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In-person Teacher Exchange or Virtual Exchange

2.9.2022 — Dimitra Panopoulou-Huovila



After a two year break due to Covid-19 related travel restrictions, I returned to Budapest Business School on a teacher exchange during the spring of 2022.

Teacher exchanges are a common practice in higher education institutions. The exchanges provide diverse teaching expertise for teachers which also enrich students' learning experience. Meeting people, experiencing different working cultures, and seeing how things are done in geographically distant locations make one appreciate and reflect on their own teaching and learning.

Although in the past two years there was an increase in virtual exchanges, the phenomenon is still new. Advancements in technology have facilitated digitalisation of education, giving way to virtual exchanges among educational institutes in the world at large.

To travel or not to travel

Would you agree if I say that virtual exchanges are meant for students, while in-person teacher exchanges are meant for teachers? It might sound preposterous to say so, because

there are also student exchanges for students to travel. However, the difference is that while student exchanges are for longer periods, teacher exchanges can be for as short as 4 – 5 days.

If you ask me whether I prefer virtual teacher exchange or in-person exchange, I'd choose the latter. The two exchanges are not synonymous but can be used to complement each other. In-person exchanges gives the opportunity to experience real teaching situations, meet students, and have real authentic cultural experience.

Teacher exchange to Budapest Business School (25.4-30.5.2022)

Since 2017, I have been visiting Budapest Business School as an exchange teacher in Business Communication and Intercultural Communication. Over the years, several telecollaboration projects have resulted from this collaboration. Now that the TAMK business travel restrictions are over, it is time to travel again to Budapest. The value of our alliance can also be seen in the increasing numbers of students coming to TAMK from Hungary as exchange students.



Students playing intercultural communication game Barnga, a simulation game about cultural clashes

The visit to BBS also strengthened the existing collaboration between TAMK and BBS. A new Virtual Exchange course *Cross-cultural Communication and Global Employability* will be piloted in collaboration with BBS this autumn, starting October 2022.

After two and a half years of social distancing and online learning, students are back to the campus for in-person classes. During my recent teacher exchange, I visited and facilitated two classes: Intercultural Communication and Business English classes.

It's worth going for teacher exchanges because it helps us build professional networks and takes us out of our comfort zone. For some, it is an opportunity to learn and practise another language, while others see it as an opportunity to share professional experiences.

Teacher exchanges can enrich our experiences as teachers. Let's use the opportunity!

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