

## 2026 German-American Symposium Presentation Summaries

*University in search of communities: Reflecting on social-spatial learning and engagement from an educational perspective* (Adriana Medina, Anselm Böhmer, Christoph Knoblauch)

Our presentation on the new LUE project (SoLE - Learning and Engagement in Social Spaces) explores how universities can redefine their roles in relation to surrounding communities. From an educational science perspective, we analyze the social and spatial aspects of learning, considering how campus environments, urban settings, and neighborhood initiatives can link universities more closely to community life and foster social responsibility. Using initial examples from the project, as well as community-engaged teaching and research in Charlotte and Ludwigsburg, we examine opportunities and challenges in fostering mutual university-community relationships. The presentation encourages participants to reflect on how to integrate spatial reflection and community involvement into academic life, while avoiding the pitfalls of short-term initiatives or purely instrumental outreach.

*Feedback redefined: Investigating the feedback loop and reflective practice among U.S. and German preservice teachers* (Kirsten Abel, Kate Gilbert, Anja Vocilka)

This presentation shares the intentional redesign of a cross-cultural study on peer feedback and reflective practice among preservice teachers in the United States and Germany. Building on prior research and collegial peer feedback, we developed a methodologically grounded study aligned with parallel teacher education courses in both countries. This design emphasizes structured iterative teaching practice, scaffolded reflection, and peer feedback training to better understand how preservice teachers develop peer feedback and reflective skills. Grounded in research on peer feedback and reflective practice, the study examines three research questions: (1) What are preservice teachers' perceptions of reflection and their ability to give and receive peer feedback? (2) To what extent do attitudes toward reflection and feedback change over the duration of the study? and (3) How do teacher candidates' feedback abilities develop across the study? Participants complete a pre-assessment on attitudes toward feedback and reflection, followed by an initial peer teaching demonstration where they engage in structured peer feedback using designed templates. A targeted feedback training session introduces research-based strategies for effective feedback. Participants then complete a second peer teaching demonstration cycle with new content, again engaging in structured feedback and reflection. A post-assessment measures changes over time. At the time of the symposium, data collection will be in progress. We will share the study design, feedback training intervention, and initial findings from the first demonstration cycle, including initial analysis of participant reflections and feedback quality. We will also discuss anticipated outcomes and how this iterative, feedback-informed design supports preservice teacher development across international contexts.

*Cross cultural perspectives on mental health and help-seeking* (Rumbidzai Mushunje)

Despite the need for mental health services, research shows underutilization of mental health services and disparities in accessing mental health services among African communities (Hollander et al., 2020; WHO, 2018, 2019a). The purpose of this phenomenological study was to illuminate the mental health and help-seeking attitudes of Congolese university students. Guided by theoretical frameworks of acculturation and identity development, participants completed semi-structured interviews that lasted between 60-90 minutes. The findings of this study indicated negative attitudes toward mental health and help-seeking that is reinforced by cultural stigma and a lack of education. These findings are consistent with prior research that note culturally situated stigma where the admission of mental health challenges is known as a "taboo" among African communities (Omenka et al., 2020; Slewa-Younan et al., 2022). Even after learning about mental health in the United States, participants automatically discount themselves from engaging with mental health services because they do not believe in the utility of services given their upbringings where mental health was not normalized, prioritized, accessible, and available. This study is critical in normalizing mental health for African communities, because they experience multiple stressors before migration, during migration and after migration. The findings from this study suggest that African communities can

benefit from more education regarding mental health and leaders within their community can be instrumental in normalizing and promoting mental health help-seeking. The implications for university counseling centers, practicing mental health providers, African university students, and counselor education training programs will be outlined.

*What sustains foreign language teachers in the profession? A cross-national qualitative study of teacher retention* (Kristin Davin, Scott Kissau, Alice Kungu, Jue Wang, Benjamin Ade-Thurrow)

Despite extensive research on teacher retention, foreign language (FL) teachers are rarely examined as a professionally distinct group. FL teachers often occupy an ambiguous status position, teaching a subject frequently treated as peripheral to core academic content, while maintaining unusually strong identification with the languages and cultures they teach. They are also often the only teacher of their language in their building, a form of professional isolation largely absent from the general retention literature. This study examines what sustains experienced FL teachers across four structurally contrasting national contexts: the United States, Germany, China, and Colombia. Twenty teachers per country (N = 80) will be recruited through a matched sampling plan balanced by career stage (mid-career: 5–15 years; veteran: 15+ years). Semi-structured interviews, conducted by pre-service teacher candidates using a shared literature-informed protocol, will probe professional identity, subject-area status, collegial experience, and moments of near-departure across the arc of a career. Teacher candidates will also complete structured pre- and post-interview reflections, generating a second data source on how contact with veteran FL teachers shapes emerging professional commitment. Analysis will use a hybrid deductive-inductive coding approach with within-country analysis followed by cross-national comparison and secondary cuts by career stage and language status. This study makes two contributions: an FL-specific, cross-national account of teacher persistence, and empirical evidence on structured engagement with veteran teachers as a pedagogical mechanism in language teacher preparation. Findings will inform both the retention literature and the design of FL teacher preparation programs.

*Cultivating global scholars: Lessons from a virtual research symposium* (Scott Kissau, Chuang Wang, Anni Lenz, Bianca Roters)

Access to international research collaboration (IRC) is often limited for part-time and racially minoritized doctoral students due to structural barriers such as time, funding, and travel constraints. This study evaluates a virtual research symposium hosted jointly by a U.S. institution and a German partner university to examine its influence on doctoral students' perceived intercultural competence (IC) and research skills. Participants included 31 doctoral student presenters preparing to become future teacher educators from programs that differ in structure and demographics: a highly structured U.S. doctoral program and a German apprenticeship-style model. Using a convergent mixed-methods design, data were collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative results indicated a differential impact of participation. While involvement in the symposium resulted in non-significant changes in perceived intercultural competence, qualitative findings suggested that this outcome may be linked to limited opportunities for sustained asynchronous interaction among participants. In contrast, participation significantly enhanced doctoral students' perceived research skills, particularly their understanding of effective research poster design and presentation practices. Participants reported increased confidence in communicating their research to international audiences and greater familiarity with scholarly presentation conventions. The findings suggest that virtual IRC initiatives can provide accessible opportunities for doctoral students to develop key scholarly skills while reducing barriers to participation. However, to more effectively foster intercultural competence, virtual collaborations should incorporate structured synchronous interactions and intentional opportunities for dialogue and engagement across cultural contexts.

*Expanding the lens: Experiences of leadership transitions in higher education* (Leslie Zenk, Susan Harris-Hümmert)

Higher education institutions are mostly led by professors drawn from within the ranks who are not specifically trained for leadership. Moving into top leadership positions requires a change of perspective, moving away from an individual focus into an outward-oriented approach (Ruben et al, 2017: 86), which is important for academic and administrative effectiveness (Gigliotti & Ruben, 2017: 96). To date little research has explored the experiences

of higher education leadership transitions. This presentation expands on recently published research primarily focused on newly-elected women higher education leaders in Germany and the United States (Harris-Hümmert, S. & Zenk, L. (2025) Women academic leaders in the process of transition: a study of institutional heads in Germany and the USA. *Studies in Higher Education*, November 2025. 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2025.2582567>) and focuses on findings from new preliminary data on recently-elected men in both countries. Findings from this study and expanded data set will be used to continue to refine and test our Model of the New Leader Transition Period (2025). Results of this study are also important for institutional leaders, policy makers, and to those aspiring to positions of leadership in higher education.

*Promoting academic vocabulary development among adolescents at-risk for failure in school* (Chris O'Brien, Rebecca Höhr)

Many adolescents experiencing academic difficulty in U.S. schools struggle with reading comprehension and vocabulary development (Lapp et al., 2005). In fact, one difficulty affects the other. Students who come to school with underdeveloped language skills, often struggle to learn to read. Students who struggle to learn to read have minimal reading habits. They may have minimal exposure to rich language or the language of school disciplines. Students who read below grade level typically benefit from explicit instruction in word meanings to build their capacity to thrive in academic subject areas. Research supports explicit vocabulary instruction as an evidence-based practice for improving adolescent literacy, particularly for struggling readers. The Institute of Education Sciences (IES) practice guide identifies “provide explicit vocabulary instruction” as a core recommendation with a strong level of evidence. This guidance emphasizes directly teaching word meanings (word-specific strategies) and generative strategies for deriving meaning. Effective instruction includes repeated exposure to target Tier 2 and Tier 3 words in meaningful contexts (Beck et al., 2008). The summer institute presentation will offer insight into the nature of explicit instruction in vocabulary spanning methods of semantic mapping, mnemonic strategies, and morphological analysis, while providing an overview of current pilot research in two local school districts using these methods. The focus will be on the implementation of a center-funded adolescent literacy project with a local middle school in which content-area teachers are working collaboratively to develop a bank of critical content vocabulary and aligning the terms with the most effective strategies.

*Exclusion and (be)longing in “post-racial” German schools: Why Atraa refused to teach* (Spencer Salas, Nicanora Wächter, Atraa Al-Hashimi)

In January 2025, half-way into the first round of a three 90-minute interview sequence, Atraa Al-Hashimi, described how at the age of 10, in Leipzig, Germany, a classmate’s mother taught her how to ride a bike. For two short days, Al-Hashimi, an Iraqi child of immigration whose family had fled during the Baathist regime of Sadaam Hussein, approached the feeling of being just “a normal human being” (her words). For a brief moment, it felt like what Atraa wasn’t and what she couldn’t do was something that could be overcome. All she had to do was get on the bike and pedal. However, the feeling of difference that marked Al-Hashimi’s refugee childhood and adolescence was much more complicated. Almost thirty years later, it still haunted her. This article-in-progress is an attempt to hear and receive her rage and to understand the role of schools and schooling in perpetuating economic marginalization and social imaginaries of difference in contemporary “post-racial” societies.

*Assessing teacher stress in Germany and the U.S.A.* (Rich Lambert)

This presentation will offer an update on our study of teacher stress as measured by both self-report survey responses and hair Cortisol samples. To date, data has been collected from 46 American teachers. We are currently planning a second wave of data collection from U.S. teachers who work for the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten program. We are also actively collecting data from middle school science teachers in Germany. We will report on the latest analyses of the hair cortisol data. Our presentation will also report on our analyses of the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey. We have created a map of all public schools in North Carolina and identified “stress hot spot” schools and school districts. Stress hot spot schools were identified based on patterns of teacher responses that show relatively high ratings of classroom demands and relatively low ratings of classroom resources.

Stress hot spot districts were identified as having 50% or more of their schools identified as stress hot spot schools. Stress hot spot schools were shown to have lower student achievement, lower teacher job satisfaction, and lower teacher sense of professional autonomy when compared to schools where teachers reported higher resources levels.

*Geographies of childhood in teacher education: Reflecting on shared journeys and cultivating sustainable bonds* (Anselm Böhmer, Christoph Knoblauch, Erik Byker, and Adriana Medina)

This presentation explores how spatial and social “geographies of childhood” shape teacher education regarding children’s lives. Drawing on a three-year international collaboration, we present results of joint research and discussions on (a) an educational perspective on place and space, with examples from India, Norway, Denmark, the US, and Germany, (b) conceptualizations of culture, diversity, and didactics in urban spaces and communities, with examples from Romania, Canada, the US, and Germany, (c) an interdisciplinary teaching module on Blended Community Education involving all participating countries. In this presentation, we reflect on how places, material surroundings, and power dynamics shape children’s chances to learn, develop a sense of belonging, and participate. We will also look at how to incorporate children’s perspectives, local communities, and international partnerships into teacher education programs.

*Literacy in unlikely places* (Anni Lenz, Brandon Watkins)

In this presentation, we introduce a collaborative course concept that seeks to invite students at different levels in their academic journey to expand their understanding of literacy beyond traditional reading and writing. Grounded in key concepts from linguistics and New Literacy Studies (e.g., Gee, 2015), the aim is to explore how pre-service teachers and doctoral students in education research engage in meaning-making processes, reflect common literacy practices, and impact literacy journeys. Therein, literacy is examined as a social, cultural, and embodied practice, focusing particularly on equity, sustainability, agency, and futures thinking. Through fostering collaboration between different universities and at different academic levels, we seek to gain insight into how diverse regional perspectives and localised *funds of knowledge* (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Esteban-Guitart, 2023) enrich our collective understanding of global literacies. By bridging the gap between institutions, we seek to leverage international collaboration to challenge ethnocentric assumptions and expose students to a plurality of literacy experiences and literacies. This cross-border exchange ensures that literacy is not studied in a vacuum but as a dynamic tool for agency and social change across varied geopolitical landscapes. By connecting undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral students in a shared domain of interest, we move beyond the traditional “sage on the stage” model, allowing for reciprocal mentorship, transnational problem-solving, and embodied learning.

*AI debate bot hallucinations: Now with 50% less nonsense* (Erik Byker, Benjamin Ade-Thurow, Mario Manzocco)

Artificial intelligence (AI) has generated significant interest within higher education, particularly with uses of AI with undergraduate students. While AI offers opportunities for innovation and efficiency, it also raises ethical concerns related to accuracy, intellectual property, and responsible use. In response, university instructors are increasingly integrating AI-focused activities that promote critical engagement rather than passive consumption. Our presentation highlights an ongoing Globally Networked Learning (GNL) partnership between PH Ludwigsburg and UNC Charlotte, centered on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). GNL is an active-learning framework that supports international virtual exchange, project-based collaboration, and the development of intercultural communication and critical thinking skills. During our nine-week GNL course, 56 undergraduate students participated in six webinars to conduct and present comparative and international research. A central innovation of the course was the integration of a custom-designed AI Debate bot. The bot was deliberately programmed to reduce AI hallucinations by using tightly constrained prompts, SDG-specific knowledge boundaries, and structured debate roles that required evidence-based reasoning. It was designed to flag uncertainty, avoid speculative claims, and encourage students to verify outputs with academic sources. Rather than presenting answers as authoritative, the bot framed responses as contestable arguments, prompting student critique and reflection. We describe the bot’s design, implementation, and instructional purpose, emphasizing how intentional AI programming can support responsible AI use and deepen students’ critical understanding of both global issues and emerging technologies.

*Caregiver perspectives on AAC: A cross-cultural scoping review* (Hedda Meadan, Virginia Walker, Erika Kramer, Shura Baigalmaa, Markus Scholz, Annika Endres)

Many children with extensive support needs use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) systems to facilitate their communication. AAC offers essential tools for expressing needs and desires, engaging in social interactions, and fostering language development, which, in turn, support independence, inclusion, and overall quality of life. AAC types range from no-tech (e.g., gestures, signing) to low-tech (e.g., picture boards) to high-tech (e.g., speech-generating devices and apps) systems. Caregivers play a key role in their children's adoption and use of AAC at home; their perspectives on these systems can influence their children's use of AAC in everyday settings and routines, and their attitudes may be shaped by cultural, personal, and systemic factors. The goal of this project is to systematically review empirical research studies conducted in the USA and Europe that examine caregivers' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding their children's AAC. We hope to understand caregivers' lived experiences with their children's AAC and whether perceptions, experiences, and attitudes differ between caregivers in the USA and Europe. We will present the findings from our scoping literature review and discuss implications for research and practice. Additionally, we will describe and reflect on the formation of our international research team, consisting of four faculty members and two doctoral students from the USA and Germany. Developing this collaboration involved negotiating differences in terminology (e.g., race/ethnicity vs. migration background), research traditions, special education law, and service delivery models. Through open dialogue, our team established shared goals, procedures, and aligned methodological approaches, enriching the analysis with cross-cultural perspectives.

*Global docs: Sowing the seeds of our German-American collaborations* (Adriana Medina, Tina Heafner, Minke Jacobi, Kerstin Merz-Atalik, Anselm Böhmer, Christoph Knoblauch)

The German-American Symposium aims to internationalize our profession. Doctoral students are the next generation of the professoriate. Their voices regarding professional opportunities abroad can help shape our programs and their professional trajectories and capture the impact of our long-standing German-American collaboration. There is meager research on American doctoral students' experiences in study abroad programs built around international conferences. This presentation address this gap by conveying the voices of the doctoral students who participated in professional opportunities initiated by collaborative researchers and grants at the PH Ludwigsburg, specifically Project INVITE (International Networking for Virtually Improved Teacher Education) and Geographies of Childhood in Teacher Education (GCTE). Student perspectives on how aspects of their international experiences collectively and individually have permeated their doctoral journeys will be presented by cohorts.

Cohort 1: includes a participant from the 2023 study abroad program - Teaching Cooperation on the Road: Migration Related Opportunities and Challenges in Education - and who took part in the 2023 German-American Symposium and a 2024 INVITE Conference participant (Ludwigsburg).

Cohort 2: includes three participants of the 2023 study abroad program who also attended the 2023 Symposium and the 2024 GCTE Summer School (Ludwigsburg).

Cohort 3: includes four 2025 GCTE Conference participants (Oslo).

Their ethnographic research contributes to the field's knowledge-base. The presentation has direct relevance and benefit to the Symposium audience as many have facilitated and participated in these conferences. These doctoral student perspectives demonstrate the value of our long-standing international partnership for developing emerging global scholars and enriching global teacher education.

*Relationships between pre-service teachers' perceived competencies, affective dispositions, and readiness to integrate artificial intelligence in classroom practice* (Ayesha Sadaf, Daniel Maxwell, Heiko Holz, Can Küplüce)

Artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly reshaping educational practice, yet pre-service teachers (PSTs) often enter the profession underprepared to integrate AI meaningfully and ethically. This exploratory study investigates PSTs' readiness to use AI in their future classrooms by examining the relationships among their perceived AI-related competencies, affective dispositions, and intentions to adopt AI. This research is grounded in the Intelligent-TPACK framework, which extends the traditional TPACK model by incorporating ethical dimensions such as fairness,

accountability, and transparency. The study provides a comprehensive lens for understanding AI integration in teacher education. Survey data were collected from 80 PSTs using validated instruments measuring AI-related technological, pedagogical, content, and ethical competencies, as well as affective factors including interest, attitudes, self-efficacy, and intentions to use AI. Descriptive, correlational, and regression analyses revealed that PSTs reported low-to-moderate AI competencies overall, with particular weaknesses in technological and ethical knowledge. While participants expressed moderate interest and generally positive attitudes toward AI, their self-efficacy and intention to use AI were comparatively low. Findings indicate strong positive relationships between perceived AI competencies and affective dispositions, especially self-efficacy and attitudes. Positive attitudes emerged as the strongest predictor of intention to use AI, underscoring the critical role of affect in shaping readiness. Teacher education program preparedness was found to influence AI readiness indirectly through its impact on both competencies and affective factors. The study highlights the need for teacher education programs to move beyond awareness toward hands-on, ethically grounded AI training that builds both competence and confidence among future teachers.

*The periodic table of emotions: Fostering human-first classrooms (Ian Binns)*

I will show how a daily emotional check-in at the beginning of class creates a brave space where individuals can engage in deeper discussions and embrace the ability to have challenging conversations. Attendees will complete a check-in at the beginning of the session, see examples of challenging conversations I've had in my classroom community, and reflect on how the check-in made them feel. Focus groups with former students revealed how the classroom atmosphere allowed for honest self-reflection. They described increased motivation, focus, and a more positive attitude toward both content and collaboration. Others have said that the shared experience of check-ins helped them feel connected, empowered, and recognized, with some saying "I'm not alone." It's important for our students to feel what it's like to be in a community where we can recognize and celebrate our differences while continuing to work together. A space where people feel encouraged to share, confront biases, and engage in constructive dialogue. Where they can take risks, make mistakes, and learn from each other.

*From symposium to edited book: Global education collaborations panel discussion (Erik Byker, Adriana Medina, Benjamin Ade-Thurow, Christoph Knoblauch, Anselm Böhmer)*

This proposed panel features contributors to Global Education Collaborations, co-edited by Erik Byker and Adriana Medina, and highlights how the volume foregrounds internationalization through sustained, reciprocal partnerships. The panel brings together chapter authors who are also collaborators in the German-American Symposium, including Benjamin Ade-Thurow, Christoph Knoblauch, and Anselm Böhmer whose work exemplifies transnational cooperation in research, teaching, and professional learning. Panelists will discuss their individual chapters while situating them within the broader aims of the book: to advance global education through meaningful collaborations that bridge national, institutional, and cultural contexts. Drawing on case studies, programmatic initiatives, and collaborative research presented in their chapters, contributors will examine how the partnerships in our German-American Symposium help to foster global competence, comparative perspectives, and innovative pedagogies. The discussion will emphasize how long-standing relationships among symposium collaborators have shaped the design, implementation, and outcomes of the featured projects, demonstrating the power of trust-building and shared purpose in international education. By connecting chapter-level insights to the collective vision of Global Education Collaborations, the panel highlights the book's central premise: internationalization is most impactful when grounded in equitable partnerships and sustained dialogue. This session will be of interest to scholars, practitioners, and policymakers seeking concrete models for building and sustaining global education collaborations across borders.