshops, 2009-2019

The course evaluation was based on a quantitative survey, which was partly extended by open-ended questions. The focus of the survey was on satisfaction with workshop preparation, handouts, lectures, tutorials, timeframe, assistance and how much support was offered, as well as the ratios of theory and practice, expectations and a comparison to reality, etc. The aim of the survey was also to help assess the allocation of work within the team into the areas of conception, graphics and storyboard creation, project management, software handling and sound recording. Furthermore, it was interesting to learn more about the intercultural dialogue, the students' self-assessment, the learning gain and the participants' satisfaction with their final design work.

The question of the motivation to take part in an intercultural workshop was one of the main aspects for me, because learning works most sustainably when there is an intrinsic motivation for it or when the natural curiosity of the learner is kept alive. My hypothesis was that, apart from the attractiveness of

travelling abroad, it is mainly the topic and the medium of animation that is interesting for the students, and I believe that is why they registered for a workshop like this one. It is important to note that only half of all workshops take place abroad, as this is an exchange program. The attractiveness of a stay abroad, which is also subsidized, is therefore not the only decisive factor.

The following question aims to provide some insight into the main motivation for taking part in a workshop:

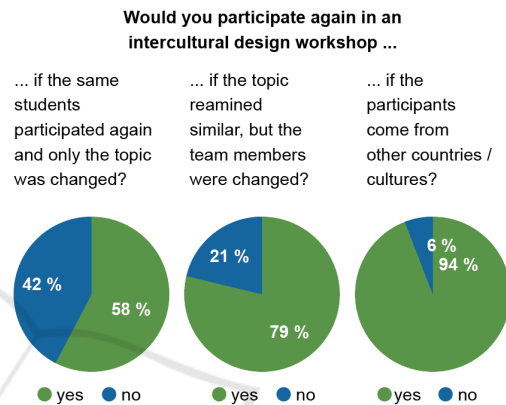


Figure 7: Results from answers to question 13 of a survey carried out with 73 workshop participants

The current status of the survey shows that 94% of the participants value most the interaction between people from different cultures. Neither the topic nor the medium of the workshop – in my case animation – is as important.

This leads to the following, more in-depth question.

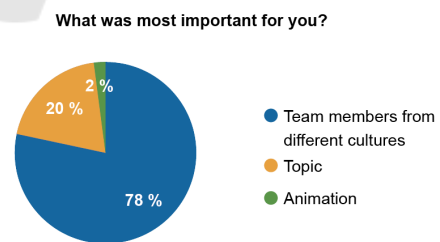


Figure 8: Result of question 14 of a survey carried out with 73 workshop participants

This pie chart shows once more that students prioritize the intercultural exchange aspect of the workshop.

This means that almost any topic or medium could produce the same result: enhanced intercultural ability. This is a small part of my empirical research,

but the message is loud and clear. All you need for a successful intercultural workshop is at least two different cultures, a working space and a common goal.

I'd now like to look at my monocultural design workshops, which are mostly conducted in Germany. Language is therefore not an obstacle, but cultural differences may still exist, because we have immigrants from other countries. Here I use the technique of Stop-Motion Animation to strengthen the team spirit at the beginning of a new project. Stop-Motion Animation is very easy to learn. Clay, paper and puppets can be easily used by everybody – not just design students. Video editing skills are not necessary because it works with single photo shots of rearranged objects. Stop-Motion is popular and is now being used in project management and even in elementary schools.

I started two years ago to evaluate my monocultural workshops using the medium of Stop-Motion. I wondered what my German students liked most about it. It seems that the creative freedom they have in a team project is the most appealing aspect, and students also enjoy the fun of producing something together as well. My research studies are still in progress and not yet representative. But, all in all, team animation seems to be an appropriate medium for bringing students closer to one another.

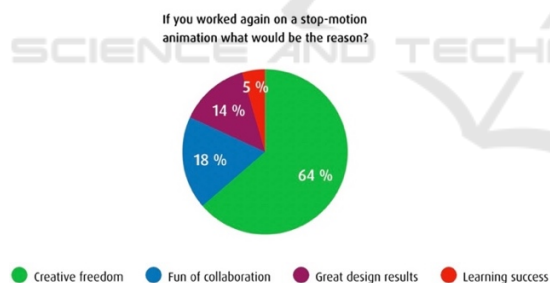


Figure. 9: Result from answers to question 14 of a survey carried out with 24 German third-semester students

3 CONCLUSION

The concept of my intercultural design workshops, which I have been carrying out for ten years and which emerged about 25 years ago from media design workshops with German participants, has proven itself in the university sector.

The examples provided above show that students in the Program Digital Media at Ulm University of Applied Sciences can gain valuable experience for their future careers and learn about new design

concepts and methods in the practical international learning situation created by the workshops. Participants benefit professionally and personally from broadening their horizons, become culturally more flexible, tolerant, and break down their cultural prejudices in the process.

Intercultural design workshops and subject-based excursions abroad are a very good way of preparing for a semester abroad and for an international career. Students can also use these experiences in Germany to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds, or with customers, employees and superiors. And, of course, in their personal lives as well: the hope is that they will encounter their fellow citizens from other countries without prejudice and react more sensitively towards discrimination when they are confronted with it. The concept has proved to be very successful, and the ensuing increase in media competence of the students is beyond question. The participants always confirm that a design workshop lasting 3-4 days considerably enhances their technical and design skills, sometimes even more so than a much more time-consuming theory-based course.

These positive experiences require intensive preparation. As teaching basic design knowledge is time-consuming, it must already have been completed in advance of the workshop. The effective follow-up work must include reflection on what has been learned in order to make sure that the participants have internalized their new skills. The quality of a workshop as well as the professionalism of the workshop results could be increased considerably with a newly developed selection procedure, in which professionally motivated participants could be distinguished from those with purely touristic goals, as first experience has shown.

All design workshops were documented and archived and can be accessed at:

www.intercultural-design-workshop.de and www.dm.hs-ulm.de/Intercultural-workshops.

The online documentations, the design of which the participants actively participated in, show the workshops as they unfold, the results of the work and a photo gallery. The videos preserve what the participants experienced and make it possible for new participants, but also future international partners, to get an impression of what the workshops were like.

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