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Message from the International President

Dear SIEC-ISBE Friends,

Welcome to the 152nd edition of *The International Journal for Business Education*, formerly known as *The Review*. Our journal is a peer-reviewed publication for global business educators by global business educators. The journal is published annually. ISBE members provide in-depth research articles that can be helpful in the classroom or with administrative responsibilities. Each article, based upon research conducted by our members, adds to the body of knowledge in global business education. As in the past, a brochure for the upcoming conference will be included. Additionally, a call for nominations for the office of General Secretary is included as required by our constitution.

I want to thank Eric Kisling, Ph.D., of the USA Chapter for taking on the task of editor for the past three years. I also want to take a moment to thank our reviewers. We had multiple manuscripts submitted this year and required fifteen reviewers. Thank you to our reviewers. From Australia: Maria Evans, Jenni Harding, and Dianne McGrath. From Austria: Gerhard Geissler, Georg Tafner, and Katharina Stoettinger. From Finland: Hely Westerholm. From Italy: Gianfranco Benati. From Poland: Les Preisner. From the USA: Margaret Erthal, Gregg Whyte, Lila Waldman, Judee Timm, Beryl McEwan, and Wanda Stitt-Gohdes. Your expertise was beneficial in helping improve the quality of the accepted manuscripts and offering guidance for improvement to those authors whose work was not accepted this year.

Our international conference will be located in Denver, Colorada, USA. Denver is located in the Rocky Mountains and it is a beautiful area. The conference theme, Mile High and Worldwide—International Business Education, is an exciting theme that is very appropriate as our organization celebrates 111 years of excellence in Business Education. I hope to see you at the 2012 conference and our future conferences as well. Future conferences are planned in the following locations:

2012—Denver, Colorado, USA
2013—Germany
2014—Finland
2015—Poland

We are seeking proposals for conferences in 2016 and beyond.

With warmest SIEC-ISBE regards until we meet again,

Tamra S. Davis, Ph.D.
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NOTICE OF APPOINTMENT
OF SIEC-ISBE GENERAL SECRETARY

SIEC-ISBE is accepting applications for the position of **General Secretary**. The General Secretary will be appointed by resolution of the Assembly of Delegates at the International Conference. The individual is appointed for a maximum term of five (5) years and may be re-nominated by the Executive Committee to serve one additional maximum five-year period, subject to approval by the Assembly of Delegates. Candidates for the SIEC-ISBE General Secretary must be a member in good standing of their national chapter.

Candidates for the SIEC-ISBE General Secretary must have the following qualifications:

a. A thorough knowledge of SIEC-ISBE, including its history, activities, operations, and future direction
b. Active participation in several SIEC-ISBE activities, including the annual International conferences
c. The ability to:
    - Maintain the Permanent Office of SIEC-ISBE and perform all secretarial and financial duties as well as other duties assigned by the President, Executive Committee, and/or the Board
    - Work cooperatively with the International President in establishing agendas, budgets, and activities
    - Maintain effective communication and provide essential information between and among the International President, Assembly of Delegates, the Board, and the Executive Committee
    - Maintain archives for SIEC-ISBE
    - Communicate effectively with individuals, institutions, and organizations, both internally and externally
    - Promote SIEC-ISBE both nationally and internationally
    - Commit time and energy to SIEC-ISBE
d. Commitment to attend all meetings of the Executive Committee, the Board, and the Assembly of Delegates at the yearly International Conference

All applications (no longer than two pages) must be sent to the International President by 31 March 2012. Profiles of the candidates should cover the above-mentioned points. Additional background information or experiences regarding qualifications for the position may be included. Candidates will be interviewed by the Election Committee at the International Conference; the nomination will be presented to the Assembly of Delegates for approval.

Email applications to: Dr. Tamra Davis, International President: tdavis2@ilstu.edu
[Dr. Judy Olson-Sutton, General Secretary, will have fulfilled her first term at the 2012 Conference in Denver, Colorado. As she is a candidate for reappointment to the position, please communicate with Dr. Davis regarding applications.]

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Membership Information

Membership in SIEC-ISBE is open to everyone with an interest in Business Education. SIEC-ISBE has many national chapters.

Visit http://www.siecisbe.org to find out if a chapter exists in your country. You can contact the national chapter from this website. If a chapter does not exist, contact the General Secretary for information to join as an international member. Contact information: Dr. Judith Olson-Sutton, secretary@siec-isbe.org.

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Preface

We would like to thank the wonderful professionals who filled the role of reviewers for this journal. Due to the number of manuscripts received, multiple reviewers were needed this year. Without their assistance, the job of editor would have been much more difficult. Thank you to all fifteen reviewers who are SIEC/ISBE members and volunteered to help when asked. Thank you.

We hope that you find the articles included in this year's *The International Journal for Business Education* interesting. Thank you to everyone who submitted a manuscript for consideration. Without your submissions, we would not have had a journal.

Eric Kisling, Ph.D. and Tamra S. Davis, Ph.D.
SIEC Co-Editors 2012

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THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN MINDFULNESS

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Abstract

This article presents information about cultural aspects of mindfulness or attention, a topic worthy of exploration and relevance to the global business education literature. The article concludes with implications for business educators and their students.

Introduction

In the movie "City Slickers," Billy Crystal's character asked the seasoned cowboy what the secret of life is. The seasoned cowboy replied, "One thing." In other words, focusing on one goal or aspect of life at a time rather than on many things at a time will bring success and happiness. For Billy Crystal's character, that one thing was being with family.

In a world that has grown busier and more complex, the ability to be mindful about tasks has become more valuable than ever before. One of the greatest compliments a person can give to another is to attend to that person mindfully. The propensity to pay attention, to focus, and to concentrate may be culturally based. According to Ketay, Aron, and Hedden (2009), "culture may shape how the brain processes even very abstract stimuli and may influence the features of the environment to which individuals attend" (p. 79). Further, Thomas (2006) identified mindfulness as a vital aspect of cultural intelligence that provides a link between behavioral capability and knowledge. What factors affect attention, and do these factors vary across cultures?

Purpose of the Article

This article presents information about cultural aspects of mindfulness or attention, a topic worthy of exploration and relevance to the global business education literature. The article concludes with implications for business educators and their students.

Definition of Mindfulness

While there are numerous definitions for mindfulness, a common one defines mindfulness as not only paying attention but also deciding to pay attention to one thing at a time. "One of life's most essential skills is the ability to focus one's attention at will. This single ability is the foundation of all mastery and contentment" (Cohen, 2004, p. xiv). In fact, the slogan of the ToDo Institute, a non-profit organization that provides mindfulness information on its website and mindfulness training, is "Life is a Matter of Attention" (ToDo Institute, 2011b).

Attention and mindfulness experts agree that "mindfulness and skillful attention don't just happen accidentally. Their development involves a conscious effort to use the brain's capacity to rewire its circuitry" (ToDo Institute, 2011a, n.p.). As with any skill development, practice is necessary to increase attention and mindfulness, and working with attention exercises daily is important (ToDo Institute, 2011a, n.p.). Through practical applications, these exercises allow people to attend to situations differently—more mindfully--than they would normally.

One hallmark of high achievers is their ability to focus their attention on specific things. They "focus in spite of distractions, fears, and setbacks and not necessarily with will power or great courage - with an almost obsessive interest, curiosity, and passion" (Fiore, 2010, p. 64). How can others learn to exhibit such focus? Strategies for developing focus are presented in the paper.

Literature Review

This section reviews literature that identifies global business education aspects of mindfulness, discusses cultural aspects of mindfulness, presents strategies for fostering global cultural mindfulness behaviors, offers information for developing mindfulness, explains the role of singletasking and multitasking behaviors and mindfulness, and provides recommendations for increasing mindfulness in the classroom and in the workplace.

Global Business Education Aspects of Mindfulness

The National Standards for Business Education (National Business Education Association, 2007) explicitly state that culturally aware students will be able to "compare cultural attitudes about use of time, silence, space, gestures, body language, and body and eye contact to [promote] successful international business relationships" (p. 105). Further, Policies Commission for Business and Economic Education (PCBEE) Statement No. 74 emphasizes the criticality of multicultural contexts since they "encompass values, attitudes, and beliefs; social and business customs, behaviors, and practices; sensitivity to diversity; language; and written, oral, and nonverbal communication" (PCBEE, 2004, p, 16). Mindful behaviors and practices certainly apply to these standards and statements. Understanding how mindfulness may differ from culture to culture will enable those involved in global business to communicate and to work better in situations where mindfulness behaviors in other cultures differ from those of the home culture

Education for a globally connected world is emphasized in *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education* (Colby, Ehrlich, Sullivan, & Dolle, 2011), a recent book published by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The authors asserted, "Deep learning about cultures other than one's own is a quintessential arena in which young people become aware of the partial and contingent nature of their own previously unquestioned assumptions and perspectives" (p. 133). In essence, developing this understanding provides students with new eyes for viewing their particular culture and "a better sense of what it means to be acculturated: that no one is culture-free and that everyone operates within particular, though multifaceted and complex, cultural systems" (pp. 133-134).

According to Comfort and Franklin (2011), global managers who are mindful display the following attributes: recognize and heed "their own cultural and individual assumptions, values and norms" (n.p.) and those of their co-workers; understand that these are solely one set of overarching action guidelines attempt to view different situations and cultures through the eyes of co-workers; value the different feelings and perspectives in their actions/evaluations of cultures other than their own; strive to understand when interacting with co-workers from other cultures or from other backgrounds than their own by engaging in active listening; change their language so it is more understandable; employ paraphrasing to check for understanding; verify their own understanding; and understand non-verbal communication cues. Mindfulness is critical in the global marketplace since it fosters better communication and understanding across cultures. In turn, this fostering enhances business relationships and may provide a competitive advantage.

Cultural Aspects of Mindfulness

This section reviews literature that discusses the role of context in cultural mindfulness patterns.

Nisbett's research (2003) revealed that Japanese and Americans focus on different things when looking at an underwater scene for 20 seconds. When explaining what they saw in the scene, "the Westerners zeroed in on what seemed like the most important thing, but the Asians focused on the relationships between things" (p. 76). The collectivist orientation of Asians is demonstrated by their concentration on relationships and context (Gallagher, 2009).

Context refers to "how people deliver, receive, and interpret messages" (Shwom & Snyder, 2012, p. 47). The importance of context when interpreting messages in a national culture may be thought of as a point somewhere on a distribution scale that ranges from low to high. From low to high, selected national cultures are distributed on a scale as follows: Swiss-German, German, Scandinavian (i.e., Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian), United States and Canadian, French, British, Italian, Latin American (i.e., Mexican, Brazilian, and Chilean), Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese (Rosch & Segler, 1987).

Victor (1992) identified five characteristics that vary across cultures. These characteristics include emphasis on written word, adherence to law, governance of interpersonal behavior, agreements based on personal promises, and agreements based on written word or contract. In low-context cultures the emphasis on the written word is high, while in high-context cultures the emphasis on the written word is low. Adherence to the law is rigid in low-context cultures, while such adherence is flexible in high-context cultures. Governance of interpersonal behaviors in low-context cultures is through external rules and regulations, while such behaviors are governed by individual interpretation in high-context cultures. In low-context cultures agreements based on personal promises are not binding, while in high-context cultures such agreements are binding. In low-context cultures agreements based on contracts or the written word are binding, while such agreements in high-context cultures are not binding.

Relatively low-context cultures such as the United States and Canada place more emphasis on specific language when sending a message, and devote less attention to the context of a situation. Cultures that rely heavily on context for making sense of messages, such as those of the Asian countries of Japan and China, convey meaning not only through words but also through the contextual situation that accompanies those words. Such attributes could include silence, the history of the communicators, and the paralanguage (the nonverbal aspects of speech such as rate; tone; volume; and use of vocal fillers such as “uh,” “um,” “you know,” “okay,” and “you guys”) used to convey the message (Shwom & Snyder, 2012).

The tendency to view a situation “in a way that prepares you to take charge of it is a cornerstone of Western individualism” (Gallagher, 2009, p. 77) and is common in a low-context culture. This low-context cultural tendency may inhibit communication since it tends to focus on the external, rather than the internal focus typical of high-context cultures. Thus, these cultural differences between low-context and high-context cultures have caused and may result in clashes over world political events, business dealings, and personal relationships.

Diverse disciplines from anthropology to education, behavioral economics to family counseling, similarly suggest the skillful management of attention is the sine qua non of the good life and the key to improving virtually every aspect of your experience, from mood to productivity to relationships (Gallagher, 2009, p. 2).

Elinor Ochs, Director of the Center on Everyday Lives of Families at UCLA, told the following story. “In it-takes-a-village societies, however, such as Samoans, people are encouraged in very early life to direct their attention outward to others . . . Even before they can talk, these tots are primed to attend to what others are doing and feeling . . . By the age of four, Samoan children contribute to society helping to care for younger siblings and carrying messages for adults” (ToDo Institute, 2011b, n.p). In essence, the Samoan culture values people and relationships. The influence of attention is broader than this, however, since the issue of attention is relevant for all areas of life, including how we raise our kids, treat our partners, do our jobs, cultivate creativity, relate to technology, and participate in the larger world. It's an area worthy of sincere study and practice" (ToDo Institute, 2011b, n.p.).

Practicing mindfulness increases one's ability to understand cultural context. The next section describes behaviors that foster cultural mindfulness.

Fostering Behaviors of Cultural Mindfulness

Because of global interdependence, business practitioners need to be cognizant of behaviors that foster cultural mindfulness. "When interacting with a person from another culture or visiting another culture (even if it is only in the next neighborhood), it is easy to miss the nuances and meaning of the behavior of others" (Moulton, 2009, n.p.). How can people be more mindful in multicultural situations? The following behaviors are conducive to cultural mindfulness:

1. Observe the way in which others behave.
2. Be open to unique behavior without evaluating it.
3. Employ the senses to notice nuances and details, remaining attuned to these behavioral signals.
4. Display curiosity, particularly in reference to cultural contexts.
5. Strive to connect with others so that common cultural aspects are revealed.
6. Appreciate the cultural behaviors and nuances encountered.
7. Remember that a particular word may mean different things to different people.
8. View the situation from many perspectives.
9. Realize how one's behavior influences others.
10. Be mindful of one's experience and how that experience influences communication situations (Moulton, 2009).

As Gervais (2011) stated, we may be missing out on things that we have culturally learned to ignore or undervalue, or we may miss them entirely. When we start from the premise that we are not maybe missing something, but we are definitely missing something because we are limited by our own culturally reinforced brains – there is less likelihood that we will insist on the "rightness" of our perspective. This could have revolutionary implications for education, for training and development, and for learning at work (n.p.).

By employing these ten strategies, a person will develop behaviors that foster mindfulness among global cultures. The following section presents information about developing mindfulness.

Development of Mindfulness

Just as yoga was once perceived as being "out there," as an activity that was practiced by people on the fringe, meditation was perceived in a similar fashion. However, that is not the case today. Both yoga and meditation are not necessarily religious activities, although the practice of prayer has been categorized by some as a type of meditation. Because of growing acceptance of meditation practice as mainstream, several recent studies have focused on the role of meditation on focus or mindfulness (Cahn & Polich 2009; Chan & Willacott, 2007; Chiesa, Calati, & Serretti, 2011; Gura, 2010; Kumar & Telles, 2009; Roeser, & Peck, 2009; van den Hurk, Giommi, Gielen, Speckens, & Barendregt, 2010; Weick & Putnam, 2006). Results of these studies have revealed that regular meditation practice, even for a short period of time, produces positive results such as (1) less stress through less cortisol production, (2) better focus or mindfulness, and (3) better health (The Doctors with van Aalst, 2009).

While meditation practices may vary, one more common type of practice is centering. Centering involves sitting with eyes closed and focusing the mind on a word or saying such as "Peace," "Amen," or some other saying that is meaningful to the practitioner. It is not necessary to speak the expression aloud. When the mind wanders from the expression and races off to another thought, the practitioner returns to the expression. Alternatively, a person may simply focus on the breath rather than on a saying (The Doctors with van Aalst, 2009). In addition to meditation, mindfulness can be cultivated through chi going, tai chi, and yoga (UCLA Mindfulness Awareness Center, n.d.). Further, such activities as writing, walking, music, and art can be used to develop mindfulness.

One focus or attention exercise in the ToDo Institute's (2003) *Working with Attention* booklet is "Chewing Your Attention." This exercise requires placing one's utensils down following every bite of food and focusing on chewing one's food thoroughly before moving to the next mouthful. Such a practice helps to avoid mindless eating and is suggested by health experts. The old adage to chew a mouthful of food 40 times is reinforced in this focusing exercise.

Self-awareness, a critical aspect of emotional intelligence, is defined by Goleman as "the ability to recognize and understand your moods, emotions, and drives, as well as their effect on others" (as cited in Bolender Initiatives, LLC, n.d.) and requires that a person practice mindfulness. Over 20,000 studies of mindfulness are included by the National Institute of Health in its National Library of Medicine (The Doctors with van Aalst, 2010). The results of these research studies indicate a mindfulness meditation practice may increase empathy for others and oneself, enhance attention and "on task" performance, lessen judgmental thinking, elevate the ability to speedily refocus following distractions, and expand one's gray matter and grow brain size.

Practicing yoga, adopting a meditation practice, practicing attention exercises, and increasing self-awareness are helpful in enhancing mindfulness. Next, the role of singletasking vs. multitasking behaviors and mindfulness is discussed.

Singletasking Behaviors vs. Multitasking Behaviors and Mindfulness

Much has been written about the need to engage in multitasking behaviors in today's society. While multitasking involves attempting to do more than one thing at a time, singletasking refers to working on one item at a time. Singletasking does not mean that a person is not involved in many projects; rather it refers to focusing on one project before moving to another. While some multitasking is acceptable, particularly with lower level tasks such as walking and chewing gum simultaneously, recent studies have determined that engaging in frequent multitasking behaviors is actually detrimental to both task efficiency and task effectiveness (Hemp, 2009).

One aspect of multitasking is the propensity for people to use technology in meetings and in the face-to-face classroom, which decreases attention on what is occurring and may decrease an individual's level of mental presence. Thus, the term "absent presence" has been used to describe this type of multitasking. Kleinman (2004) defines absent presence as a situation where individuals may, through technology use, remove themselves "from the context of shared group behaviors to become involved in a virtual world that is not available to those around them" (n.p.). It is not necessary, however, to use technology to appear to have "absent presence." For example, one may read a book in the presence of others and be absent from the social situation.

The practice of singletasking is recommended by Babauta (n.d.). Benefits of singletasking include: it is less complex, more efficient, and allows the human brain to operate optimally. Conversely, with multitasking, the switching from one task to another trains brains to "have a shorter attention span" (Babauta, n.d., p. 92). When people are multitasking, they are not fully engaged with another person. Further, lack of attentiveness may result in less than stellar comprehension and require the repetition of information.

Settle-Murphy (2009) recommended strategies for enhancing engagement of remote (not face to face) participants, which would also be effective strategies in the classroom. One recommended strategy involves specifying participation ground rules twice—once in advance of the meeting and again just before the meeting begins to increase participants' attentiveness. Moreover, "you might also get specific and ask that people refrain from handling e-mail or instant messaging during the meeting" (Settle-Murphy, 2009, n.p.)

Five strategies for increasing one's ability to singletask are paying attention, clearing away distractions, determining what is the most important thing one can be accomplishing at the moment, dedicating oneself to the task, and practicing singletasking (Babauta, n.d.). Most or all of these steps could be incorporated into almost any teaching activity.

The value of cultivating the ability to singletask has been discussed. Next, enhancing the ability to be mindful, thus increasing the ability to singletask, in the classroom is presented.

Increasing Mindfulness in the Classroom

Lehrer (2011) reported that highly developed executive function can aid children and adults in regulating their attention and impulses. Executive function is "a collection of cognitive skills that allow us to exert control over our thoughts and impulses" (p. C32) and may be developed by engaging in yoga, tae-kwon-do, challenging board games, and computer exercises (Lehrer, 2011).

Ritchhart and Perkins (2001) identified three instructional practices that are helpful in increasing mindfulness in the classroom: looking closely, exploring possibilities and perspectives, and introducing ambiguity. Looking closely involves learning to be open to new information by cultivating sensitivity. Instructors might ask students to complete an activity such as "What's On A Penny?," (R. Dortch, personal communication, October 18, 2000) by having students closely examine a penny for all of its attributes. Exploring possibilities and perspectives allows students to view perspectives of others. For example, in a business writing course, a message could be examined in terms of the perspective of the consumer and that of the business organization. How do the perspectives differ? How can the differences be bridged? Introducing ambiguity involves refraining from absolute statements. If an instructor makes "this could be" statements rather than direct statements, students are more likely to fill in the gaps and avoid narrowing too rapidly (Ritchhart & Perkins, 2000). Practicing these three aspects allows students to become more mindful and to reduce mindless behaviors.

Strategies for increasing mindfulness in the classroom have been discussed. In the next section, strategies are presented for increasing mindfulness in the workplace.

Increasing Mindfulness in the Workplace

Connerley, an expert in multicultural workplace issues, asserted, Culture influences our thoughts, words, and actions in ways that are often unrecognized and that can lead to misunderstandings, missed opportunities, and less than ideal outcomes. No matter how highly skilled, well-trained, or intelligent you are—if you are making culturally inappropriate assumptions, you will not be accurate in your assessment, meaningful in your understanding, or appropriate in your interactions in the workplace (Ho, 2006, n.p.).

Not only do such cultural missteps cost organizations money, they also cost in terms of lost time and damaged relationships. Mindful managers employ these five key attributes:

- commitment to resilience;
- deference to expertise;
- preoccupation with failure, referring to "continuous attention to details to detect small discrepancies that could be symptoms of larger problems in a system" (Weick & Putnam, 2006, p. 9);
- reluctance to simplify interpretations; and
- sensitivity to operations (Weick, 2001).

While preoccupation with failure may seem counterintuitive, practicing mindfulness allows one to perceive things one might not normally perceive rather than focusing on the routine and blocking out what is not expected.

Further, Weick (2001) explains: Whether mindfulness is central or is not is dependent on how the firm explains the reasons for its successes and failures in coping with problems. If successful coping is attributed to continuous inquiry, candor, wariness, updating, tolerance of discomfort, and flexibility, assumptions supporting mindfulness will be institutionalised in the culture. But if those same successes originated instead from factors such as central direction, specialisation, competence, compliance, and confirmed expectations, existing schemes of categorisation will be maintained and contexts will be treated as though they are understood even though they are given only cursory attention (p. 138).

Veil (2011) proposed the Mindful Learning Model that recognizes potential crisis warning signals stemming from mindlessness behaviors so that adaptation and organizational learning can occur. Among those warning signals are rhetorical barriers of classification with experience (nuances of a situation are not recognized), reliance on success, and trained mindlessness. Classification with experience refers to a person's inability to perceive outside of the person's experiences, and as a result, not perceiving warning signals of crisis. Reliance on success occurs when organizations focus only on past success, not recognizing potential red flags. Trained mindlessness describes how employees can be trained to disregard potential crisis warning signals. For example, if employees are shown the correct way to complete a task or assignment, adhering to the routine is encouraged, and crisis warning signals may be ignored. Veil asserts, "By taking into account the contexts, environment, and perspectives surrounding a situation and welcoming new information, mindfulness allows us to reframe the situation" (p. 135) and organizational learning is encouraged.

Implications for Business Education

This article has presented information about cultural variations in attentiveness and mindfulness. While Eastern cultures tend to view situations holistically and contextually, Western cultures typically address situations with a narrower focus. As a result, when Westerners and Easterners interact, the potential for misunderstanding arises, particularly if they have not had the benefit of cultural training. Following the strategies provided in this article for fostering cultural mindfulness, such as being open, employing the senses, displaying cultural curiosity, striving for connection with others, viewing situations from several perspectives, and appreciating differences in cultural behaviors, should enhance the quality of multicultural interactions.

Business educators and their students should be cognizant of the importance of cultural knowledge in terms of attentiveness and mindfulness. Along with this knowledge, practicing mindfulness is critical to enhancing one's cultural expertise. Providing students with opportunities to develop such mindfulness will increase their cultural competence. Opportunities to interact with others, to keep a blog or journal about such interactions since writing increases mindfulness, and to develop an action plan to elevate cultural competence may be helpful in building both cultural competence and confidence.

The ability to mindfully single task in a multi-tasking centered world is essential. Incorporating instructional practices that encourage mindfulness such as looking closely, exploring possibilities and perspectives, and introducing ambiguity will enhance the ability to communicate effectively with others regardless of their native culture. Prudent business educators and their students will strive to increase their ability to single task by participating in such activities as focus exercises, yoga, chi gong, and tai chi; engaging in music, art and writing; and practicing mindfulness meditation. Adopting a meditation practice, if only for five minutes a day, is an important step not only toward cultural competence but also for integrated health (The Doctors with van Aalst, 2009).

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BASIC SKILLS AND GLOBAL COMPETENCIES FOR BUSINESS MAJOR GRADUATES

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Abstract

A task of achieving academic success by business students becomes of paramount importance in our times, as globalization puts high pressures on our national priorities in education and workforce training. The projected shortage of skilled workers for the global economy elevates concerns about our economic growth and competitiveness in the world. This article is built upon research (Weisblat, 2010) that had achieved two objectives. First, through the reviewed literature, basic skills and global competencies required from business major graduates in the global economy were identified. Second, perspectives of college educators and business leaders on the required skills and competencies were captured. The researchers compared these perspectives in order to answer the question of whether business schools are successful in producing “knowledge workers” (Drucker, 1996) for the global economy. This purpose was achieved by utilizing a grounded theory outlined by Charmaz (2006).

Such comparison of educators’ and business leaders’ views shed light on the issues of effectiveness of business education and employers’ satisfaction with the business graduates’ academic preparation. The study revealed significant differences in educators’ and employers’ understanding of what skills make business graduates competitive in the 21st century, and what skills, accordingly, should educators teach. Implications for practice were recognized, based on the findings of this study, including the need for extensive collaboration and greater input from business leaders into the design of curriculum that fits the rapidly evolving global economy.

Introduction

Is the world economic future at risk, as some authors predict? Given the rapidly changing demographics of advanced countries, the shrinking economies, and the projected shortage of educated workers, a concern about our economic well-being is not dramatic rhetoric (Canning, 2007; Edward, 2009; Hayward, 2004; Leitch, 2006). Educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners concur with the business leaders that advanced skills of "knowledge workers" (Drucker, 1996) are key factors in the future economic success. Employers expect colleges to supply their firms with skillfully trained workers who can successfully compete in the global market place. Important questions for educators and policy makers to answer are: How do we know which skills are important, and how well are we preparing students to attain those skills?

Statement of the Problem

As we entered the new Millennium, dramatic changes occurred in the national and world economy. Consequently, the workplace today is quite different from what it used to be a mere decade ago. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2018, there could be twenty million more jobs that require a postsecondary education than there will be workers who have it (DOL, 2009). The new jobs in the 21st century will require advanced competencies, as global economy requires world class skills (Carnevale, 1991; Carnevale & Desrochers, 2003; Drucker, 1994; Leitch, 2006; Levin, 2000). In light of changing economic circumstances, the problem is to determine what constitutes those world-class skills.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The researchers of this study sought to identify a set of skills required from workers in the 21st century, based on the reviewed literature. The literature search centered on perspectives on necessary skills that educators (who equip students with the necessary skills) and business leaders (who ultimately employ college graduates) have. The intention was to create a comprehensive list of skills and competencies that business students must possess.

Two broad research questions guided this study:

1. What are the basic skills and global competencies required of college graduates with a business major in the global economy?
2. Does the reviewed literature capture any differences in views on the required skills between educators and business leaders?

Significance of the Study for Improvement of Business Curriculum

No other study had previously attempted to answer these questions concurrently. No other studies looked simultaneously at these groups of skills – basic skills and global competencies, although both sets of skill seem to be important in the highly competitive marketplace. More importantly, no studies pursued a comparison of educators' and business leaders' views on those skills. This is in spite of the fact that both educators and business leaders are the major stakeholders who have a great influence on workforce development.

This research advocates, first and foremost, that a larger share of the workforce must acquire skills and knowledge through higher education. Secondly, this study points to a bigger role that all postsecondary institutions must play in order to produce well-educated workers. In addition, the significance of this study is in offering practical recommendations for improvement of business curriculum in postsecondary institutions.

Methodology

Databases Used for Literature Search

Several local, state, and national databases have been searched, such as: ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center), ProQuest Research Library; PsycARTICLES, PsycBOOKS and PsycINFO (the American Psychological Association databases), The Circuit (San Diego Library Consortium), Academic Search Premier (SDSU), and WilsonWeb (Educational full-text articles search). For most searches, the time frame was limited to the ten-year period from 2000 to 2010, in order to review the publications containing the most current trends in the subject matter. A few noteworthy writings were published prior to the year 2000, which allowed the researcher to follow a progression of ideas and policies on different aspects of skills development.

Selection Criteria

Two decisive parameters for selecting the databases mentioned above guided the researcher. First was the task of identification the basic skills and global competencies distinctive for diverse student population in colleges in general, and for business major graduates in particular. Second was the credibility of sources accumulated by the selected databases.

Data Collection and Theoretical Foundation

During data collection, special attention was paid to the rigorousness of methods and richness of data that would reveal the stakeholders' "views, feelings, intentions, and actions", as Charmaz (2006) advised (p. 14). Analytic techniques used in this study, application of initial codes, sorting and interpretation of the data, then recoding it again, checking the data for consistency, finalizing the themes, and identifying the appropriate skills and competencies for each theme category were modeled after the concepts presented by Charmaz (2006) in her grounded theory.

Landmark Studies

A glaring problem identified in the reviewed literature was the shortage of educated talent in the United States of America. Some experts cautioned that this critical skills gap threatened this country's competitiveness in the world (Friedman, 2007; Lingenfelter, 2007; Marshal & Tucker, 1999; Wagner, 2006). Yet, the literature indicates that Americans are not fully committed to preparing a new generation of "knowledge workers" (Drucker, 1996) with highly specialized expertise for the fast-growing industries (Hunter, 2004;

Wagner, 2006). It appears that a similar problem persisted in the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and other member countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Devroye & Freeman, 2001).

A question arises as to whether there is a match between what the global economy needs and what our colleges actually provide. What exactly comprises the skills, knowledge and competencies necessary to become a successful worker in the global economy? Are there differences in perception of skills between educators and business leaders who are the potential employers of college graduates? These were the primary questions of this investigation. Drawing upon the insights of both educators and business leaders documented in the literature, the authors found the answers to research questions for this study.

Skills and Competencies for the Global Economy

<u>Basic Skills</u>

Literature on the subject of basic skills contained a recurring idea about the hyper-competitive job market of the future that will require basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics to take on a new meaning. This idea first became evident after the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) had examined the workforce demands in the early 1990s and produced a report that identified skills and competencies required for those entering employment. The SCANS report (1991) acknowledged the need for workers who can "read well enough to understand and interpret the manuals… and write well enough to prepare correspondence, explain, illustrate, and convince" (p. ix). More to that, the report explained how the future jobs will increasingly depend on people who can make decisions and suggest new course of action.

In answering the question "What business wants from higher education?", Oblinger and Verville (1998) referred to Drucker's (1994) notion about knowledge becoming the primary source of comparative economic advantage in the world economy (p. v). A decade later, the Conference Board's (2006) survey showed that employers still expected their new hires to possess basic skills in English writing, reading, and mathematics. To this list, employers also added science, economics, geography and foreign languages (The Conference Board, 2006).

The *Future Workforce* Report (2000) issued by the Manpower Corporation carried the employers' expectations one step further. Their findings indicated that there were no futures for routine or unskilled labor. Today's economy requires specialization, expert skills and complex communications abilities (Levy & Murnane, 2005). It was estimated that 80% of jobs in the United States by the year 2020 will be cerebral and only 20% manual, which is the exact opposite of the ration in 1920, as Oblinger and Verville (1998) observed.

A consensus was found in both historic and recent literature that more jobs will require skills that call for mastery of basic skills. However, in addition to the orthodox 3R-basic skills [reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic], a profile of "knowledge workers" (Drucker, 1976) in the global economy will include analytical skills, creativity, innovation, strong competences in technology, sensitivity to the issues of multiculturalism, and ability to collaborate with the global business partners (Marshal & Tucker, 1993; NCEE, 2007; Wagner, 2006), to show proficiency in computers, and adept to complex service sector (Levy & Murnane, 2005).

Interestingly, some critical points of contention about relative importance of basic and "applied" skills were noted in the literature. Florez (2006), for example, maintained that "applied skills" surpassed the basic skills in importance. Others considered global competencies to be the "new basic skills" (Tagg, 2003).

Global Skills and Competencies

Current literature on basic skills and global competencies was rife with reports of eroding student achievement and declarations of imminent crisis in skills development for the 21st century (Gándara, Orfield & Horn, 2006; NGA, 2007; Tagg, 2003; Wagner, 2006). Yet, there is little research that clearly identifies these skills and competencies. Furthermore, there is no agreed upon definition among the researchers and practitioners about what it means to be globally competent or what particular skills should colleges teach their students in order to prepare them for the global workforce.

Realizing the effects of globalization on higher education, scholars were looking for effective solutions in developing "global-ready students" (Savicki, 2008, p. 32), although "global competencies may not be so easily understood or identified" (Bresciani, 2008, p. 906). In attempt to identify the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and experiences necessary for "global-ready students", some authors (Hunter, White & Godbey, 2006) referred to the Swiss Consulting Group. In their Global Competence Report (2002), global competence was defined as "the capacity of an individual or a team to parachute into any country and get the job done while respecting cultural pathways" (p. 4).

As if expanding this definition of global competency that highlights respect for one's identity, Bresciani (2008) made an important comment about one's ability "to listen, process, and synthesize another's varying thoughts, opinions, ideas, beliefs and feelings within the mores of various existing cultures without fear of aggressive or violent reaction" (p. 909). A panel of international scholars who participated in the Delphi study defined global competencies in a similar way: "Having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment" (Hunter, White & Godbey, 2006, p. 277).

Educators' and Business Leaders' Perspectives on Necessary Skills

Building upon the traditional set of interpersonal skills, team-work and communication skills identified by educational researchers as the necessary traits in the 21st century, American executives from IBM, Oblinger and Verville (1998) provided the following list of attributes, which reflected what employers actually demanded from their workers:

- Intellect, ranging from analysis, critique, and synthesis to problem solving
- Knowledge, both real and potential, ranging from an understanding of the basic principles of a subject or discipline to knowledge of the organization and

commercial awareness – in many organizations knowledge of the subject is less important than the ability to acquire knowledge

- Willingness and ability to learn and continue learning throughout life
- Flexibility and adaptability to respond to change, to anticipate change, and to lead change
- Self-management skills, such as self-discipline, ability to deal with stress, prioritization, planning, and ability to juggle several things at once
- Self-motivation, ranging from being a self-starter to seeing things through to a conclusion, including such characteristics as resilience, tenacity, and determination
- Positive self-image, including self-confidence, self-awareness, self-belief, self-sufficiency, self-direction, and self-promotion (Oblinger & Verville,1998, p. 74).

Incidentally, in the cited above 134-word passage that describes the ideal attributes of college graduates, the word "self" appeared 11 times (8% of the text content). Clearly, employers rely on educators to prepare the intelligent cadre of workers who are self-sufficient and adaptable to change. It is interesting to note also that business leaders put much higher value on the ability to acquire knowledge than on proficiency in the subject matter.

In response to escalating calls for greater accountability and effectiveness of postsecondary institutions, some studies focused on the problem of collaboration between business sector and educators, as a way to ensure that young people are well prepared to enter the workplace of the 21st century. These writings suggested that direct participation of business leaders in program evaluation may provide colleges with helpful external insights, facilitate further evolution of higher education, meet the needs of key stakeholders, and deliver value that is meaningful to different groups in the community (Alfred, Shults & Seybert, 2007; Roueche & Jones, 2005).

Results for Research Questions

These researchers identified the skills and competencies required of college graduates in the global economy and created a 15-item list of skills. Furthermore, this study highlighted the differences in perception of skills that educators and business leaders had. Answers to the two research questions presented here were rooted in the reviewed literature.

Research Question 1: Identification of Basic Skills and Global Competencies

What are the basic skills and global competencies required of college graduates with a business major in the global economy?

A 15-item list of basic skills and global competencies, including knowledge of technology, was created as a result of the studied literature. The identified 15 skills were clustered into two domains: (1) basic skills; and (2) global skills and competencies:

Basic Skills
1. Spoken English language
2. Writing in English
3. Reading comprehension in English
4. Basic math

Global Skills and Competencies

5. Foreign language(s) proficiency
6. Working with diverse cultures and people
7. Social responsibility
8. Ability to adjust to change
9. Ability to build partnerships
10. Listening
11. Teamwork ability
12. Leadership ability
13. Productive use of resources (time, money, materials, space, and staff)
14. Computer proficiency
15. Information Technology (IT) literacy

This list was inspired by the records of SCANS-skills outlined in the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991) report, basic skills documented in the Center for Student Success (2007) publication, and global competencies acknowledged by American and international scholars in various writings (Bresciani, 2008; Carnavale, 1991; Hunter, 2004; Levy & Murnane, 2005; Oblinger & Verville, 1998; Savicki, 2008).

Research Question 2: Educators' vs. Business Leaders' Views on Skills for the Global Economy

Does the reviewed literature capture any differences in views on the required skills between educators and business leaders?

Contrary to the business leaders' values, the National Education Goals instituted in 1999 described academic achievement as "challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, history, and geography" (The National Education Goals, 1999, p. vi). Thus, a dissonance between business leaders and educators in assessment of knowledge became apparent. In addition, some national studies pointed to the noticeable "misalignment in curricular content and academic standards" (Bragg, 2002, p. 30) and to the gaps in curricular sequencing and outcomes assessment. Other studies criticized business curricular for being "irrelevant and unmotivating to students preparing for careers" (Perin, 2001, p. 303); and thus, questioning the instructional effectiveness in colleges.

Discussion of Key Findings

The key findings of this study encompass the following area: (a) relative importance of basic skills and global competencies; (b) employers' expectations toward necessary knowledge; (c) relevance of business curriculum to economic needs; (d) collaboration of educators and business leaders; (e) quality of teaching of the job-related skills; (f) employer satisfaction with the college graduates' job performance; and (g) importance of various skills for competitiveness in the global economy.

The primary finding of this study indicates that there is a gap between educators' and employers' perspectives of the skills and competencies that business major graduates need to develop in order to be successful in the global market place. Some publications (for example, the SCANS Report, 1991) inform about consensus among educators, business leaders and policy makers regarding the nature and definition of skills needed in the global economy. Other writings, for example works by Gordon (2006), Carnevale and Desrochers (2003), Oblinger and Verville (1998), do not find harmony between educators and business leaders in understanding of the required skills.

Another key finding of this study points toward little alignment between the undergraduate business curriculum and the actual needs of business and industry. Curriculum does not appear to match the needs of the global economy, in employers' view, which was contrary to educators' perceptions. This finding, again, fails to disprove the fundamental assumption made in literature that educators continue teaching various content areas of business, while industry leaders consider the practical application of knowledge to be the driving force in the 21st century (Kutner, Greenberg, & Baer, 2005).

The third significant finding derived from the reviewed literature upholds the need for the faculty members and student affairs professionals to increase their partnerships with the business world. Institutions of higher education are "forced to think along corporate lines now more than ever" (Gordon, 2006, p. 117). Thus, educators may need to re-evaluate their strategies and attune them to the corporate demands and to the needs of their local industries that provide the jobs for the business major graduates.

The fourth key finding of this study is associated with the lack of communication on two different levels: (a) between external stakeholders (educators and business community); and (b) within the higher education system (for example, among the faculty members, student services professionals, career advisors, and academic administrators). One common conclusion drawn from the reviewed literature is a call for a greater level of collaboration between business educators and business community for the benefit of all stakeholders, and particularly students who bring the skills learned in college to a future workplace.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This research identified the necessary skills and uncovered the gap between the educators' and employers' perceptions of these skills; and, thus, provided answers to the research questions formulated for the study. This research also affirmed the importance of the identified basic skills and global competencies for business graduates entering the job market. Furthermore, this study established that in the global economy, the basic skills of English language speaking, reading, and writing, and basic mathematics alone were not sufficient for student success at work. Global competencies, together with proficiency in computers and information technology, were found to be critical for college graduates' success in the business environment and for their competitiveness in the global market place.

Nevertheless, there is still a gap between the skills and competencies that our colleges teach and the job-related skills that employers need. Literature presented little evidence of alignment between the colleges' business curriculum and the actual needs of business and industry. Various inferences can be drawn from this body of literature. First, educators may not be entirely aware about what it means for their business curriculum to be relevant to the needs of a global economy. Second, business educators may not have enough knowledge about what those global economy needs are. Third, educators seem to have a different understanding of epistemology, the theory of knowledge, than the business leaders have. The future studies may shed light on the reasons why educators are committed to teaching various content areas of business, while business leaders consider the practical application of knowledge to be the driving force in the 21st century. As debates about the influence of business on education continue, a synergy of all stakeholders immune to political pressures may increase the value of business programs and student learning outcomes.

Implications for Practice

Findings of this study highlight the literature assertions that businesses are no longer satisfied with the quality of workers that colleges produce today. The business world is quickly adapting to new challenges posed by transition from manufacturing-based and service-based economies to knowledge-based economies. Colleges may consider getting more involved in developing new, practical business curriculum that can improve their business students' achievement of real success. Students will have better chances for success in the modern business environment if their skills and competencies are aligned with those skills demanded by the fast-paced, forward-thinking, and globally-oriented businesses. While business leaders' commitment to education has been of paramount importance over the years, their ability to forecast which skills will be necessary in the future would help greatly in academic planning. By building reliable alliances with the business sector, welcoming their input in business curriculum and by restructuring their business programs to fit the needs of the increasingly global environment, our colleges may add value to degrees they grant.

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SIEC-ISBE: Quo Vadis? Strategy suggestions for the SIEC-ISBE

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Abstract

In order to escape the danger of stagnation, the SIEC-ISBE needs fresh perspectives. A strategy to increase membership numbers will be introduced in this paper, based on a study instigated from the Austrian chapter. After a short introduction of the status quo of the SIEC-ISBE, the paper will focus on the USP (Unqique Selling Proposition) and the benefits of SIEC-ISBE membership. Some selected recommendations (for instance lowering the threshold for attending conferences or increased targeting of students) form the completion of this thesis.

Introduction

Faced with dwindling membership numbers, SIEC-ISBE has to take measures in order to increase its attractiveness for potential new members recruited not only from the domains of schools, colleges and universities, but also from the business world. The following study on future perspectives for the SIEC-ISBE was conducted with a view to the specifics of the Austrian chapter, but many findings can be generalized, as the Austrian situation is by no means unique.

SIEC-ISBE Status Quo

Founded in 1906 in Zürich, the SIEC-ISBE looks back on a long and eventful history (Moore & Anderson & Carlock & Ristau, 2001). Recent developments however have revealed a disquieting trend: Many members, who have contributed a lot to the society, are nearing retirement and gradually withdrawing from active participation. Replacements are hard to find due to a distinct lack of young blood. Fast benefits of memberships are not sufficiently transparent to potential new members.

This problem affects most of the organization's national chapters. In Austria, the situation is particularly problematic, as the Austrian national chapter used to cater mainly to teachers and to recruit its new members from a fairly limited pool of schools. Public relations efforts were minimal and knowledge of the society was therefore limited to the selected few. The current demographic makeup of the Austrian chapter suggests that this state of affairs will not be tenable for the foreseeable future. A reorientation is called for in order to win new members and strengthen existing members' commitment to the objectives of SIEC-ISBE.

This was the challenge faced by Hermine Sperl when she was elected president of the Austrian chapter in May 2008. In order to gain some fresh perspectives she asked the Department of Business Education and Development of the Karl-Franzens-University Graz to provide recommendations for measures to make the Austrian chapter more attractive for potential members. A team of three students (Yvonne Beutl, Martina Rechbauer and Katharina Stöttinger) supervised by Michaela Stock, head of the department of Business Education and Development in Graz, was tasked with the development of a strategical concept for the SIEC-ISBE based on the clarification of target group, unique selling proposition and benefits of membership. Strategic recommendations were derived from a survey of official SIEC-ISBE publications (national and international webpage, newsletters), interviews with ISBE-members about their observations when attending conferences and a survey of other networks fulfilling a similar function as the SIEC-ISBE.

Once those questions of strategic importance had been addressed in the development project, different benefit dimensions of membership were identified and described in more detail by developing a set of criteria measuring their attractiveness. The resulting catalogue of criteria was used as an instrument for a best practice analysis of other networks, fulfilling similar functions as the SIEC-ISBE for potential members. The best practice analysis serves as a basis for recommendations. A selection of these recommendations will be presented at the end of this article.

Further recommendations are available upon request in the form of a strategy paper, which aims at encouraging a lively debate on the future of the SIEC-ISBE on the national and international level.

Project Objectives

The desire to catch fish is not sufficient. You also have to bring a net. (Chinese Wisdom)

Just as fish cannot be caught without a net, a society like the SIEC-ISBE cannot attract members without providing the benefits of networking. Yet, when aiming to increase its network's utility, the SIEC-ISBE is confronted with a basic dilemma: In order to attract more members, a network has to provide more benefits. In order to provide more benefits, more members have to get involved in the network. The network can only provide a framework, but its actual value is generated by the interaction of its members. The goal is to optimize the framework in order to facilitate and inspire such interaction, for instance by creating the right mix of presentations and informal activities in order to encourage subject related discourse as well as socializing while preventing conferences from being perceived as sight-seeing trips first and foremost. This requires a profound reexamination of the society's target group, unique identity and purpose, as a mere increase in promotional activities would only scratch the surface of the dilemma.

Target Group and Unique Selling Proposition

The official target group of the SIEC-ISBE comprises everyone who has a professional interest in Business Education and Development, regardless of whether this interest stems from a professional background in secondary or tertiary business education or business. So far, most activities of ISBE Austria have been directed towards teachers on the secondary level however.

A closer look at the historical roots of the SIEC-ISBE reveals that the society did not start out as an organization primarily for teachers. This is evidenced by the fact that in addition to individuals, also companies, trade unions and other organizations are listed as categories of members in the society’s constitution (Moore & Anderson & Carlock & Ristau, 2001). Founded in 1901, the society was designed to promote the border-crossing exchange of ideas between teachers and those responsible for business education in companies. Considering the long tradition of the SIEC-ISBE, starting at a time, when commercial subjects were not as established in secondary education as they are now, the current focus on teachers is a fairly recent development, which raises the question whether a move back to the roots might have its advantages. This is a question not easily answered as such a move would imply a profound reorientation of the currently rather teacher-centered activities of the society.

Both broad and narrow definitions of a target group have their pros and cons. Whereas a narrow definition allows for a concentration on core competencies, a broader definition generates more synergy effects. Perceived as an independent and integrative discipline with a transdisciplinary character, Business Education and Development is characterized by the interconnectedness of its partial disciplines, integrating economic science and pedagogics in a way that neither implies a mere addition of disciplines nor a hierarchical relationship between them (Aff, 2008). This means that neither business matters nor pedagogical issues can be looked at in isolation in the context of Business Education and Development. As those interdependencies suggest a high potential for synergy effects, a broad definition of the target group promises more benefits. It would be therefore desirable if members of the SIEC-ISBE indeed represented all areas in which Business Education and Development is applied – that is, schools, universities, administration and commercial enterprises, the latter area currently being underrepresented. SIEC-ISBE’s apparent difficulties with regard to finding sponsors from affiliated businesses suggest a lack of appeal to this segment of the target group.

In the context of universities, it might be advantageous to consider students of Business Education and Development separately, as future teachers, academics and business people are never so easily approached in such a high concentration as during the course of their studies. SIEC-ISBE should follow the example of banks, striving to encourage customer loyalty from a young age. Increasing public relations efforts targeted at students would be a fairly straightforward way to spread the word about existence of the SIEC-ISBE among people interested in Business Education and Development. Stories of members who had already been able to look back on years of experience in their profession before encountering the name SIEC-ISBE for the first time should become the exception to the rule. This however requires the consistent implementation of an inclusive approach towards recruitment in contrast to more exclusive approaches favored by predominantly research-oriented networks such as the German DGfE (this is the German organization for research on educational science), where new members have to be vetted by existing members before being allowed to join.

Reinforcing the original broad definition of the target group, SIEC-ISBE's unique selling proposition becomes apparent: it is the multiperspectivity resulting from the different backgrounds of potential members. As multiperspectivity is basically inscribed in the DNA of a discipline mediating between the realms of business and pedagogics, a society dedicated to business education would be wasteful not to exploit this unique characteristic of its subject matter.

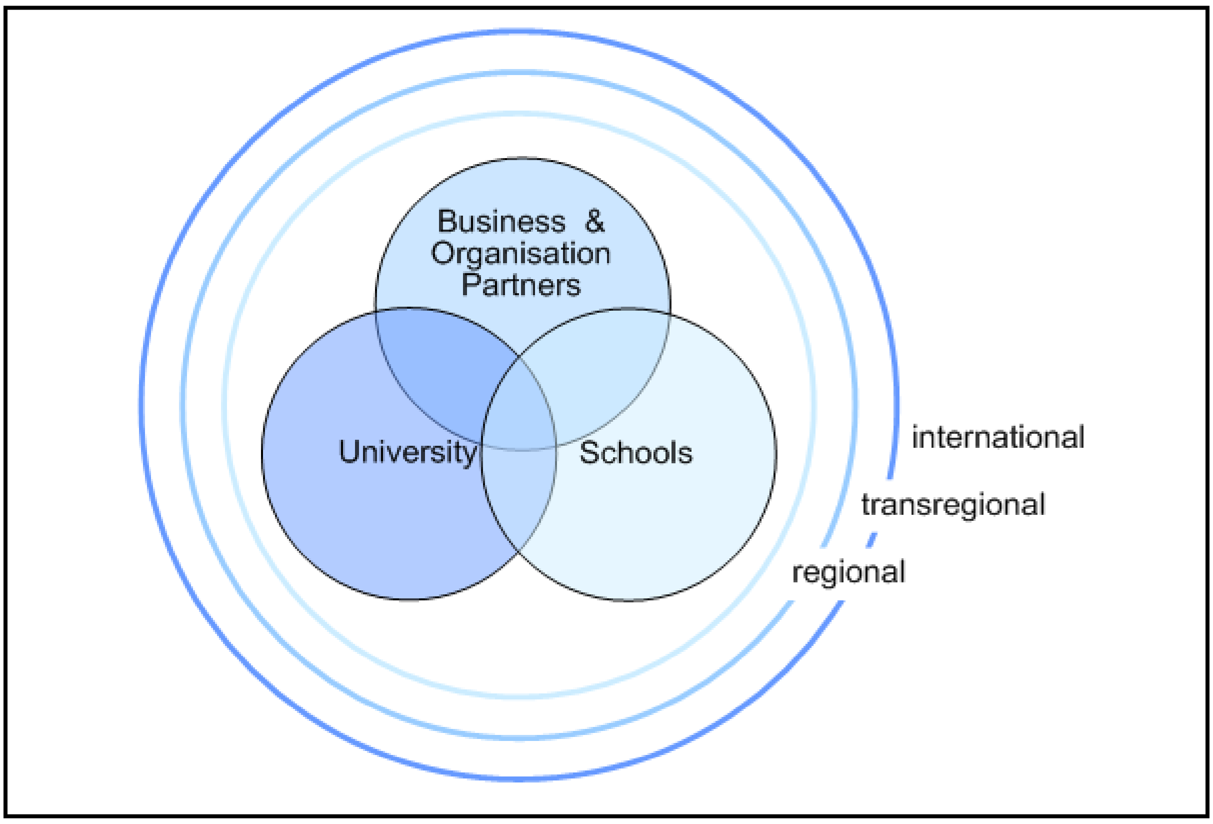

Figure 1. SIEC-ISBE Unique Selling Proposition

The benefits of **multiperspectivity** are bolstered by the society's international dimension. SIEC-ISBE does not only operate at the intersection of various domains of Business Education, but also at the intersection of different nations and cultures. Thus the dialogue of different perspectives becomes the guiding principle of the society. The ability to engage in such a dialogue represents a key qualification that holds intrinsic value, not only for the society as a whole but also for individual members.

Benefit Dimensions

The first thing that usually comes to mind when thinking about the benefits of membership in a society is networking. The next step of the development project was to break down the general benefits of networking into more specific benefit dimensions and find criteria to measure them.

Well-known networks like fraternities or service clubs such as the Rotary Club owe much of their popularity to the positive impact they are said to have on their members' **career perspectives**. In the context of this analysis, career is mainly seen in connection with increased competence and personal growth. Career success in the conventional sense, associated with increased income and higher prestige, is a sensitive issue with regard to business teachers in secondary education as career perspectives are limited. On the one hand, career perspectives are rarely cited as a driving factor when choosing the teaching profession, often ranked after motivations such as *wish to teach, wish to deal with children* or *wish to play an educational role*. This suggests that teachers are predominantly intrinsically motivated (OECD, 2003). On the other hand, EU policies recommend the implementation of better career development for teachers as a way to make the profession more attractive for more career minded individuals. This objective can be accomplished by training and remunerating teachers for taking on middle-management responsibilities with regard to school organization and providing training opportunities connected to higher salaries for teachers who wish to acquire a specialized skill-set but do not want to go into administration (ETUCE, 2005). Career development for teachers is a topic that still leaves a lot to explore and provides a potential field of activities for a teacher-oriented organization such as the SIEC-ISBE, especially since a better interconnectedness of teacher education, induction and professional development is postulated as a key requirement for creating a more coherent learning and development system for teachers (OECD, 2004). The SIEC-ISBE with its multiperspectivity and interface-function is uniquely suited to cater to this particular need.

But while career promotion clearly is an aspect that should not be neglected when targeting teachers, it is unlikely to be the focus of their concerns. It is therefore particularly important to consider benefit dimension that go beyond mere career considerations. Networks like sports clubs and marching bands thrive without providing tangible career benefits after all. Yet members are motivated to devote considerable amounts of time and energy to these pursuits – not so much for the sake of rational self-interest, but for the pleasure of **social interaction** and the reinforcement of a self-image largely shaped by devotion to a shared activity. Commitment to a common goal makes people feel part of a community, which also strengthens their **identity**. Sharing expertise and experience related to a common area of interest increases the fun of engaging with the issue at hand.

Last but not least there is also the opportunity to improve your **intercultural competence** (including language skills) provided by the international dimension of the SIEC-ISBE. This special feature of the society allows members to obtain a key qualification relevant to business teachers, academics and business people alike, gaining more and more importance in a globalized economy, characterized by complex interconnectedness. As business experiences increasingly involve communication with people around the world, the potential for misunderstandings due to different cultural perspectives on issues such as authority, the nature of time or the value of words rises. In order to avoid these pitfalls and ensure successful and satisfying human encounters, the art of cross-cultural communication has to become an integral part of business education (Davis & Ward & Woodland, 2010).

Selected Recommendations

In a next step of the development project, measures were specified to increase the attractiveness of the various benefit dimensions for each target segment. The scope of this article only allows for an exemplary illustration of some of these suggested courses of action. The following suggestions apply to all target segments.

One benefit that should provide a strong incentive for all people involved with Business Education and Development to consider membership in the SIEC-ISBE is active **participation in the public discourse** on educational policies, as it offers them an opportunity to creatively design their own working environment. The SIEC-ISBE could provide an ideal platform for stimulating and moderating the debate on educational issues, while guaranteeing an appropriate **level of discourse** – another criterion highly relevant in this context. Creating a **moderated online forum** to promote debate on educational issues could be one measure to enhance this particular benefit dimension.

While the face-to-face interaction between members during transregional and international conferences is certainly invaluable in fostering the sense of community and social exchange that constitutes the raison d'être of a network such as the SIEC-ISBE, it is also often limited to special occasions, as members' limited financial and temporal resources force them to choose which conference to attend. Measures to enhance the social benefit dimension by increasing the **frequency of interaction** among members include **increased activity on the national and regional levels**, which are more easily reconciled with limited travel budgets and providing a **virtual space for interaction** that is not subject to temporal and spatial constraints.

The SIEC-ISBE webpage could be an instrument to accommodate such a virtual community, but in order to fulfill this function its design would have to be adjusted to the requirements of web 2.0, allowing for a more uncomplicated integration of user-generated content and promoting more interaction among users. Here again, the installation of a moderated forum on educational issues would be beneficial. Other upgrades such as a searchable **user-database with user-profiles** could also significantly increase the utility of SIEC-ISBE's virtual home and open new communication channels.

The most important step however is the switch from the traditional fairly elitist, exclusive membership policy (at least in the European chapters) to a **more inclusive approach**. This switch has already been affected in places, but there is still a certain lack of awareness of the radical change of direction it actually constitutes. One step towards embracing the new inclusive membership policy would be **increased efforts to target students** and include them in the society's activities, for instance by promoting cooperation with international student's associations such as AISEC[1].

Increased inclusiveness could also be achieved by lowering the threshold for attending conferences and giving presentations at conferences (currently you have to be a member in order to get this opportunity; opening the call for papers to non-members

[1] Association Internationale des Etudiants en Sciences Economiques et Commerciales.

might be an attractive incentive for people who are interested in contributing their expertise but on the fence about membership, would enrich the subject related part of the conference program and would also increase public awareness of the society's existence). At the moment, participation in an SIEC-ISBE conference requires significant investment of money and time from members. A conference program with strictly subject-related elements spread over a couple of days interspersed with ample opportunities for socializing doubtlessly has its benefits, but there are also considerable opportunity costs: the organic interweaving of formal and informal networking opportunities also makes the conference more time consuming and expensive. The importance of socializing is not to be underestimated, but there is a certain tradeoff between the intangible but crucial benefits of networking provided by the less formal, less subject related elements of the conference and time and cost-efficiency. Restructuring the conference schedule, for instance by concentrating the subject-related conference elements on the first two or three days and reserving the last two days for socializing, would offer members two modes of participation: a conference extended version and a conference light version at a lower price. This would allow members to consider this particular trade-off for themselves and make their own choices accordingly. This might also make conferences more attractive to members from the domain of tertiary education, as they often operate on a tight schedule.

Conclusion

The main challenge faced by the SIEC-ISBE can be seen in low membership numbers. Certain measures such as the implementation and moderation of an online-forum require a considerable investment of time and energy as well as the assignment of responsibilities among members. Some of the measures suggested are therefore difficult to implement with the available resources – especially when it comes to synergy effects resulting from the integration of various areas of Business Education and Development, as the current membership structure of many national chapters does not yet reflect the desired multiperspectivity required to realize the society's full potential. Those recommendations are therefore intended as a long-term vision.

Measures that can be tackled immediately include upgrading the webpage in order to make it a regular feature in members' online routines (since the start of the project the scope of the content made available by the webpage of the Austrian chapter has been incrementally extended to include information on presentations held at most recent conferences) and increased activity and heightened visibility with regard to the public discourse on educational issues.

To conclude, all future measures to increase the attractiveness of SIEC-ISBE should be aimed at the same goal: to enhance the various benefits gained through the multiperspectivity of the organization – benefits that cannot be provided to the same extent by organizations with a more narrowly defined target group and therefore represent a unique selling proposition. Many of these potential benefits are already inherent in the design of the network, but lie idle at the moment – the prime objective should be bring them to light and let them shine.

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HOW TO BECOME A GOOD BUSINESS TEACHER DEVELOPING COMPETENCES OF PROSPECTIVE BUSINESS EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract

The mission of teacher education is to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour they need to deliver their best performance in the classroom and at school. This paper presents ideas for optimizing teacher education using the example of the master's program of Business Education and Development at the University of Graz, placing a special focus on the acquisition of teacher competences. The biggest milestone in the curriculum is the teaching practice, the success of which strongly depends on good cooperation among students, teachers, schools, university, and school authorities. The second part of this article will be devoted to the introduction of various instruments designed to support the mentoring process during the teaching practice and to guide the development of teacher competences by the student (self-perception) and the mentor (external perception).

Introduction

Principals expect applicants to possess the necessary formal qualification and appreciate practical teaching experience. Yet neither practical experience nor formal qualification can guarantee that a given applicant has actually acquired all the necessary job related competences and appropriate personality traits, which are what principals, are actually looking for. Outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well, they follow current developments within their fields, they can simplify and clarify complex topics to help learners and they think about their own thinking by analyzing its nature and by evaluating its quality (Bain, 2004). Peterssen showed that a holistic ability to take actions results from the intersection of professional, social, methodological and personal competence (2009). Concerning **teacher competences** in business educations this can be structured as follows:

- Professional competence: Firstly, teachers need professional knowledge e.g. in accounting, finance and economics both on a theoretical and practical level. Secondly they must be familiar with business didactics and teaching methodology in order to use effective methods, explain complex contents, optimally support students in learning and assess their performance.
- Social competence: Teachers have to deal with various people. They need to build up a productive relationship with students using communication strategies and problem solving. Furthermore, they often cooperate with other teachers and staff members.
- Methodological competence: Teachers need to adequately apply their knowledge and skills. They have to know how to access new research results and teaching ideas. Leading, mentoring, communication and presentation skills are also required in this profession.
- Personal competence: Being a teacher requires a basic attitude of openness, toughness, innovation and willingness to learn as teachers often have to adapt to new educational issues. (Schelten, 2009).

Independent from these competences teachers must generally have a positive attitude towards young people and display an inclination towards teaching, caring and educating. This is linked to **teacher personality**: Lots of things you can learn, but some things you just have to be (Schelten, 2009). Teacher personality can be defined as the relatively stable traits of a teacher which are significant for performance, success and well-being in the teaching profession. However, changes from learning, training and further development are possible, at least to a certain extent (Helmke, 2009; Mayr & Neuweg, 2006). Numerous empirical studies have been done to describe human personality (e.g. Five Factor Model, McCrae & Costa, 1999). Concerning the teaching profession several research results show that three traits have a significant correlation with personality, performance and well-being of a teacher. These three traits are:

- Extraversion: This is the tendency to be very outgoing, enthusiastic and energetic. People seek and enjoy the company of others. They like to talk and draw attention to themselves.
- Emotional stability: This is characterized by freedom from persistent negative feelings. People tend to be secure and confident. They stay calm under pressure.
- Conscientiousness: Conscientious people are efficient, dutiful, well-organized and show self-discipline. They prefer planned rather than spontaneous behaviour.

The results show that these personality traits are attended by diligence while obtaining the degree, good performances during the teaching practice as well as competent performance and well-being in the teaching job (Urban, 1992; Mayr & Mayrhofer, 1994). As a consequence risk factors are introversion, strong neurotic tendencies and diminished self-control. To transfer these findings to teacher education implies that it is necessary to address not only on the competences but also the personality of students during their degree. Students should be encouraged to experience their own strengths and weaknesses, to reflect their learning processes and to become able to control their own development of teacher competences and personality, of course always supported by lecturers, coaches or mentors.

Teaching practice in the master program Business Education and Development in Graz

The master curriculum Business Education and Development of the University of Graz, Austria, was introduced in 2009/10 (Curriculum Graz, 2009). It was designed to succeed a bachelor degree in business administration, economics or other pertinent qualification. Students pass their oral final master examination and receive the title Master of Science after five semesters, totalling 150 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. Due to the indisputable integration of the teaching practice, the curriculum covers five semesters instead of the four semesters usually required for a master's degree. It is characterized by its marked orientation towards business administration – a tribute to the polyvalent nature of the discipline and its occupational fields.

The teaching practice takes place in the fourth semester and comprises 16 ECTS credits, including an accompanying seminar. Further opportunities for a scientific post-processing of the teaching practice are provided by a seminar on the topic of education management (comprising 3 ECTS credits) and the master thesis (comprising 20 credits). Students can integrate an active experience of their potential future occupational field into their scientific training and test their personal suitability for the profession, thus getting the opportunity to put the theory (knowledge, abilities, skills) acquired in the course of their studies, as well as their attitudes to the test, and draw their own conclusions for the further exploration of this theory from their practical experience.

In accordance with an edict of the Ministry of Education, the teaching practice takes place over 12 weeks at a higher and medium level secondary vocational college (2011). The ministry prescribes the following objectives: Students of Business Education and Development are supposed

- to use their knowledge, abilities and skills with regard to educational science, business didactics, teaching methodology and business administration in real school life situations,
- to ingrain confident and competent behaviour with regard to classroom management,
- to meet the organizational challenges of everyday school life in compliance with legal requirements,
- to independently design and execute competence oriented lesson plans and
- to gain comprehensive insight into various not-directly-teaching-related activities of teachers (Ministry of Education, 2011)

Students should be optimally mentored and prepared for their future occupational field. The re-design of the teaching practice in Graz has led to an increased focus on accompanying reflection and professional orientation; in addition to the mentoring students receive at school, which requires optimal coordination of mentors and university. In order to acquire the competence for reflection, students have to approach their own teaching performance (covering classroom management, education, diagnosis, counselling, assessment, organization and evaluation) in a sustainable and self-aware manner (Kliebisch & Meloefksi, 2006). This has led to the establishment of accompanying self-reflection in Graz, as pedagogical expertise and professional competence cannot be gained without reflection (Arnold, 2005). Based on these objectives, the organization of the teaching practice has been designed as illustrated in Figure 1.

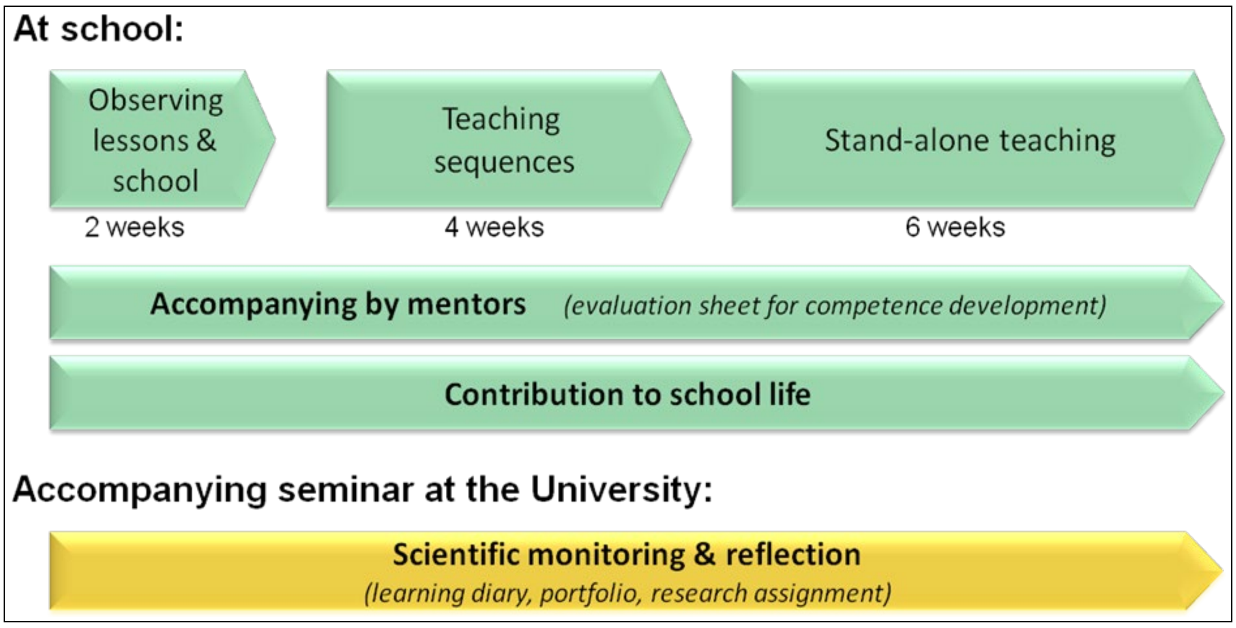

Figure 1. Model of the Teaching Practice

The teaching practice generally covers four subjects: business administration, accounting, business informatics and some subjects concerned with personality training and competence acquisition (such as business training, project management or the practice firm). Students start their 12 week teaching practice with an observational phase, in which they analyze their mentors' lessons and the development of the classroom sociogram. This phase is followed by a training phase, which allows students to develop their classroom management skills and gain confident and competent behaviour by designing and conducting isolated lessons and teaching sequences. The main part of the teaching practice consists of the teaching phase, in which students independently plan their own lessons over a longer period of time, conduct them alone or in the presence of their mentors and assess their own progress. Students are mentored by experienced teachers, who have been required to undergo a three semester training course for future mentors and engage in continuous further training. Weekly mentoring sessions provide students with feedback on their teaching performance (first level) and the opportunity to discuss their ideas for lesson plans and the required background knowledge (second level) with their mentors (Niggli, 2001). On this occasion, the evaluation sheet for competence development is used. In addition to teaching classes, students also get the opportunity to participate in everyday school life in their function as student teachers, for example by cooperating with other colleagues or contributing to school events.

In addition to the teaching practice students also attend the accompanying seminar at the university which takes place in the same semester and is conducted by team teaching involving two members of the department. The seminar provides a framework for scientific mentoring, accompanying reflection and support of students' individual professional orientation. Theoretical models are combined with practical requirements, personal experience is exchanged in workshops dedicated to reflection and problems are discussed. Twice every semester, external experts from school or school-related fields are brought in to discuss topical challenges such as the implementation of quality management systems in schools, the future of the teaching profession, violence among adolescents or the role of teachers with regard to cyber-mobbing and internet security. A round-table involving mentors, university lecturers and students, organized by the university, contributes to closing the theory practice gap and provides quality control and development concerning the teaching practice.

Stakeholder Involvement

An important factor of success of this kind of student teaching is the common strategy and cooperation of all stakeholders involved. When all people involved are integrated, they can follow the same objectives and collaborate closely. This leads to an essential acceptance of and identification with the implemented procedure and its instruments. Figure 2 illustrates the many stakeholders involved in this teaching practice: the university, the individual student, schools with learners and their teachers who act as mentors, the regional school authority and the ministry of education.

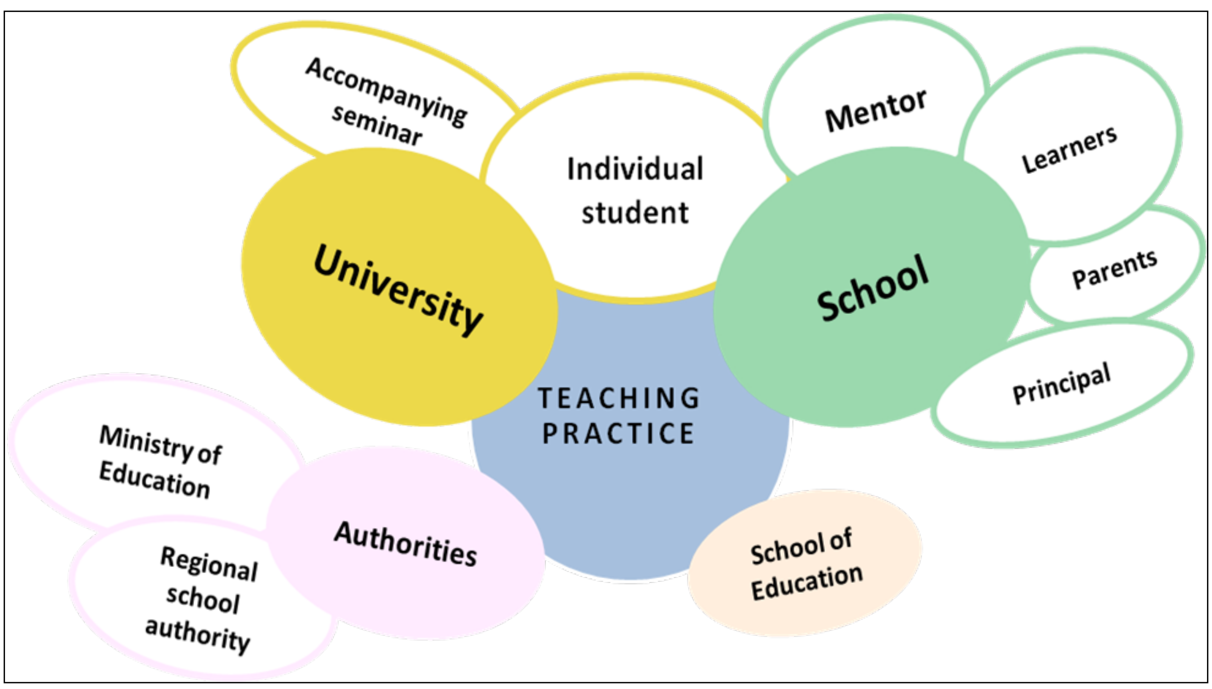

Figure 2. Stakeholders of the Teaching Practice

The **university** offers the master program Business Education and Development with its teaching practice and the accompanying seminar, including several instruments such as evaluation sheet for competence development, learning diary and ePortfolio. It is also responsible for an introductory meeting, the coordination between the individual students and mentors and the evaluation of the teaching practice. The **school** selects the mentors together with the school authority. The mentor provides continuous feedback, offers weekly mentoring sessions, thus providing an opportunity to discuss competence development. The regional **school of education** organizes further education for teachers and the training for mentors. The **authorities** are in charge of rules and administration. The Ministry of Education enacts general regulations for the teaching practice, e.g. procedure, payment of mentor, amount of working hours and weeks. The regional school authority takes care of the selection of schools, the allocation of students to the selected schools and the approval of mentor training. The mentors are nominated by their principals.

The enormous challenge is to coordinate all these stakeholders, especially as their daily needs, wishes and problems are very different. Yet they pursue a common goal, developing good business teachers.

Instruments supporting a competence-based teaching practice

After explaining organization and course of the teaching practice, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to the description of the most important mentoring tools used in the accompanying seminar and the mentoring sessions. Objectives, process, distribution of roles and expected benefits of tools such as the evaluation sheet for competence development, the learning diary and the ePortfolio are introduced. All three tools share the common purpose of promoting students' occupation with their own learning process and performance. In the course of their self-reflection students engage in an interior dialogue, questioning their own learning process and evaluating their learning results. Of course, the teaching practice also involves traditional forms of student assessment such as prognosis (e.g. the grade students receive at the end of teaching practice, providing assessment of learning) and diagnosis (e.g. feedback given by mentors, providing assessment for learning). The three tools introduced above in contrast primarily aim at metacognition – thus providing assessment as learning. This form of student assessment requires learners to become active in the critical evaluation of their own performance and enables them to supervise their own learning processes in a way that allows them to reach their individual learning objectives (Earl, 2003). However, learners should be supported in this endeavour by a targeted promotion of their competence for reflection.

Evaluation sheet for competence development

The aim of this evaluation sheet is to provide a tool for supporting the competence development of students during their teaching practice by enabling a combination of external and internal assessment. It is designed to document and analyze the acquisition and development of students' competences during the teaching practice and provides a comprehensive list of all integral topics and competence areas related to teaching. The wording of the evaluation sheet was chosen to be as general as possible, thus making sure that this tool can be used for all subjects covered by the teaching practice. Its content is organized as follows:

- Teaching activities: lesson observation, preparation, classroom work (characterized by pertinent didactic expertise and learner orientation), assessment
- Contribution to school life: cooperation with colleagues, participation in school wide events

- Teacher personality: behaviour, reflexion as well as willingness to learn and improve

In combination with a concerted indicator handbook, the evaluation sheet for competence development aims to support reflection during mentoring sessions. The procedure stipulates interim and final evaluations. The comparison of self-image (students) and external perception (mentors) has to occur in the middle and at the end of the semester. Deviations of self-image and external perception, progress in the development of competences, strengths and weaknesses are discussed and reflected upon. A standard form is filled in for every student and every subject, documenting self-image and external perception. The document detailing the external perception is handed to the student at the end of the semester in order to support professional orientation. The accompanying seminar provides a follow-up to the experience with the evaluation sheet, thus covering the third level of the mentoring concept to promote the development of the professional personality as described by Niggli (2001). The use of the evaluation sheet in accordance with the stipulated procedure represents a contribution to quality assurance with regard to the mentoring of students.

Learning diary

As mentioned above, students have to attend an accompanying seminar in the semester of the teaching practice. In order to meet the course requirements students also have to keep a learning diary for the purpose of reflecting their learning process and performance by documenting their observations, experiences, thoughts and feelings with regard to the learning and teaching process (Winter, 2008). Several years of experience with using learning diaries and reflection reports in the virtual enterprise at the University of Graz show students encounter great difficulties when required to think about themselves in the context of their surroundings. Verbalizing these thoughts seems to pose a particular challenge (Stock, 2010). As learning diaries have already been successfully used in practical trainings in business as well as educational contexts (Frackmann & Tärre, 2009), this tool has been included in the redesign of the teaching practice in Graz.

The learning diary aims at developing and expanding students' competence for self-reflection, thus systematically increasing their insights with regard to professional orientation. Since summer semester 2011, a learning diary has to be kept continuously over the entire duration of the teaching practice. Students have to post at least six entries (phrased in full sentences, distributed over the entire semester) on the learning platform Moodle, which is protected by personal access data. The organization of content in the learning diary reflects the three stages of the teaching practice – observation, teaching sequences, independent teaching – as well as the structure of the evaluation sheet for competence development. The following topics with examples for pre-formulated sentence beginnings are designed to help students get started with their reflection process:

- Personal learning objectives and expectations (eg. what I want to learn…)
- First impressions at school (eg. my first experiences with group processes in school classes…)

- Individual lesson plans (eg. this is how I am going to activate my learners…)
- Individual teaching methodology (eg. these teaching methods will be used in this manner…)
- Experiences with performance assessment and everyday school life (eg. this is how I will assess performances…)
- Teacher personality (eg. I can / cannot envision myself as a teacher, because…)

Keeping a learning diary is obligatory for students of Business Education and Development. Quality and quantity of the entries however, do not affect their assessment in the accompanying seminar, which is made transparent from the start. Diary entries are anonymous – students cannot access entries of other students. What makes the use of the learning diary in Graz special is the ample and twofold support students receive. An external coach, who is not employed by the department for Business Education and Development but by the Academy for New Media and Knowledge Transfer of the Karl-Franzens-University Graz supports students by giving feedback on their reflection competence, questioning their argumentation or asking additional questions to trigger further reflection. The lecturer responsible for the seminar evaluates the anonymous entries and analyzes the results, the most significant of which are then discussed and reflected upon in the accompanying seminar.

ePortfolio

The master program Business Education and Development is the first curriculum at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz which features the support of students' competence development through the use of ePortfolios over the entire course of studies. By working on their personal competence development portfolios (a mixture of reflection and development portfolio), students are encouraged to become aware of their own learning processes and results, visualize the progress of their acquisition of competence throughout the course of their studies and reflect on their learning progress. Solidly anchored in the curriculum and thus designed for sustainable use, the ePortfolio aims at facilitating the transfer from university to professional life and promotes lifelong learning. For this purpose, three courses have been selected to create time and space for students to work on their portfolios. First, an external coach provided by the Academy for New Media and Knowledge Transfer introduces students to portfolio work. Then students pair up and discuss their individual competence development and finally, they devise their own ePortfolios, keep them up-to-date and expand the data. In this, they are supported by their coach who gives individual feedback and makes suggestions for improvement. Supervised portfolio work is done in three stages, each of which has a different focus. In the first semester, the focus is placed on social and self-competences, followed by professional and methodological competences in the third semester and finally reflexion and holistic competence development in the fifth semester (Stock & Riebenbauer, 2011).

In those designated portfolio sessions, the coach also provides preparation and post-processing with regard to the challenge of bridging the theory-practice-gap during the teaching practice. In the third semester, students are encouraged to clarify their objectives and expectations with regard to the teaching practice and introduced to the use of a learning diary. In the fifth semester, they process the experience gained in their teaching practice, documented in their learning diaries, evaluate their competence development and transfer their results to their personal ePortfolio.

Conclusion

This paper showed how to organize business teacher education using the example of the master's program Business Education and Development at the University of Graz. In order to receive good business teachers, business teacher education has to focus both on teacher competences and teacher personality. The gap between theory and practical school life can be closed by a well-organized teaching practice with accompanying procedures, whereas the reflection on experiences and students' learning is very important for competence development and professional orientation. Several instruments used during the teaching practice were discussed. The evaluation sheet for competence development proved to be a good tool for feedback and reflection both for students and their mentors. Learning diary and ePortfolio also support and guide the student's learning process, competence development and occupational orientation. However, a central factor of success of this student teaching is the shared strategy and cooperation of the stakeholders involved: the individual student, teachers who act as mentors and their schools, the university, the regional school authority and the Ministry of Education. Even if they have different daily needs and problems, they pursue a common goal: developing good business teachers.

Concerning further research in this context, the following two projects can be mentioned as examples: Firstly an evaluation project of the overall master curriculum including an evaluation of the teaching practice in particular will be developed. This study will focus on the objectives, the use of the three instruments and the realization of the teaching practice at several schools including the coordination of all stakeholders involved. Secondly differences and similarities in student teaching will be analyzed by an international comparison among Austrian and German universities.

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ePORTFOLIO-IMPLEMENTATION IN THE MASTER'S PROGRAM OF BUSINESS EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The introduction of the new Master's Program of Business Education and Development in the winter term of 2009/10 also marked the ePortfolio-initiative's kick-off. At the same time the companion research was started to accompany the initiative for a period of at least six terms. This article gives insights into the initial results of the companion research, which has the purpose to examine the ePortfolio-initiative's effectiveness.

Introduction

In the winter term of 2009/10, the Department of Business Education and Development at the University of Graz, Austria, launched a new five semester Master's Program of Business Education and Development. One of the most innovative elements of the new curriculum (not found in any other national program of Business Education and Development) is the structured integration of ePortfolio-work, which is implemented within the entire course of studies. The new ePortfolio-initiative is also anchored in the curriculum, which is available is publically available online. Information on the requirements of successful ePortfolio-work can be retrieved from the online curriculum. Also, they can gather information about the new ePortfolio-initiative on the webpage of der Department.

Due to its competence-oriented nature, a field of study such as Business Education requires students to internalize a philosophy of lifelong learning. Aim of the ePortfolio-initiative is to encourage students to become lifelong learners who are self-aware of their competence development and are able to reflect on their learning behavior. In the spirit of collect – select – reflect – connect, the ePortfolio-work supports the students to make their competence development transparent, reflect on their learning behavior and promote their motivation to engage in sustainable reflective practice. The ability of self-reflection is a basic prerequisite for their professional future as a teacher. Teachers should be able to reflect their own competences to identify opportunities to improve themselves and thus, to ensure the best education for their pupils. Moreover, the Department of Business Education and Development assumed that a structured ePortfolio-work encourages the Master students to act as multipliers to use this instrument independently in their future teaching activities.

In addition to the launch of the ePortfolio-initiative, a companion research was introduced to evaluate the whole initiative. The companion research is developed and conducted by a working group which consists of academic staff of the Department, an ePortfolio-coach and a sociologist to proof the methodology of the companion research. They also developed the evaluation tools which are used in the companion research and are responsible for the examination and interpretation of the results of the companion research.

The companion research's first results show that some students are not always convinced of the ePortfolio-work. In order to increase their conviction, the working group considers additional coaching units in the form of focus groups in future.

Purpose of the Study

The introduction of the new Master's Program of Business Education and Development in the winter term of 2009/10 also marked the ePortfolio-initiative's kick-off. At the same time the companion research was started to accompany the initiative for a period of at least six terms. This article gives insights into the initial results of the companion research, which has the purpose to examine the ePortfolio-initiative's effectiveness. To meet this requirement, the following objectives were established for the companion research:

Objectives

- Evaluation of the implementation process concerning the ePortfolio-initiative.
- Evaluation of sustainability (continuation of ePortfolio-work by students, independent from course work).
- Self-Evaluation of the ePortfolios' effectiveness with regard to
    - students' attitude towards ePortfolios and self-reflection,
    - the function as a multiplier later, and
    - expected benefits for future job applications.

Limitation

Fact is that this research project is not aimed at measuring competences per se but focused on the students' change of the subjective perception of their individual competence development by doing ePortfolio-work. Furthermore, it should be noted that ePortfolios are not used for performance assessment and teachers, therefore, have no access to individual ePortfolios.

Methodology

In a first step a short overview about the term ePortfolio is given, after that the methodology of the ePortfolio-initiative and the companion research is discussed.

Review of Literature

The term ePortfolio generally describes an electronic collection of competences, knowledge and skills (Belgrad, Burke, & Fogarty, 2008). This article uses the definition of ePortfolio by Hornung-Prähauser, Geser, Hilzensauer, & Schaffert (2007) that an ePortfolio is a digital collection of works made with skills by a person, who seeks to document and illustrate the product (=learning outcome) and process (= learning path/growth) of their competence development in a specified period of time for a specified purpose. Further the ePortfolio-initiative is based on the competence model developed by Peterszen (2009) covering four areas of competence: professional competence, social competence, methodological competence, self-competence as well as the intersection of these competences, which is the holistic ability to take action, respectively learning empowerment.

ePortfolio-Initiative

Every student has to do ePortfolio-work at several stages over the course of studies. At each of these stages students will be professionally coached with regard to their ePortfolio-work.

Professional coaching means that an ePortfolio-coaching is implemented in cooperation with the Academy of New Media and Knowledge Transfer (in short: academy). Coaches from the academy conduct ePortfolio-units in specified courses of the Master's Program of Business Education and Development. During the term the academy also supports the students with individual coaching lessons.

The following description of the conduction of the ePortfolio-work in the first term should provide an example for this process:

- Introduction of theoretical and practical aspects of ePortfolio-work.
- Competence development through conversational student pair activities.
- Design of an individual ePortfolio (home assignment).
- Feedback and suggestions for improvement provided by a coach and fellow students.
- Individual coaching and guided reflection.

ePortfolio-work will be done in the first, third and fifth terms. Each stage of the ePortfolio-initiative will establish a different focus. Whereas ePortfolio-work in the first term will be focused on self-perception and the reflection of social competence and self-competence, ePortfolio-work in the third term will mainly be concerned with the reflection of professional and methodological competences. In the fifth term, finally, the reflection of a comprehensive, holistic development of learning empowerment will take center stage.

Companion Research

The companion research is conducted by a working group consisting of academic staff of the Department of Business Education and Development, an ePortfolio-coach and a sociologist. One semester before the ePortfolio-initiative was launched, the working group began with the conceptualization of the companion research. In the first meetings the working group started to discuss the objectives of the companion research. Further, it was decided to choose questionnaires as the evaluation instrument.

Based on the research's objectives to evaluate the implementation process, the sustainability and the effectiveness of the ePortfolio-initiative, appropriate questions for the questionnaires were derived. Upon completion, a pretest with four students was conducted. The result of the pretest was sufficient – the questionnaires worked very well. The questionnaires feature qualitative as well as quantitative items, the latter of which will be measured on Likert-scales. The Likert-scales use numbers from one to five and corresponds to the Austrian school grading system, in which 1 is excellent and five is insufficient. All questionnaires contain recurring elements in order to make the students' subjective competence development transparent.

Each questionnaire uses the following elements:

- Evaluation of structural implementation.
- Evaluation of self-perception and awareness of individual competences.
- Evaluation of sustainability – motivation for sustainable use.

In general, the companion research is designed as a panel survey, in which the same students are measured on the same units over time. This survey method was chosen because of its usefulness for researching a potential change of the development of competences at the individual level. The questionnaires are handed out to the students before they start with their term-specific ePortfolio-work. After filling out the questionnaires, a member of the academic staff collects them again, before the ePortfolio-work is started. This procedure guaranties that the ePortfolio-coach is not involved in the companion research's administration and ensures anonymity. Another advantage of this procedure is that as the questionnaires are hand collected immediately, the questionnaires' return is 100%. However, as some students do not finish the Master's Program, they are not included in the companion research's later stages, which induce the problem of panel mortality. As the companion research is in the beginning phase, it is unclear how severe the panel mortality issue will turn out. The working group further processes the collected data with the statistical software SPSS Version 19. Figure 1 illustrates the design of the companion research.

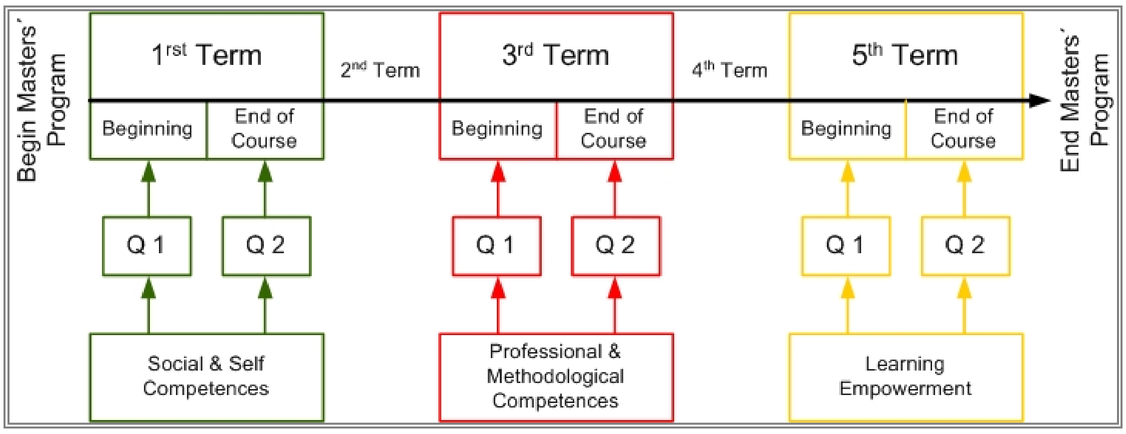

Figure 1: Research design

Surveys are taken at the beginning of the term (Q 1), before the conduction of the ePortfolio-unit, as well as at the end of the term (Q2). For example, the measurement of competence development starts with an analysis of the status quo via questionnaire one (Q1) in the first term. This analysis of the status quo gathers information on students' knowledge of the ePortfolio-method and their awareness of and reflection on their own competences. Questionnaire two (Q2) is designed to measure individual competence development and competence-related self-perception of students at the end of the term. This procedure permits a quantitative comparison of Q1 and Q2. In order to ensure the creation of a suitable framework for ePortfolio-work, there will also be an assessment of the structural and organizational implementation by students.

First Results

This section presents some of the companion research's first results of in the academic years 2009/10 and 2010/11, concerning the evaluation of structural implementation, the student's self-perception of their own competences and their attitude towards future ePortfolio-work. A total of 170 students were surveyed, who already passed the first semester of the new Master's Program in that time.

The following figure 2 presents an overview of the student's satisfaction concerning specific items of the implementation process of the ePortfolio-work. The students were able to rate between 1, which means excellent and 5, which means poor satisfaction. The used scale corresponds to the Austrian school grading system.

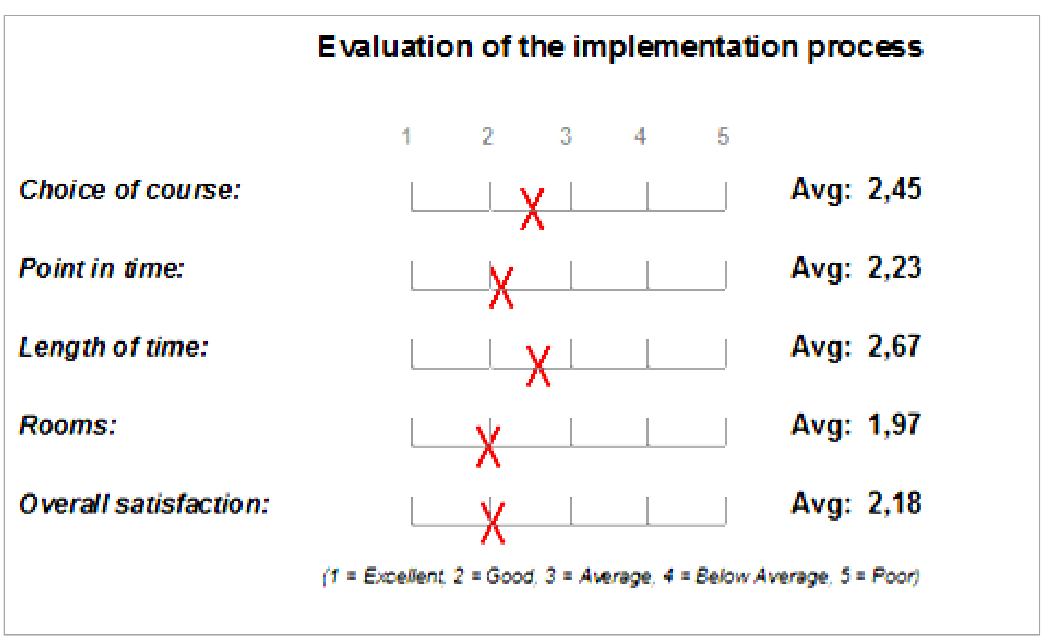

Figure 2: Evaluation of the implementation process

As these results indicate, students (n=170) students are pretty satisfied with the structural implementation (average ratings range from 1.97 to 2.67). This suggests that students were satisfied with the choice of course and the time of the ePortfolio-introduction. Students were least satisfied with the length of time dedicated to ePortfolio-work during class. The assessment of overall satisfaction with the structural implementation of the ePortfolio-initiative yielded a satisfactory average rating of 2.18.

The next part of the survey was concerned with assessing students' self-perception with regard to their individual competences before and after the creation of their own ePortfolio. Figure 3 shows the change of students' self-perception over the course of time.

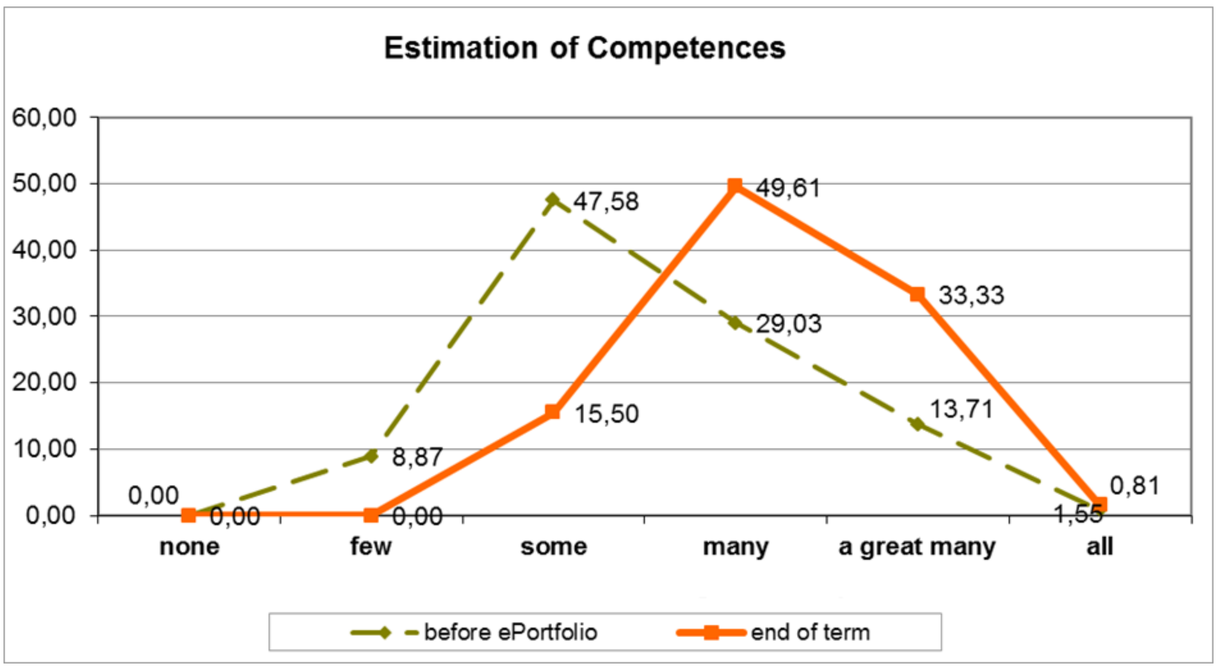

Figure 3: Evaluation of self-perception of individual competences

The dotted line depicts the results before the start of the ePortfolio-initiative, showing that about 55% of the students questioned indicate that they believe themselves to possess only few or some competences. The solid line in contrast reflects the results at the end of the term. A significant shift of the curve to the right can be detected. After ePortfolio-work, approximately 83% of students indicated that they believed themselves to possess a great many or many competences. This shift was also reflected in a highly significant difference of the mean value. At the end of the term students were clearly more aware of their competences than at its start.

Further lines of inquiry went along the lines of potential future use of ePortfolio-work. More than 65% of the students said, that they planned to continue developing their ePortfolio for the purpose of self-reflection with regard to their own learning processes. In addition, 76.9% rated the ePortfolio-initiative in the Masters' Program of Business Education and Development "very beneficial" and "rather beneficial".

Conclusions and Recommendations

The ePortfolio-initiative aims at giving students space for an analysis of their own potential and helps them grasp the importance of autonomous lifelong learning. The integration of ePortfolio-work in the curriculum of the Masters' Program of Business Education and Development represents a first step in the right direction. The experience of the first four terms of ePortfolio-work has shown that external coaching and clear disconnection from performance assessment are essential. It has been also revealed, however, that nudging students towards a sustainable use of ePortfolios will still require considerable efforts.

The goal of promoting a disposition towards lifelong learning, constant development and reflection cannot be limited to selected courses with integrated ePortfolio-work. It is, therefore, vital that students are shown the benefits of ePortfolio-work over the entire course of studies, so that they become intrinsically motivated to continuously engage with their ePortfolios on a voluntary basis. Reflection is a virtue required in almost any realm of learning and development and should not be taken for granted. A disposition towards self-reflection is not a purely innate quality people can be assumed to born with, but something that has to be trained. Many people find it difficult to critically contemplate themselves and their learning processes and relate themselves to their environment. Writing these thoughts down often proves to be a particular challenge. (Earl, 2003)

The companion research revealed that certain student' attitudes towards ePortfolio-work leave room for improvement. A study by Rick Breault (2004) described how frictions concerning the implementation of the ePortfolio-method can negatively affect students' acceptance of the instrument He listed the following problem areas, which applies to the ePortfolio-initiative at the Master's Program of Business Education and Development:

- Conflicting objectives of ePortfolio-work.
- Lack of transparency with regard to the benefits of ePortfolio-work.
- Lack of transparency with regard to the role and integration of ePortfolio-work within the curriculum.

Future research of the department will address these problem areas, investigating whether potential frictions and contradictions concerning the implementation of ePortfolio-work result in diminished acceptance on the student's part. A first measure in this context will be the conduction of focus group interviews to add a qualitative dimension to the quantitative information gathered by questionnaire.

To conclude, coaching efforts with regard to students' self-reflection skills have to be intensified. Furthermore, the process of implementation has to be investigated with regard to potential frictions and contradictions. The following suggestions for improvement can be derived from these observations:

- Clear communication of the objectives and purpose of the integration of ePortfolio-work in the curriculum.
- Systematic integration of ePortfolio-work within the curriculum.
- Demonstration of the benefits of ePortfolio-work for students' lives, instilling a passion for self-discovery.

By eliminating the obstacles that hamper students' motivation for ePortfolio-work, the ePortfolio-initiative can achieve its desired multiplier effects with regard to students' professional future as teachers in schools. Only those young teachers, who possess the capacity of self-reflection, text competence and positive attitudes towards ePortfolio-work, will be able to pass on this instrument to their pupils. Once ePortfolio-work has found its supporters within schools, pupils too will be guided towards self-reflection and lifelong learning.

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