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**Learning Social Competences Online?
Methods of E-Learning - Seminars in Culturally Heterogeneous Learning
Groups – Recommendations for Lecturers**

The following is based on experiences gained in the process of carrying out two pilot courses by means of e-learning elements. The contents of the courses was designed to unfold the specific and varying needs and approaches in counselling and guidance for people with a migration background. The practical experience gained during the two courses is supplemented by theoretical experience on e-learning methods.

1. Short Presentation of the Project „Mainstreaming Vocational Guidance for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants“

Newly immigrated refugees and migrants in Germany just as in any other European country have to overcome various hurdles in order to gain access to education and vocational training as well as job markets.

Counsellors and multipliers do not always know enough about the rights and entitlements of the target group, or the difficulties with which they are usually confronted. Similarly, awareness as to which information is required or what additional tools are needed in order to provide comprehensive assistance is often missing. Yet, competent counselling and guidance for refugees and migrants requires specific knowledge about the rights and entitlements of the target group.

Against this background, the project „Mainstreaming Vocational Guidance for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants“ was developed, with seven European countries participating and funded by EU's Leonardo da Vinci programme.

Within the frame of the European project, which was carried out from October 2003 to September 2006 two products developed:

1. A Web-site dealing with the complex subject of migration offers an extensive amount of information relating to this topic. It facilitates the search for specific information and familiarizes with examples of good practice aiming at the improvement of the standard of guidance especially in view of vocational training and further education.
2. An online course providing guidance workers and multipliers with a possibility of investigating specific and different needs and approaches in the guidance and care of people with a migration background. The concept of this online course was tested in a pilot project phase by the participating European countries.

The ensuing text illustrates the experience gained in Germany during the online course. The natural heterogeneity of the students with their differing cultural backgrounds meant that transporting intercultural competence was not only a cognitive aim but had to be constantly born in mind by the teachers in their methods of planning and realization. E-learning as a special form of teaching and learning was considered an additional challenge.

2. Outline of the Concept of the Online Course

During the duration of the project 2 work and study courses were carried out, each with a duration of six months. The courses were divided into 3 learning units:

1. Reflection of one's own standard of knowledge and the specific improvement of theoretical basic skills.
2. Reflection of one's own culture and sensibility for an intercultural counselling competence.
3. Reflection of the structures of one's own organization and the development of a vision for an intercultural opening of this organization.

All the necessary information for the processing of the learning units was made available to students via the project web-page. Each learning unit ended with an evaluation in writing of about three to five pages which was sent to the tutors by e-mail.

In order to get more precise information regarding the appropriate use of e-learning elements both courses implemented a varied amount of e-learning:

Course1	Course2
Start with a presence meeting.	Start with a presence meeting
Presence meeting for an introduction to Module 1	Moderated Chat to introduce Module 1
Moderated Chat dealing with questions/problems from Module1	Moderated Chat dealing with questions/problems from Module1
Send online a Feedback-Questionnaire on Module1	Send online a Feedback-Questionnaire on Module1
Presence meeting for an introduction to Module 2	Moderated Chat to introduce Module 2
Moderated Chat dealing with questions / problem from Module 2	Moderated Chat dealing with questions/problems from Module 2
Send online a Feedback-Questionnaire on Module 2	Send online a Feedback-Questionnaire on Module 2
Presence meeting for an Introduction to Module 3	Moderated Chat to introduce Module 3
Moderated Chat dealing with questions /problems from Module 3	Moderated Chat dealing with questions/problems from Module 3
Send online a Feedback-Questionnaire on Module 3	Send online a Feedback- Questionnaire on Module 3
End of the course- presence meeting	End of the course- presence meeting

3. Challenges of Online-Learning for Lecturers in Transporting Social Skills

When the e-learning method had overcome its teething troubles and its young tempestuousness it was able to claim as regards didactics its right alongside other teaching methods to be a supplementary methodological system.

Besides, it was evident that Internet or CD-Rom are excellently suited as medium for the teaching of the so called „hard facts” - be it to enable access to special internet sites to make available the latest information on the ever-changing contents (for example of legal texts) or be it an educational software, whereby with the help of images and language information one can learn, for example, a new language or an IT programme.

However, if it is a question of gaining skills in the region of interpersonal behaviour, this form of learning, definitely, has its limitations. Just as by using a textbook, an online course or a CD-Rom can teach the theoretical basics of, for example, a counselling model; however, in order to train the knowledge gained and bring it into juxtaposition with personal behaviour a presence situation is needed. In the form of role plays the competences learned can be tried out and improved in a protected surrounding. A competent partner is available for an instant and individual feedback and a training success can be directly felt which gives the necessary assurance to use the newly learned competence in a day-to-day (job) situation.

Nevertheless, in this sector there are also some positive developments on the e-learning market. People who are qualifying in the medical field can learn with the help of a video sequence how to recognize clearly the different consequences of a tracheotomy without harming a living patient. Another e-learning producer worked out different virtual conversation simulations in which people of differing cultures took part. The simulation is constructed in such a way, that it can reproduce different stages of the conversation, depending on how each of the two dialogue partners reacts.

It is most definitely possible in this manner to experience the effects of a surgery or a verbal exchange. However, when acquiring social skills, the step should be made to actively try out these newly learnt skills, so that the required confidence for changing behaviour patterns can be built up. Both online courses of the European project show that this form of practice transfer is not only a meaningful didactic supplement, but reflects frequently the need of the course participants. Course participants articulated clearly their need to exchange thoughts on the contents of the modules with other students: about their own understanding of culture¹ and their (up to this point) structure of counselling talks (module 2) as well as the possibilities to initiate changes in their own organizations (module 3).

It became apparent that course participants with a migration background face different challenges in their counselling situation to those colleagues who do not have a migration background. The latter found themselves rather in a situation whereby due to their belonging to a majority society they were attributed with a totally differently defined power level, which in turn was apt to lead to mistrust.

The „dynamic terminology culture” derives from a processional and dynamic development of culture: It is created by members of a group, yet at the same time it forms those group members culturally. In this non-static conception of culture the individual has his or her place in the corresponding group. Their identity, however, is not only limited to the group: Belonging to several groups allows room for change and makes culture into something which can be learnt and experienced and which is not limited to certain groups only.

The difference between groups and the individual can be explained with this model without culture being blamed as the only source responsible for the difference. Several different cultural memberships exist alongside one another and the individual can decide which one she/he belongs to. So, besides being a member of a certain nation or ethnic group (membership is often reduced to this only) gender, education, family background and many more components decide the cultural belonging of a human being.

Fager, 2006: Interkulturelle Kompetenz – ein Muss in der Beratungsarbeit

Comp. also: Tuschinsky: Interkulturelle Kompetenz – Ressourcenorientierte Kommunikation in der Sozialberatung.

The former saw themselves more confronted with the problem of having to come to terms with the challenge of the fine line between solidarity with those looking for help on the one hand and un-reflected partiality on the other in reply to the greater expectations with which they were approached. Lecturers, thus, had to pay particular attention to this point and to adapt theoretical counselling models to suit the individual situation.

When comparing the two online courses, it was obvious that the more frequent presence meetings of the first course created definitely a considerably better learning situation. This response was also noticeable in the written feedback of the course participants.

*„... It is actually difficult to self- analyse one’s own action on the PC.
A workshop on this topic would be helpful. A chat in my opinion is also
not suitable”²*

*„I often missed the discussion and feedback from the group. On the other
hand it was good to follow my own thoughts.”*

For others again, the anonymous possibility of reflection was an advantage.

*„The very personal reflection of my own culture would only have been
possible for me in a group that I had trusted. In this form self-reflection
was easier for me, although a real partner who asked questions, would
have forced me to be more selective, or would have made me aware of
blind spots.“*

The following extract taken from a chat which took place during the online course shows once again very clearly that in a virtual situation intercultural competence is dealt with in a much shorter form than in a personal meeting.

<i>Lecturer</i>	<i>„Do you have possibilities to work if you only have a limited permission to stay?“</i>
<i>Participant 1</i>	<i>„With no secured status, no work“</i>
<i>Participant2</i>	<i>„Yes but only 2-4 hours a day or so“</i>
<i>Participant 1</i>	<i>„Yes, but only a little “</i>
<i>Participant 3</i>	<i>„Yes, on the black economy“</i>
<i>Participant2</i>	<i>„No, legal “</i>
<i>Participant1</i>	<i>„ Black Economy is a discriminatory term!“</i>

3.1. How to recognize and deal with emotions in a virtual learning process.

Learning has a social basis which arises solely from the fact that learners are social beings. In addition to this, networking is the essence of intelligence, be it in the brain, in the training room or at work. The more people network their knowledge with one another, the cleverer the individual becomes. And learning has always got something to do with emotions.

Thus, only in an emotionally pleasant atmosphere, free from fear, others can partake of one’s knowledge. (Meier 2004)

Eye to eye contact or an encouraging smile give lecturers in presence training the possibility to establish a personal relationship and to encourage the individual to take part in what is happening. Just as an understanding nick of the head or an irritated facial expression from the students gives the lecturer a direct feedback as to how much information is being understood. These and other social factors of a learning scenario are important requisitions in order to support learning.

²All inserted quotations written in italics are taken from unpublished manuscripts which were written either as informal statements in emails by course participants, or from the evaluation of the formal feedback papers of the pilot course.

How is it possible to uphold such an atmosphere in a further education unit which is not only concerned with presence training, but also takes place mainly in phases of online learning?

E-Trainers are dependant on reading personal and emotional information so to speak „between the lines“ of the neutral e-mail responses in order to be able to react adequately, whereby it must be kept in mind that a feedback in writing on one's own learning progress is new and strange for most students.

In order to face this challenge one must know exactly which emotions can arise in the (virtual) learning process. Very often, at the beginning, there is a feeling of curiosity and of hope that one can fill the gaps in one's own knowledge. Or, perhaps a feeling of insecurity or inadequacy can motivate somebody to learn something new. During the phase of gaining new information, there are moments of recognition which arouse joy, or moments which arouse fear or frustration. If the learning process is continued in spite of strong negative emotions, there is a feeling of satisfaction after finishing the course, of having achieved something, having gained new information, as well as having learnt to react to certain situations in a different way. (Meier 2004)

The process of having successfully achieved the change from “not knowing” to “knowing” gives one confidence and the ability to react with less stress to further changes. Support and guidance given by lecturers play a very important part. Thus, the most important emotions which arise in learning and how they can be dealt with will be discussed in the following text.

Joy

A feeling of joy, which is important for motivation, arises especially when somebody not only achieves the goal, but achieves it better than expected. As learning processes are very rarely marked exclusively by joy or happiness, it is very important for the lecturer to further this emotion and give it an area where it can be expressed. Students' achievements should be acknowledged and a concrete response to their learning achievements in the form of a differentiated feedback should be given. Also, when a person repeatedly excels through exceptional performance, this is not self-evident and should also be acknowledged in the same way.

If this feedback is not immediately possible, as it is during presence training, there are other possibilities open to lecturers. The most effective is the personally addressed e-mail, for example as a response to the sending of a written paper. The very fact, that the lecturer takes time to write a few lines is a clear indication of his or her appraisal. The e-mail should express recognition and it should go into details over certain aspects of the paper. Tips and suggestions on how to improve the text are also examples of encouragement. This form of communication has the advantage of being very personal and course participants can accept it without worrying about what other members of the group think.

Contributions to a virtual forum should be acknowledged by a commentary as well. This should be written in an appreciative and factual, but less personal way. To begin with, it shows clearly that the texts/ contributions of the participants have been read and secondly, it motivates others to make a contribution.

Within the online courses, especially personally addressed e-mails were used to motivate and to give feedbacks. Following these feedbacks, many participants had more confidence in their own abilities and could evaluate themselves and their degree of professionalism more effectively. It was very important for the lecturers to practice this sort of recognition which in Germany is traditionally not very highly valued.

„Thank you for your reply. I find your commentaries very helpful and I feel encouraged to continue my studies in this direction.“

Fear

Especially, when it is a question of showing our knowledge many people remain silent because they are afraid of saying something wrong or of making mistakes. E-learning experience shows that this fear often is even more present in this form of learning because most statements must be expressed in writing. No one wants their written or perceptual mistakes permanently in the forum for all to see. The demand on written expression increases enormously. (Busch/Mayer 2002)

Here it is important that lecturers create an atmosphere where mistakes are permitted. If this is not possible in a presence meeting, then another possibility is a corresponding input in the forum, where clear rules are laid down for a respectful reciprocal behaviour. By way of consequence, inputs from course participants who do not adhere to the rules must be sanctioned at once, either through an adequate written reaction from the lecturer or through erasing the input. Professional inputs, put by lecturers in the forum should be correct in as far as the technical information is concerned, but should not be too perfectly written, so that less pressure is conveyed in this way. (Busch/Mayer 2002)

An encouraging and supportive personal e-mail is very helpful here too. For instance, one can offer to read and correct someone's text before it's put into the Forum.

For many students in a heterogeneous learning group the language of communication is not their mother tongue. Lecturers should remember that, once again, this fact can cause for some students an increase in the above mentioned fears. If the lecturer is qualified enough, it is helpful to allow papers to be written not only in the German language but also in additional languages.

The latter mentioned offer was enormously helpful for two online course participants, as otherwise both students would have spent more time at the end of each module, writing up the texts in German language. The fact that the lecturers in this case were not using their mother tongue was an additional help to overcome barriers. It was also noticeable that whenever a course participant had enough courage to place a professionally very informative input in the forum without the text being grammatically perfect, others were more easily motivated to dare to do the same.

Personal feedbacks to written papers, sent by e-mail by the lecturers at the end of each learning unit, were of great importance to the students, because they felt that their work had been appreciated and at the same time they received helpful information. This played a part in reducing the aspiration towards perfection.

„Thank you for your response. You have given me suggestions which were in line with my individual situation and standard“.

„That was very helpful. I had understood it more or less and now I have more confidence and can go on“.

„In spite of having the feeling once again, that it is not quite finished, I'll just simply send my text off!“

Frustration

People who have to come to terms with new subjects or new learning forms are very often confronted by many differing frustrating experiences. One doesn't understand a technical article, one cannot formulate as well as one wants to, the newly gained information is not applicable to everyday situations or one meets with resistance from others. When it comes to virtual learning the technology does not always function perfectly. In spite of the advantage of e-learning being flexible as far as time is concerned, this method still withholds the challenge of self-responsibility and self-organization for the planning and carrying out of one's study time. According to our experience this does not always succeed.

When guiding students over virtual distances, it is all the more important to uphold good personal contact so that at an early stage the first signs of problems can be registered. When

the teacher first becomes aware of frustration after the student sends an e-mail telling her or him that she or he wants to break up the course, it is often too late. Thus, a readiness to support and help the student can not be signalled early enough. For a participant to point out at a presence meeting difficulties encountered and expecting to be offered a solution or to learn immediately that others are facing the same problem is relatively uncomplicated. But to take a problem seriously enough to take time to write an e-mail to the lecturer, without knowing when she or he will give an answer is for most people less easy.

Another possible reason for frustration and despair can be the problem of having to analyse professional texts in an additional language. For many people, professional articles are more difficult to understand because apart from the unfamiliar grammar and choice of words, culturally formed sub-texts are transported. Expressing thoughts is for some people difficult enough and the barrier to write an e-mail in an additional language might be even higher. Considering this fact, the use of e-learning programmes can be advantageous in reducing the amount of written language. Thus, the possibility of preparing subject matter with the use of multimedia on the PC, allows for a greater use of video clips and didactically relevant illustrations or video sequences, than can be realized in a book. Additionally, illustrations can also motivate students to make more of an effort to acquire information on course subjects. The attention of the student is focussed, contexts are built up, previous knowledge is activated and the interpretation of information is made easier. Images are ideal for the visual backup of a simple content. The use of diagrams by way of contrast can be recommended for the understanding of abstract, non dimensional features.

The online course participants were particularly delighted in the beginning at the thought that they could organize their time for themselves because this meant that they were able to fit their learning in with their work schedules. As the course progressed, however, many of the students reported how difficult it was to have enough self-discipline to do their studying and of how often they finished their written papers under pressure of time. In this case it was very helpful to have set an early closing date. If the course participants could not keep the deadline, there was still enough time for the lecturer to access adequately those papers which had been sent in late. Finally, the difficulty of finding time for one's own further education was intrinsically linked with high professional demands and a feeling of frustration in being torn between the various tasks which had to be done.

„Many thanks for your answer. It helped me out of a depression. My discontentment with the work is based on my own high expectations. I want to do so much, but thanks to the economic situation of the company, can't do it. [...] Your lines have given me courage. Once again, many thanks!”

„Many thanks for your mail. You are right that I am very stressed at the moment and scarcely have time to occupy myself with anything other than work. I cannot and will not put up with this stress any longer and I am going to apply for other positions. The course has given me courage to do this!”

„Once again, hearty thanks to you both for the very good and intensive guidance of the (because of its online form) not always easy course. Without your support and motivation, I most probably wouldn't have finished it!”

It was shown also that when it is a question of technology, continual guidance is necessary. Especially in trying to gain access to forum or chat, telephone help was gratefully made use of as technological problems are very difficult to solve in written form.

„Many thanks for the information. I could make good use of them! I can chat already but have certain difficulties when entering forum sessions. On Thursday I'll be meeting... and we will be going online. We will most certainly telephone you. I feel that you look after me well”.

Isolation

As already mentioned, students are in themselves social beings and therefore have a more or less strong need for social contact and exchange. As online-learning is characterized by so-called single learning phases a feeling of being left alone with the learning material can quickly arise. There is a feeling that the lecturers are not present, although they simply cannot be seen. It is tremendously important for lecturers to be highly committed and to repeatedly tell students that they are available for them should questions occur. Part of this arrangement is an agreement on a time-frame in which e-mails should be replied to and this time frame must really be adhered to. If a particular question requires a longer period of research, then at least a short contact mail indicating that the question was and is being taken seriously must be sent.

Isolation can likewise emanate as regards to one's course participants. This can be counteracted by the lecturer in that she or he organizes an exchange of Data-Information, so that students can contact one another independent of course times or fixed chats. Apart from this, a chat can be organized in which students not only meet one another during the officially arranged times, but also can have an additional informal exchange. Professional questions can be explained and examined in detail in a forum.

If unfamiliar with researching in the internet, in activating various links one often loses one's orientation and can no longer return to the original site. This also leads to a feeling of being lost. By giving students an online course as an introduction to the use of search in the internet, this problem can be overcome.

As the contact in e-learning is basically realized via a written exchange (chat, forum, e-mail), the consequences are necessarily the same as mentioned previously. Furthermore, one can assume that people who have little social contact elsewhere more easily suffer from a feeling of isolation. The ability to make social contact and to create for oneself a network is much more a question of the individual personality than the cultural background.

Due to the fact that the participants of the second course had only two instead of five presence meetings, forum and chat were given a greater importance, namely that of preventing the feeling of isolation.

„It was a pity that not all of our inputs were put into the forum. I know that it was optional, but I would have liked to have read them. They were personally and professionally very enriching. For me, they helped to replace personal contact”.

„We could have more actively used chat dates, but it is not so easy to exchange information with so many at the same time. I would have liked to have had more contact, information and an exchange of experience with other course participants.”

In addition, there was a need to express personal emotions which were connected with the work in a verbal or rather written form. Particularly in such situations the lecturer needed to have a high degree of empathy, as the working situation of the course participants is generally marked more by the absorbing and supporting of needs and fears of those seeking advice and less by the possibility of being able to share one's own emotions and stress with others.

„I am deeply shocked and horrified by all the information and texts dealing with the treatment of migrants and refugees. I hope that I can

still learn a lot in this course and that I will have the opportunity of putting my knowledge into practice, such as being able to help with the questions and problems of those concerned “

3.2. Possibilities and Limits of the Creation of Social Contact with the help of the electronic communication media

A basic difference between the traditional presence-training and trainings with e-learning elements is the changed form of communication. Technical means of communication such as chat, forum and e-mail must be used in order to communicate with other course participants or lecturers. This is a hurdle especially for people who do not have a working knowledge of the computer and internet. It is the job of the lecturer to offer here a special kind of support. When the media are not being used because of the fear of making mistakes, a feeling of isolation inevitably arises: it is not possible to exchange ideas in chat or forum, thus missing important information and there is the feeling of being excluded from group events. It has already been elaborated elsewhere in the text that for some there is a technical as well as a language challenge.

Support regarding the formation of contributions to the forum has been mentioned under the rubric of ideas on how to prevent students having fear or feelings of isolation.

Exchange in chat is also based on written language. Discussion points which are verbally expressed in a presence meeting have to be expressed here in writing, which in turn demands much more time, particularly for course participants who speak German as an additional language. Furthermore, for many this is an additional stressful aspect, because one can speak faster than one can write. Hastily written exchange also tends to more tolerance as regards to formulation and grammar. This distinct characteristic of chatting means less inhibition on the whole.

A strong structuring function is demanded of the lecturer to see that the course participants, if possible, are disciplined enough to keep to the point and do not argue associatively, in that they move from thought to thought and rapidly lose sight of their premise. One structuring element is that all those taking part in the chat clearly state which question or opinion they are referring to and name the person meant.

To prevent discussions in virtual space from petering out, the lecturer should acknowledge contributions early enough, give a positive feedback and introduce a new topic.

Besides structuring the discussion, the lecturer is also responsible to pointedly include persons who are so-called “silent participants” in the discussion. Such persons, for example, tend to a „me too“ position so that when asked for their opinion they agree with the previous speaker. Here is a need for more concrete questioning – such as asking for a feedback on the basis of special professional experiences.

When group decisions have to be made, the wish is often expressed in a chat situation that only one person needs to make a suggestion and the others merely follow suit. If this phenomenon contributes to decisions always being initiated or made by the same persons, it is important as lecturer to very carefully and sensitively re-raise the question of group decisions. (Busch/Mayer 2002)

In the previous text it has been repeatedly pointed out, how important the personal e-mail is for the lecturer in order to keep in contact with the course participants. What are the criteria for a personal e-mail? Formalities such as salutations, greetings and goodbyes are an absolute must. A study made by Mrs. Stokar von Neuforn illustrates the gender relevant aspects of e-mails. According to her survey women measure a personal „good bye“ – far removed from the standard „sincerely yours “ as a clear indication of the emotional interest involved. Men, on the other hand appear to be in this respect more neutral and prefer short statements which they find are concise and to the point. Women interpret short, clearly-structured sentences as a sign of disinterest, bad temper or being stressed out. Just like an accumulation of spelling mistakes is also interpreted as a lack of interest. It is a knife-edge question of finding a personal tone, without having to resort to flowery speech or to colloquialisms which, likewise, are interpreted as being negative. Rather more, it should be clear that, by asking personal questions, or by

referring to an aspect of a previous e-mail, there is a personal interest in the course participant as an individual (Stokar von Neuforn, 2006).

Independent of the findings of Stokar von Neuforn, lecturers attached great importance to a personal address when formulating their e-mails. Although most of the persons taking part in the course were women, lecturers made no difference between women and men in their personal address. Although written e-mail replies as well as the papers were time-consuming, in particular when giving a more differentiated response, it was shown that this was a very important instrument for giving the course participants the feeling that their individuality was being taken seriously.

„Thank you for asking. My personal stress is beginning to clear, that means that certain blockades are being dissolved and that I am getting around to continuing some of the things which I had left undone“.

And it proved to be an excellent idea to continue with this style in spite of the fact that the answers given by the course participants were sometimes more than short. A concise way of writing can be an indication of a lack of time or of a lack of security in the language being used. Lecturers were aware of this insecurity and in an attempt to reduce it, formulated their e-mails in a clear and understandable way. Long, complicated sentences were, if possible, avoided. It goes without saying that a particular sensitivity to avoid misunderstandings is especially called for. Finally, it was always appropriate to state that one would be happy to clarify any questions or misunderstandings.

4. Synopsis

E-learning is in itself characterized by phases of individual learning and thus removes areas of responsibility from the teacher to the student. The course participant must set aside a time for studying, must recognize the problem and research an individual solution from the material available. Some students are better able to deal with the challenges which arise from this situation than others. In learning scenarios such as the two online courses, experience showed that lecturers have a particular responsibility to make students aware of their changed role and they, in turn, must also be aware of changes in their own role and put them into use.

Throughout the two courses it was obvious that because of the flexibility of the time factor in this form of learning deadlines, times and places could not be often enough stated. As e-mail as a medium appeared to be associated with a high degree of non-commitment, it was very helpful at the beginning of a detailed information to state the importance of thoroughly reading the total text.

On the whole, the differences between the communicative and social aspects of the two courses could be felt rather than measured. The qualitative feedbacks to the questionnaires from the participants of the first course were more frequent and more detailed. Their final meeting of the first course was more clearly marked by an informal character with intensive talks amongst colleagues than that of the second course. Both courses registered a need for more personal contact in order to increase one's own social competence. The possibility, however, of meeting outside the presence meeting was scarcely made use of, although 90% of the course members lived in the same town.

As the course aimed at an increase in intercultural counselling competence, there was almost automatically a respectful and sustaining contact in the culturally heterogeneous group and meant that practically no intensive training on the part of the lecturer in this field was necessary. The comparatively low figure of 30% of group participants who did not finish the course gave the work load and the time factor as being their major reasons for breaking off the six months' parallel study and work programme. Against all prejudiced assumption, it must be noted here that cultural backgrounds were not responsible for the quota of drop outs. However, it cannot be

denied that the need for written, rather than oral communication increased the language barrier and that this problem could only be partially annulled by agreeing on a common additional language.

Summing up, e-learning as a supplementary learning and teaching method, has its justification. In the teaching, however, of social competence it reaches its limits and the resulting deficits can only be partly modified by the lecturer. Accordingly, on the basis of the experience gained in the implementation of the two online courses the following **recommendations** can be derived: Learning scenarios which demand a high degree of responsibility from the student affect at the same time the role of the lecturer. The emphasis on conveying knowledge by means of lectures is greatly reduced and serves mainly the initiation of the learning process. It is very much a question of engaging the student through supportive guidance in the active acquisition of learning material. A particular challenge for those working with online courses is to make this support felt without being seen. It is also apparent that the e-learning is better suited to the conveyance of factual information than to the learning of social competences. Correspondently, phases of online-supported learning should be used for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge. Presence seminars, however, should be planned in order to convert theory into practice. With regards to reflection of one's own experience and exchange with other course participants, there was a great need for language-based face to face contact. This need can be met either through practice seminars or through another virtual means of communication - the online conference. Hereby it should not be underestimated that a clearly less personal and less confidential atmosphere can be created.

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Information about the Project:

Detailed information about the European project which was laid out in „Mainstreaming Vocational Guidance for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants“ can be found in the Internet. The project was led by the University of Glasgow: www.gla.ac.uk/rq/ . The German project partner was the passage gGmbH, Hamburg: www.themenpool-migration.eu

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