Readiness Framework for Blended Multilogues in Higher Education

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Technical sheet

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Introduction

The major societal challenges of our times such as sustainable development, ecological transformation, or justice and equality, are not restricted to and cannot be solved by single nations, disciplines, actors or spheres of society alone, but need collaboration - across supposed borders - from a diverse group of stakeholders. Our project addresses these needs of multiple stakeholder engagement and translates them into academic study and learning context by introducing the Multilogue format to Higher Education. Multilogues are an interactive and transformative learning experience that brings together different spheres and stakeholders of society and is based on Humanistic educational theories and pedagogical paradigms aimed at societal engagement and change.

In addition to the innovation of connecting the Multilogue to a Higher Education context, we – a group of four diverse higher education institutions from Slovakia, Germany and Sweden – are breaking new ground by moving the Multilogue into a blended and digital setting. The emerging blended / digital Multilogue format will not merely incorporate stages of place-based classroom settings and online activities, but will further plan for the opportunity to virtually participate in place-based settings, allowing for maximum flexibility in the combination of physical and digital participation.

A blended and digital implementation of Multilogues in Higher Education is an important means in the pursuit of our main objective: to enhance transformation and innovation in Higher Education by forging transnational and transdisciplinary spaces of knowledge creation in order to address urgent societal challenges, such as sustainable development, ecological transformation, or justice and equality.

The readiness framework presented in this document marks the first step on our journey to facilitate blended / digitally implemented Multilogues in Higher Education by providing a conceptually derived description and definition of Multilogues in Higher Education, embedding the Multilogue format in pertinent learning theories (Part A) as well as applying these findings to clarify the usage of the term Multilogue in the context of our project and providing an analysis of our first student led activities regarding Multilogues (Part B).

The framework is primarily aimed at educators wishing to familiarize themselves with the Multilogue format and will also serve as the theoretical and methodological foundation for the next steps in the project, which will be the development of a toolkit for educators supporting them in the digital implementation of multilogues and overcoming the challenge of how multi-perspective and transformative learning formats, which so far have been heavily place-bound, can be provided in a digital setting allowing maximum flexibility.

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1 The added value of multilogue

The pandemic led not only to school closures and the disruption of in-person contact between students and higher education institutions, but also to opinion groups becoming isolated in online 'bubbles' of people sharing similar views. The natural flow of information was disrupted and the feedback signals in communication processes were lost, limiting the participation of diverse groups of inhabitants in social dialogue. Knowledge circulated in closed sections of society, substantially reducing democratic participation. The war in Ukraine further exacerbated the problem and urgent questions such as the freedom of development, civic participation and open dialogue have come to the fore.

Consequently we are now seeking ways and means of reviving the circulation of knowledge, of overcoming the isolation of opinions, ensuring democratic participation across society in pursuit of individual and community development and – let us not be afraid to say it – in the name of balance and truth. Traditionally, higher education has performed this role; however, as we have shown above, even it is under threat and possibly in crisis.

Presented with this situation, we are discovering the potential of multilogue – which is a rather hazy concept, even in higher education. Nonetheless its very ambiguity and ambivalence presents us with the challenge and opportunity to adapt it to the conditions of higher education and accentuate features that have developmental/learning effects for the participants of the multilogue and the potential to increase active civic/education participation amongst a wide range of education actors.

Even the name multilogue suggests it has the potential to overcome the communication barriers inherent in monologue and dialogue. Multilogue is a form of communication and mutual learning in which there is no place for authoritarian, monodirectional communication. Multilogue is not just about communicating one's perceptions of a phenomenon or event in the absence of feedback or where there are two opinion spectrums. Rather it purposefully involves the sharing of multiple perspectives and diverse views that are continually subjected to validation and verification. Additional, complementary perspectives are consciously sought out and there is a specific focus on diversity views, as only then can we transcend the boundaries of our own perceptions. Multilogue is therefore a response to the social dilemmas that have long affected higher education but keep rearing their head. It can be seen as a sort of modern pursuit of the ideals of liberal education as conceived of by Wilhelm von Humboldt. His motto was 'knowledge is power and education is liberty'. Multilogue is a means of guaranteeing freedom of education and learning, whilst seeking and ensuring a balance of power in determining knowledge.

2 Concept of multilogue

The term multilogue first appeared in the literature at the beginning of the 1990s in close relation to the development of information and communication technologies and online communication. At that time the conception of multilogue had a practical purpose, mainly future developments in social communication, including new forms based on technological innovation. It was in this era

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that the first environments began to emerge, within which this conception of multilogue could be applied. In the next stage (the first half of the noughties) of the evolving conception of multilogue, there was a stronger emphasis on enhancing social participation, deliberation and democratisation. Hence it was no longer restricted to semiotic communication contexts but permeated into educational and policy contexts as well. We will now consider these stages in the evolution of the concept in greater detail.

2.1 Technological stage

Gary Shank was the pioneer behind the concept of multilogue. Shank (1993) was interested in the semiotic aspects of 'Net communication'. He demonstrated that Net communication differs from the three basic types of conversation – monologue, dialogue and discussion. Net communication is specific both in terms of formality and semiotics. In analysing it, 'we need to go beyond (while still including) the conversational models of communication types'. In this type of communication, written characters and symbols take on greater significance. He thought that multilogue was a model of sign communication that might describe Net communication.

> In the multilogue, we have a number of players. We have the starter, or the initial sender, who starts the "thread" (a well-established Net term, by the way). Once a thread has been started though, it is no longer under sender control. This is because the mechanics of Net response do not require turn taking. From the oral side, it is as if everyone who is interested in talking can all jump in at once, but still their individual voices can be clearly heard. From the written side, it is as if someone had started writing a piece, but before he/she gets too far, people are there magically in print to add to, correct, challenge, or extend the piece. Therefore, what we have is a written quasi-discussion that has the potential to use the strengths of each form. Since the "feel" of Net communication is still oral, I think it is best to call this form of communication "multiloguing", to retain the link with its oral heritage.

The online environment thereby brings new communication possibilities: speaking and writing in parallel, loss of 'authorship', weaker power to interpret meaning, community formulations of meaning, mutual correction and the sharing of meaning. According to Shank online multilogue is particularly useful for interdisciplinary issues; the advantage being that one can 'pull together disparate arguments and examples, file them electronically, archive and examine them, and pull them up for later reference'. That means that 'all members of the community have access, in principle, to the expertise of each other almost instantaneously'. Even here one can sense the strong participative and democratising potential of multilogue.

Eva Ekeblad drew on Shank's approach (1998, 1999) and used the term 'online multilogue' (1998, 17), characterising it as a 'computer mediated form of significant interaction', based on '...modes of interaction permitting a multiplicity of players to join the spinning of a semiotic thread' (3). She nonetheless stressed the developmental/educational effects of online multilogue and the desire to seek consensus or solutions. Its main function then is 'fostering shared understandings of circumstances and phenomena'. Multilogue is understood to mean 'virtual spaces for communities of learners' (3) trying to deal with or resolve issues. Ekeblad thereby emphasises the community side of multilogue. The layer of Community Building

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> comprises the construction and maintenance of the social structure of an online community, not least the building of trust between participants. The work of community building involves getting to know colleagues in the community, identifying issues of concern to the community and understanding its goals and missions. (9)

She gives the following as an example of a multilogue: a 'virtual environment that has served as a meeting place for scholars with a common field of interest for more than a decade.' This environment is a cluster of related mailing lists – xlists – subscribed to by researchers, graduate students and practitioners with a common interest. In sum is a computer mediated channel for discussion among scholars (1998, 7).

> In spite of depending on voluntary participation, scholarly mailinglists may form sustainable virtual settings for communities of learners, where multilogical discussions form the center of collectively autodidactic activity. (1999, 1)

What emerges is a type of autodidactic arena in which 'all participants, each from their perspective, may contribute as well as benefit from the contributions of others' (1998, 4). This type of multilogue looks like this:

> On email-based discussionlists messages with quite different functions in the activity of the subscriber community must pass through one and the same channel. Profound or playful multilogues on central ideas, reactions to political developments bearing on education, calls for conference papers, job announcements, encouragements to listmembers in the final throes of their dissertation, as well as messages announcing a temporary shutdown at the mother node or educating the community about the mechanisms of bounced messages, are all posted to the same server address and distributed from there to all the subscribers of the list. The subscribers thus receive - and may freely contribute to - a sequential stream of textual utterances constituting a textweb where multiple communicative actions with different functions in the activity are woven together, in and across messages (8-9).

From today's perspective, this type of multilogue is not particularly interactive and is too rigidly tied to written inputs or textual production. It was even envisaged that joint paper reading would become a CMC multilogue activity (1999, 22). In today's higher education there is of course no need for that and it could even mean a return to the writing and analysis of written texts. Nonetheless towards the end of the 1990s, Ekeblad was discussing the problems with this type of multilogue (which are of a greater magnitude these days). She talked about the 'predictably unpredictable nature of electronic multilogue. The discussions rarely if ever lead to convergence on shared conclusions, and there is no obvious cumulativity in the system'. (1999, 28). Consequently the organisational side of multilogue involves 'inserting more organized activities into the Xlist setting: exchanges between local seminar groups, Xlist channeling of communication between similar courses run at separate locations, setting up of special-purpose subconferences, joint readings of papers or entire books etc'. (23)

Ekeblad's thinking was based on real-life experiences of online multilogue in higher education and research. These led her to recommend a 'combination of the centered, participatory appropriation of these practices with occasional de-centered knowledge-building about the emergent nature of mailinglist dynamics at a systemic level' (26).

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2.2 Humanist stage

The humanist stage followed the technological one, but interestingly there is no specific reference to the concept of multilogue used in the technological stage. The scholars developing the concept of multilogue treated it as their own specific concept and made no reference to the tradition in place twenty or so years previously. That makes it all the more interesting to observe the conceptual correspondence between the humanist stage and the technological one and identify the 'discursive formation' they belong to, as M. Foucault would say.

For, just as in the technological stage, the more recent conceptualisation of multilogue is set within a linguistic and semiotic framework – especially discourse analysis. Multilogue represents an arena for encounters between various discourses, for different ways of interpreting selected problems and for a variety of types of interaction and communication. But the fundamental difference in this stage compared to the previous stage is the issue of the power relations that play out in discussing, writing and learning in education.

The most distinctive voice in this conceptual stage is that of S. Mehta (2009). In knowledge expansion, she distinguishes between 'mini-narratives (small stories, local, experiential, subjective and disruptive/transgressive/interrogative of meta-narratives) and meta-narratives (big stories, global, theoretical, objective and exclusive of small stories)' (1193). The conversation model used in higher education seems to exclude mini-narratives and rely primarily on meta-narratives. Each field has multiple meta-narratives that intermingle in a state of academic disputation. One typical feature of higher education is the privileging of certain stories, narratives and interpretations. Another is the argumentational disputes or contests between the privileged stories. Hence there is no common arena in which all the existing narratives and interpretations could exist without them being in a state of tension or disputation.

Mehta (2009, 1193) states that 'there is the erasure of voices as stories struggle to become part of a dominating discourse and the loss, or translated versions of those stories as they become part of the visible discourse (of research, of "thick" or metaphoric sociological description, of policy and so on)'. She argues that this ends up 'denying the most plural view to the student of educational issues'.

The basic question for education and learning then is 'how to do the "multiple" (to map multiple knowledge perspectives) as both meta- and mini-narratives', how to enable 'more choice in language and register, through which to describe our various worlds and views' (1192). For Mehta the answer to the question 'how can we operationalise multiplicity and subjectivity' is a 'modality called multilogue' (1195). Multilogue

> is the manifestation of a belief in multiple realities, with space for both big and small stories, multidimensional, complex, mutable and embodied, where intertextual relationships take over what meta-narratives left out. (1202)

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Mehta even sets out the didactive side of multilogue, drawing on Paulston to show how to proceed when equating narratives and interpretations (1201):

> 1. Choosing "the issues and debates" to be mapped
> 2. Choosing the "range of texts that construct these debates"
> 3. Conducting a "close reading and macro-analysis" of these texts (or narratives)
> 4. Identifying the "range of positions in the intertextual mix"
> 5. "Sharing": ...identifying textual communities that share ways of seeing and communicating reality and their locations in the mapping. One might also find differences.
> 6. "Re-mapping": The last, and I feel, most significant point in the mapping

Overcoming the traditional power relations through multilogue is not just about the dominance/suppression of some discourses and narratives, though, but about the power relations in education and learning as well.

> Multilogue, ultimately, breaks the barrier and the power relationship between instructor and instructed, engaging both in the learning process. Only a collective can produce a working model of multilogue, and this suggests a next phase in traditional ways of doing research. (1202)

Overcoming the monopolisation in education entails breaking down the spatial monopolisation in education.

> The concept of multilogue... questions the idea that pedagogy of difference can be crafted exclusively from the classroom. In the end, the space of most fluidity may be found in spaces other than the traditional (such as classrooms), perhaps in cyber-space versions... The concept of multilogue extends the pedagogical sites of meaning construction from the classroom, to any environment through which common and/or different space is represented. It takes the concepts of dialogue and multiplies them. (1200-1201)

Multilogue therefore offers an egalitarian space in which knowledge and meaning can be shared openly. For Mehta, like the scholars in the technology stage of the conception of multilogue, virtual 'cyber-space' is an alternative to the traditional classroom space which is encumbered by the traditional identifications regarding the nature of knowledge and the learner's status, in other words the traditional division of roles in education. This raises questions about the freedom to participate in education/teaching and democratising access to information. In formal terms, Mehta sees multilogue as the multiplication of dialogue and as leading to community teaching. The multilogue participants thereby become part of a 'deeply meaningful way of creating "knowledge", or perhaps even "problem-solving", in a fashion that allows for personal expression as well as collective interaction with others in the discourse' (1201). Community learning does not, however, mean mitigating differences or attempting to achieve a consensus and in no way does it mean adopting a 'neutral position or a neutral language in which to compare difference' (1194-1195). Mehta summarises the basic principles of multilogue thus (1201):

> Multilogue works under the following conceptual framework:
> - Concern for Otherness and Othering, as constructive and destructive concepts
> - Recognition of the simultaneous existence of multiple voices
> - Acute and self-conscious bias towards enabling tentative and silenced voices
> - Recognition of the existence of liminality, hybridity, transitions/transitologies and of motion in all narratives and knowledge cultures
> - Recognition that deconstruction and reconstruction, situatedness and fluidity are empowering and desired in a learning process
> - Recognition of the existence and effects of power

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- Recognising the limits of each story: that all knowledge is partial and is built through the interaction between reader and texts as well between multiple communications
- Recognising that everything is dangerous, and that being able to engage reflexively at all levels keeps us generating connective forces rather than static, silencing forces

These principles can be seen a model code of ethics for holding multilogues and presents a great challenge for all multilogue participants. It is entirely new to the concept of multilogue – it is not found in the technological stage – and requires certain value settings and complete openness among all those involved. Multilogue has a radical humanist core and participants need to have what Gorski (2018) calls equity literacy:

> Equity literacy refers to the knowledge and skills we need as educators to be a threat to the existence of bias and inequity in our spheres of influence... When we develop our equity literacy, we naturally filter every decision through an equity lens. (23)

N. Hale (2021) draws on this notion in her culturological conception of multilogue. She is of the view that multilogue requires transcultural competence, not cross-cultural or intercultural competence, as they do not lead to full understanding nor recognition of diversity. Transcultural competences allow for 'collaboration in diversities'. She believes the pandemic has led to an even greater need for multilogue. It is a concept that applies to both online and in-person capacity-building as well.

> The multilogue I describe is a new cosmopolitan perspective that offers the intercultural discipline a fluid, dynamic and enabling approach for building relationships in collaborative work. Multilogue supports seeing the 'other' as human and rejects the constructs of race or status which divide us.

Hale's concept focuses on the conditions required for collaborative work in diversity situations. She does not consider the content of multilogues and there is no linguistic and semiotic layer in her concept. Instead she concentrates on human relationships, the potential for open communication and on how a collaborative atmosphere can be created in diversity situations.

> A multilogue is a safe space for collaboration in diversities... created and nurtured by the actors themselves... supported by compassion... enriched by multiple perspectives ... where all voices matter... where people want to contribute....and where people try to stay conscious of the impact of their words and behaviors.

In terms of the organisational side of multiloguing, she thinks it is important to 'support cooperation among actors coming from diverse cultural collectivities, be they ethnic, national, generational, professional, occupational, organizational, or other groups'. That means that all multilogues should be purposefully managed, based on the diversity of the participants, and continually monitored and supported. In that way, multilogue can become a 'liberating structure' that gives a voice to multiple stakeholders, including those on the margins of the discussion, i.e. those who have traditionally been excluded.

> The Multilogue is a safe space for collaboration in which all voices matter. It requires a huge leap of faith that it will be valuable to move away from defending my opinions. If we are ready to stay open to deviant views and behaviors, we will ultimately, build and nurture working relationships with people who are not in our usual tribe, our echo chamber.

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Consequently, certain communication practices are considered inappropriate in multiloguing, such as defending one's opinion, or disputations, as Mehta calls them. Here the important thing is the initial openness to difference, which is something Mehta discusses as well.

> The multilogue is not just many people talking with many people. It is the flavor, the feeling, the texture, aromas, sounds and sights of this collaboration space with many-in-many conversations. ... we cannot predict what will emerge out of this space, since that will depend on the actors, their history, external conditions, power dynamics, et al.

The outcomes and directions taken in multiloging are fraught with unpredictability, which is one of the risks flagged up by scholars in the technological stage. Hale's concept has added value in that she considers the psychological conditions, which are not dealt with in any of the other conceptualisations. For example, she states that the 'main attribute of building the multilogue is the actors' ability to co-create and maintain psychological safety'. That particular pedagogical and psychological condition is hardly new, but she also describes additional facets and conditions that apply to multilogues:

> 1. A multilogue is re-negotiated every time participants come together; it is fleeting in nature. The multilogue continues to be co-created with intention, regularly reflected on by all actors present in that specific moment, for a particular situation, and context.
> 2. No collaboration group can sustain the intensity of the expectations of the multilogue at every moment; actors in the group will weave in and out of multiloguing moments.
> 3. The challenge is to bring the group back to the multilogue, if the interactions begin veering off towards toxicity or ego-land, complacent echo chambers or groupthink.
> 4. The multilogue feels safe, people feel welcome and welcomed, regardless of status, title or role. Actors stay alert and conscious of the impact and consequences of their behaviors.
> 5. Participation has diverse connotations; people feel comfortable to participate, in the way and frequency they want to. All voices matter. If people want to share, we listen without resorting to unsolicited advice, blame or judgment.
> 6. This space provides us access to diverse sets of experience, if we stay open and available to others' insights. Even in conflict, we are present for each other and we remind ourselves of the potential growth by shifting our own perspectives. In the multilogue we are all learners, not assuming, not expecting, staying spacious, many-to-many.

In the humanist stage of the evolution of the concept of multilogue, analysing the power relations in terms of the discourse, actors and communication setting is also important. As is the need to maintain balance, equality and diversity and a collaborative atmosphere and to create the communicative and psychological conditions that enable the multilogue to become a 'space for collaboration in diversities'.

3 Doing multilogues in education

The only account of the application of a multilogue in pedagogy is to be found in Carico and Logan (2001). Partly because there are so few resources on multilogues generally and partly because theirs is the only account offering a complete pedagogical analysis. In their study they looked at multilogues in terms of technology, didactics and the teaching as well as evaluation. It therefore captures the whole pedagogical process, which is evaluated through the multilogue, primarily from

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the viewpoint of the participants. It is particularly valuable as it covers most of the principles discussed in the theory relating to both the technological and humanist stages of the concept.

Unsurprisingly then, given the above, the multilogue in that study was centred around the core concept – language, text and semiotics – and mainly involved the analysis of literary texts. It targeted the humanist requirement – collaboration in diversities – both in terms of the content and the participants. Thus the content consisted of the analysis of multicultural literature.

> We believed that the use of multicultural and human rights novels, short stories, poems, and essays, would not only provide the students content but would broaden the learning community even further to include voices from literature of the underrepresented and marginalized.

While the participants represented a diverse community of learners when compared with a typical school class. The multilogue was regularly attended by 15 to 20 eighth-grade students, along with their teacher, school support staff, higher education lecturers and selected students. It was therefore heterogeneous in terms of education, position, and age as well as ethnicity: 'in this new kind of educational community... we hoped to find the spaces for such dialogue to encourage voice, thought, exchange of ideas, and a stretching of the imagination'.

The participants were selected at the beginning of the semester: the class teacher invited eighth-grade students to participate in the multilogues. The university lecturer did the same with her students and asked them to provide 'information about themselves: hometown, major, hobbies and "favorites": foods, bands, books, authors, TV shows, movies, colors, and so forth'. The eighth graders had to 'read the information sheets and choose three people with whom they would enjoy working'. The class teacher and lecturer then met to pair up the students and ensure that each eighth-grader was paired with one of the three people they had selected.

> Electronic formats were used that were believed would create a learning community in which each would learn from many people but have special access to one. First, e-mail was the tool the pairs would use to get to know each other and to begin a practice of discussing literature together. Second, an electronic bulletin board called NetForum... was the medium that gave individuals from both classes an opportunity to interact asynchronously with the entire group around topics related to poems and the essays. Finally, the MOO was used as an electronic literature circle to bring together web pal pairs who read the same multicultural novel.

As we can see, the multilogue was conducted through a variety of electronic formats. Just as in the classic technological stage, email and an electronic bulletin board were two of the formats. But unlike in the early stage of the concept, the multilogue also involved a synchronous virtual component, known as MOO (multi-user object oriented environment). The work done via this component was called 'MOOing'. The MOO was specifically created for this purpose at the university of the lecturer and student participants (Virginia Tech).

> In this environment, students move from room to room (wherever their group has been directed) in the virtual house that was created by our technical assistant solely for our use. (Other groups on or off campus cannot have access to it without a password, making the site a protected environment.) There they discuss multicultural literature with other students who have read the same work. So, for example, while one group is in the study discussing Parrot in the Oven, another group is in the library discussing April and the Dragon Lady .

The MOOing generally took place at four in the afternoon twice a semester. The eighth-graders and their teachers communicated with the university students in a virtual house with rooms.

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> While the middle schoolers wait, they will investigate the other rooms in the "house"—the kitchen, salon, library, or den, perhaps—and see who else is there or who has managed to pass through before they arrived... For the next 10-15 minutes they search for that one eighth-grader with whom they have been paired since the beginning of the semester, and, once finding her or him, catch up on the latest news until it is time to begin.

The MOOing usually lasted an hour and a half, including a five-minute break, and the discussion about the books was described as 'a provocative mix of chatter, analysis, question, and opinion'. The teachers prepared the groundwork for the discussion beforehand, which was based around set questions that participants received in advance.

> Through e-mail, they were to discuss the book they were reading in the weeks before the MOO. Then one week before the MOO, Donna and I asked the students to prepare for the discussion in the following ways: (a) by marking with sticky notes interesting passages or passages illustrative of life in a different culture; (b) by considering how the structure of the book helped or hindered the reading process; (c) by focusing on the positive and negative experiences the characters had as a result of being part of two different cultures; and (d) by relating some of the previously mentioned experiences to their own lives or to someone they knew.

The start of the discussion was moderated in exactly the way Shank (1993) describes multilogues: 'We have the starter, or the initial sender, who starts the "thread"... Once a thread has been started though, it is no longer under sender control'. This rule was also used in MOOing.

> The host began with one question 'Anybody have a burning thought to get us started?'and from there the students took over the conversation. All the participants, with the exception of the host, who was never heard from again, began to share their ideas and questions about the story. ... First, there is a flurry of conversation as everyone shares their responses to the books. Then the group gradually settles into one or two related and substantial themes, which it continues until moving into a different topic. A similar pattern was observed in the other rooms as well.

The discussion was rated very positively by all the participants. Not only did it aid attitude and knowledge development in the eighth-graders but it also made community learning possible and brought different generations together, which was rated highly by the university students in particular. The organizers of the multilogues claim that they have great potential to transcend the possibilities of face-to-face learning in school classrooms with pupils of the same age.

> Our purpose was not to replace face to face... interactions but to see how, through this one medium, the learning community of both groups of students might be broadened, thus offering greater access..., access to a larger number of ideas, perspectives, concerns, and increased opportunities for dialogic experiences for students. We believed that connecting these two groups, students whose interest in each other was perhaps motivated differently, but matched in enthusiasm, would set the stage for vibrant conversations in which the students would gain new understandings of their own lives and of the lives of others.

There is also a record of the multilogue participants' reflections. It shows that the multilogue had several benefits. The most important of these, according to the participants, was the freedom to express themselves. The freedom to do this is greater than in face-to-face classroom interactions. We can therefore speak of 'presence in absence' in the MOOing, where the participants are vocally present but physically absent. To some extent this weakens the traditional power relations: 'for the middle schoolers, the pressure of having to say the 'right thing' in front of teachers was noticeably absent'. This accords with the principles of the multilogue, particularly those emphasised in the humanist stage of the concept. The participants had a greater sense of freedom, which was evident not just in their willingness to participate in the lesson but also in their willingness to engage in the learning. The main negative aspect was the fear of being misunderstood and "technostress", a term

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encapsulating all the complications associated with operating in the virtual sphere and the rules for moving around in it.

Another – completely different – conception of the multilogue, a more didactic one, was proposed by Schwab (2011). Schwab locates it in the context of foreign language teaching (English) at secondary school level. He sees the multilogue as an everyday communication strategy used in teacher-fronted learning.

> A multilogue shall be defined as a certain form of institutional multi-party activity where participants' verbal and non-verbal contributions have reference to more than one addressee. It is determined by the following characteristics: a certain participation structure that is teacher-fronted and involves more than two people; teacher or student initiated; not limited to a certain phase or point of time during the lesson; public and apparent to all learners ('on stage') and therefore fragile, vulnerable and potentially face-threatening; addresses more than one person – directly or indirectly; and takes place in an institutional setting. (7-8)

Here the multilogue is not a special activity that takes place outside the classroom but is directly incorporated into the classroom teaching and is not tied to the online or virtual sphere. From this definition it is clear that he makes no attempt to radically alter the power relations inherent in the mediation of knowledge or among education actors. They key aspects are participation, group engagement and the public nature of the activity.

Hence the multilogue is a special communicative context that can be purposefully guided by the teacher. It is a strategy for engaging the majority of students and for making communication less individualized. In other words, it is a sort of community conversation in which the teacher creates space for everyone to participate. The teacher can then guide the discussion using various strategies. Schwab gives the examples of direct or indirect elicitation.

The multilogue can, however, be initiated and controlled by the students themselves. Schwab (2011, 12) for instance describes a strategy he calls 'multi-party activity' thus:

> This kind of cooperative participation among students could be seen frequently... and may have to do with fact that one learner alone can hardly engage the teacher's attention but requires others to help him or her. In our case, there is a fourth student, Rachel, who steps in... and resumes the interaction by presenting a new thought. Once again her turn is overlapped by the teacher ... This time she does not give in and continues... and finishes her phrase. When her utterance is overlapped for a second time by the teacher's turn, Tracy... and Vivian... get on and continue Rachel's statement. The dyadic structure at the beginning has emerged into a multi-layered discourse, a multi-party activity, with the teacher on one side and a group of two boys and three girls on the other.

Even in the multicultural literature multilogue discussed above, the multilogue can only work when the actors are selected through an appropriate communication strategy: 'Due to some of the students' interactional competence and the teacher's willingness, the interactions become multi-layered talk and multi-party actions' (13). According to Schwab, classroom teaching that is based around such activities can be described as a multilogue. From his viewpoint:

> classroom interaction is to be seen as a mode of speech exchange system that bears the opportunity for multi-party discourse, especially if students can fill other slots than those given to them by the teacher. I call such teacher–cohort interaction a multilogue: an interaction format in whole-class settings where more than two participants are involved, either directly or as bystanders and listeners who follow the ongoing interaction and who may take part in it. (15)

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Although this pedagogic example reduces the multilogue to a specific type of ordinary classroom communication, it offers some didactical insights into the application of the multilogue in education. Apart from the formal structure of the multilogue and preparatory work on setting up the environment (virtual or real), organisers need to think about which communication strategies to use to encourage group engagement and community learning. Multi-layered talk and multi-party actions have been shown to be among the most effective strategies.

4 Learning in multilogues

The project concerns the use of multilogue as a teaching medium in higher education and the goal of all formal education is to improve knowledge, skills and capacities in the participants. Multilogue is a pedagogic medium for personal and knowledge development. It is not seen merely as a means of community sharing or creating communities but also of acceleration – both in terms of development and knowledge. Unsurprisingly, the classic literature on multilogues refers to two teaching theories than can be used to describe learning in multilogues: learning in the zone of proximal development (L. S. Vygotsky) and expansive learning (Y. Engeström). These two theories follow on from and refer to one another and are considered acceleration theories – theories that enable dynamic student development, mainly in and through social sharing.

According to Ekeblad (1998) the multilogue is a form of computer mediated communication that

> brings to mind Vygotskian theories formulating learning as a mediated process in the Zone of Proximal Development. This Zone, first named by Vygotsky... is the space of psychological mobility between what an individual may perform unassisted and what she may perform in joint activity.

A multilogue is therefore a special kind of spatial learning context. Ekeblad states that multilogues create 'Zones of Proximal Development for communities of learners' and defines these as 'places where all participants, each after their kind, may learn'. However, the multilogue also has potential in assisted social learning, that is, learning that goes beyond what Vygotsky (1978) termed the Zone of Actual development, which is the zone where students learn individually and not in an instrumentally (cognitively, affectively, materially) mediated social setting (community) that advances their learning. Vygotsky claimed that to make more significant advances in learning requires More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), who may be various social actors, including 'more capable peers' (p. 86). MKOs can provide us with the tools and perspectives to dynamise our development. The multilogue is therefore an optimal organisational form of this kind of learning in the Zone of Proximal Development.

> the ZPD is a sign-/tool-mediated zone of guided action and discussion within which children become acquainted with newer historical and cultural forms of expression and action, with the vestiges of the history and culture being embedded in an agent or in a tool, and with the more-knowledgeable-others being the participant(s) in an interaction whose resources (knowing, experiences and ways of doing) are used to think about the problem and/or to solve it. (Abtahi 2017, 36)

The theory of expansive learning draws directly on Vygotsky's ZPD and formulates practical steps.

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> The theory of expansive learning focuses on learning processes in which the very subject of learning is transformed from isolated individuals to collectives and networks. Initially individuals begin to question the existing order and logic of their activity. As more actors join in, a collaborative analysis and modeling of the zone of proximal development are initiated and carried out. (Engeström, Sannino 2010, 5-6)

Hence expansive learning is problem-oriented learning based on collaborative analysis in learning communities: 'The theory of expansive learning puts the primacy on communities as learners, on transformation and creation of culture, on horizontal movement and hybridization...' (2). What is important here is the horizontality and hybridization of learning. There is no emphasis in this theory of learning on vertical relationships in learning. It is therefore similar to the humanist conception of the multilogue that questions the traditional power relationships and attempts to bring marginalised voices and experiences into learning. It also places the actors and the sources of knowledge in a horizontal position. And that is the case with hybridization too. It embraces ambiguity and rejects the pigeon-holing of learning content, while accepting mixed and non-authoritative learning frameworks. It also therefore favours open learning processes – in terms of both input and output. 'In expansive learning, learners learn something that is not yet there. In other words, the learners construct a new object and concept for their collective activity, and implement this new object and concept in practice' (2). That is what happens in the approach Engeström calls 'expansive cycle or spiral'. It takes the following form.

> -The first action is that of questioning, criticizing or rejecting some aspects of the accepted practice and existing wisdom. For the sake of simplicity, we will call this action questioning.
> - The second action is that of analyzing the situation. Analysis involves mental, discursive or practical transformation of the situation in order to find out causes or explanatory mechanisms. Analysis evokes "why?" questions and explanatory principles. One type of analysis is historical-genetic; it seeks to explain the situation by tracing its origins and evolution. Another type of analysis is actual-empirical; it seeks to explain the situation by constructing a picture of its inner systemic relations.
> - The third action is that of modeling the newly found explanatory relationship in some publicly observable and transmittable medium. This means constructing an explicit, simplified model of the new idea that explains and offers a solution to the problematic situation.
> - The fourth action is that of examining the model, running, operating and experimenting on it in order to fully grasp its dynamics, potentials and limitations.
> - The fifth action is that of implementing the model by means of practical applications, enrichments, and conceptual extensions.
> - The sixth and seventh actions are those of reflecting on and evaluating the process and consolidating its outcomes into a new stable form of practice. (7)

It is merely a model and so in a multilogue one would not expect each of these stages to occur and be followed precisely as set out above. Nonetheless it is a good guide for understanding the community learning approach within the multilogue framework. There are also practical formats that are organisationally very similar to the multilogue that relate to the theory of expansive learning. Lambert labelled one such format the Learning Studio (Engeström, Sannino 2010, 12).

> The student teachers were asked to conduct development projects in the workplaces, aimed at improving their curricula and teaching practices. Each student teacher presented a report of his or her project in the Learning Studio. The participants of the studio included (a) representatives of the teacher education institute, (b) teachers and students of the vocational training school in which the student teacher worked, and (c) representatives of one or more employer organizations (in this case, health care and social welfare service delivery organizations) for which the specific project was relevant. In the studio session, the participants discussed the student teacher's project as a possible shared innovation. In other words, the studio sessions required discursive crossing of multiple boundaries. (12-13)

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The Learning Studio is a specific type of multilogue designed to encourage what is known as 'knotworking' in the theory of expansive learning. It is the 'rapidly pulsating, distributed and partially improvised orchestration of collaborative performance between otherwise loosely connected actors and activity systems' (13). One of the key tasks of the multilogue is to bring together actors who do not normally come into contact (despite being in the same social sphere).

From the above we can see that when using multilogues in higher education it is important to monitor development in the ZPD and to try and create an environment with multiple interested participants or MKOs. At the same time, it is important to select open topics and problems, or initiate situations in which the learning participants can formulate the learning problems and challenges themselves. Another key aspect is ensuring that conditions are in place for collaborative analysis and continual, ongoing knotworking. Then can we talk about effective learning in multilogues.

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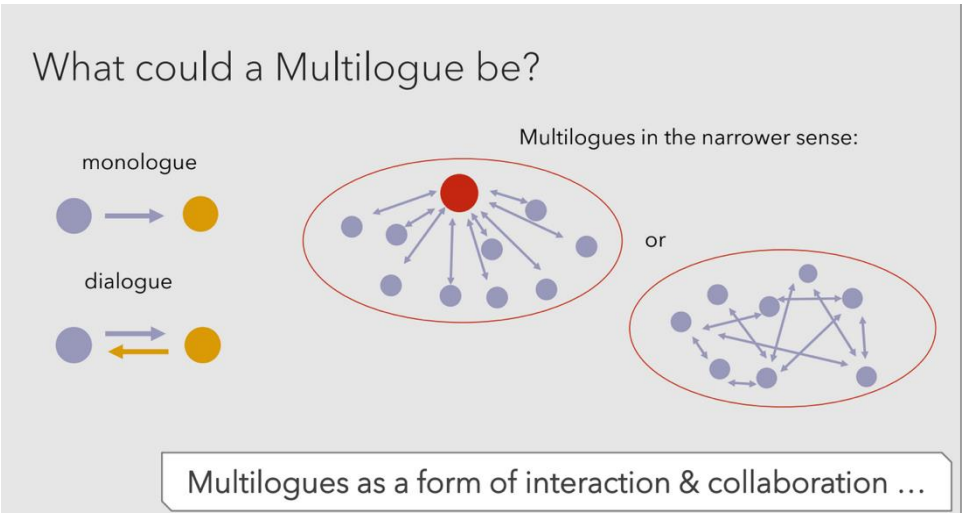
ANNEX 1

Forging an Understanding of Multilogues in Higher Education

Multi-actor interactions are quite common in HE settings (e.g. interactions between students). Drawing on the expansive review of the Multilogue term and concept provided in Part A, we want to expand the narrow understanding of multilogues as a mere form of interaction and collaboration by defining multilogues as a method of interactivity and collaboration between various stakeholders inside and outside Higher Education. In multilogues, different sectors of society participate in an interactive and transformative learning process aimed at societal engagement and change.



As part of our project, we are exploring scenarios where we extend the nature of the stakeholders involved in multilogues to stakeholders from outside Higher Education, for instance multilogues with students, teachers and a variety of actors from broader society that are involved.This form of collaboration in Higher Education seeks to tackle a challenge from various angles by combining research-based learning with approaches that have no direct link to Higher Education (i.e. challenge-based or even purpose-driven).

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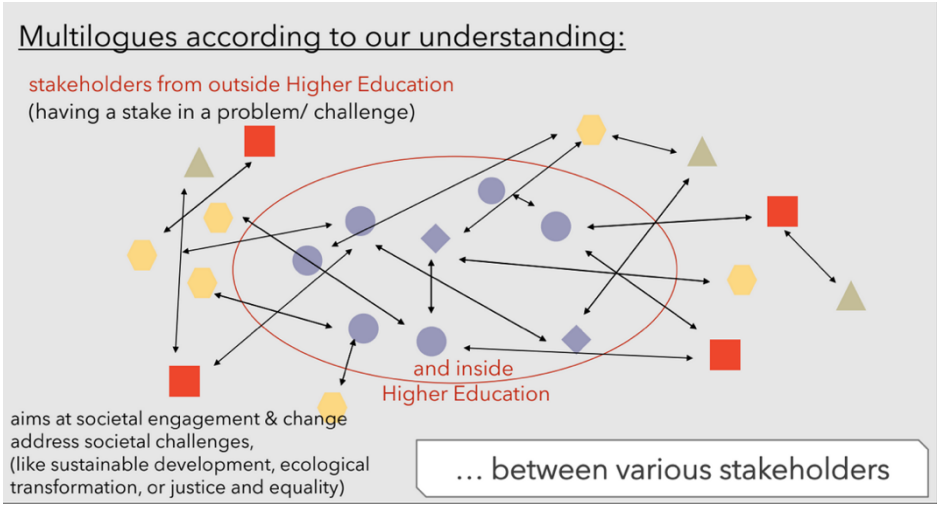

Our goal is to create inclusive, democratic learning experiences for students, teachers, and external stakeholders, and to dissolve the traditional teacher-student power gap, which constitutes a barrier for mutual learning.

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ANNEX 2

Objectives and Opportunities of multilogues in Higher Education

In the educational context knowledge transfer remains an important measurable element but other skills are increasingly and pressingly imperative. It has become increasingly and urgently necessary to be able to adapt to rapid change, to quickly gain new competences and knowledge for jobs which may not have existed when one went through formal education. In other words, being more open than ever to lifelong learning. Likewise, because today's problems can best be solved across disciplines, nations, and individual identities, being able to build relationships, and to work as a team member in diverse teams have become central skills and prerequisites for life and work in the 21st century and beyond. For the OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, this translates into the 4 Cs – Communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity – as essential skills that enable us to navigate the 21st century (OECD: The Future of Education and Skills, 2018).

In that sense, a multilogue focuses on ensuring that students develop their proficiency in relation to the module's learning outcomes (e. g. problem-solving, communication, etc.). Its main emphasis is on "methodical competency" and "personal competence" rather than on acquiring subject matter-related skills or knowledge. In addition, transformative aspects, impact on society, and societal change, such as enabling a wider participation (e.g.) are at the core of multilogues. Through multilogues, it is possible to bridge science and society, foster hands-on attitudes, build networks and increase collaborations among a wide range of actors (in society, politics, corporations, etc.). Furthermore, multilogues offer a unique opportunity to explore new perspectives and gain new skills, such as negotiation skills: Multilogues not only provide an avenue for accepting and appreciating all participants, but they also stimulate and encourage group cooperation to identify solutions.

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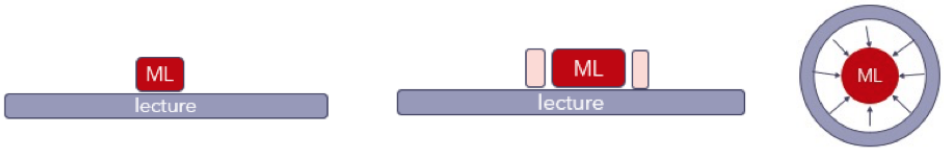
ANNEX 3

Design Approaches for Multilogues in Higher Education

Multilogues in Higher Education can be transferred into a teaching-learning format with varying degrees of integration, from low to high. Design options range from small add-ons to fully integrated solutions as illustrated below.



(A) (B) (C)

Design Approaches: Various degrees of multilogue integration

Integrating a multilogue with relevant stakeholders outside of Higher Education to the lecture or seminar (A) is an easy way to add value to the learning setting. This design expands the experience of all participants, much like an excursion would.

Alternatively, scenario (B), provides a medium degree of integration: In this case, design A may be supplemented by a preparation and a follow-up preparation phase.

Unlike the previous two approaches, a fully integrated Multilogue design (C) allows non-Higher Education stakeholders to participate and be involved over the long-term. During the preparatory and follow-up phases of one or even multiple multilogues, there is extensive opportunity for collaboration between students, educators, interested parties, and other stakeholders – both inside and outside of higher education.

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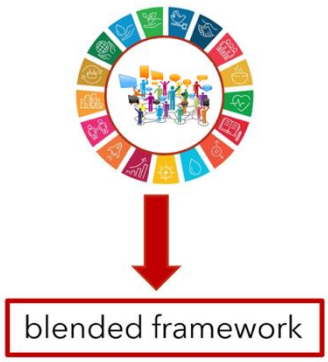
ANNEX 4

The Digital Aspects of multilogues in Higher Education

The Covid-19 Pandemic has accelerated the digital transformation at all levels of work and education. Among the challenges exacerbated by the pandemic were the issues associated with adapting education systems to the digital age, including supporting the digitalization of education and training. These challenges have been met by a variety of policy initiatives. For instance, at the EU level, the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) adopted on 30 September 2020 calls for greater collaboration in digital education to address the challenges and opportunities posed by the COVID-19 pandemic[1]. It provides educational and training opportunities for teachers, students, policymakers, academics, and researchers across national, EU, and international boundaries. We propose multilogues as an educational and interactive format that follows this logical progression. In addition to the innovation of connecting the multilogue to a Higher Education context, we are thus breaking new **ground by moving it into a blended setting, in order to enhance transformation and innovation in HE by forging transnational and transdisciplinary spaces of knowledge creation** to address urgent societal challenges, such as sustainable development, ecological transformation, or justice and equality as laid out in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations[2].



Digital implementations of Multilogues in Higher Education would fall into one of the following categories: **Hybrid learning,** where some individuals participate in person and some participate online. Instructors and facilitators teach remote and in-person learners at the same time using technology like video conferencing whereas **Blended learning, in the narrow sense of the term,** describes the combination of in-person instruction with online learning activities. Learners complete some components online and do others in person.

[1] https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/action-plan
[2] https://sdgs.un.org/goals

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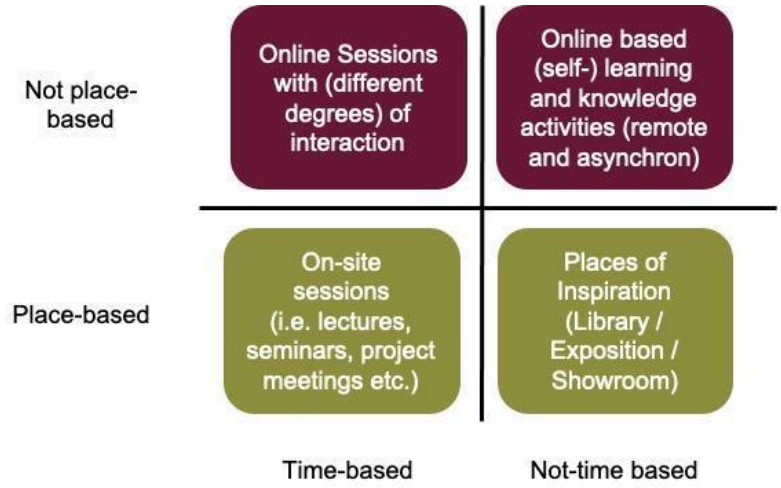
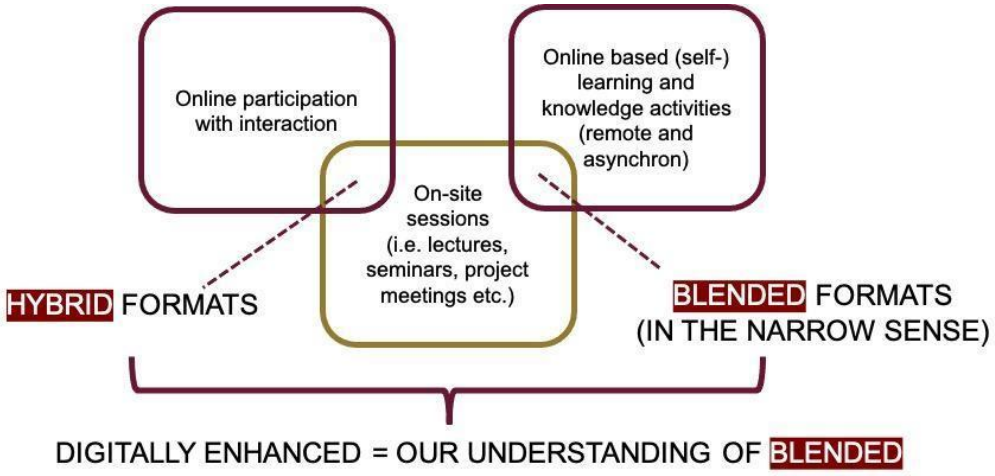


Both types of learning involve a mix of in-person and online learning, but the who differs in the two scenarios. With hybrid learning, the in-person learners and the online learners are *different* individuals. With blended learning, the *same* individuals learn both in person and online. Given the immense opportunities for stakeholder involvement of both blended and hybrid learning elements, we will use a broad understanding of the term using blended learning as an umbrella term for digitally enhanced formats:



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ANNEX 5

Multilogues in Action: Review of the first LTT-Event on Multilogues in HE

At the centre of the first Learning, Teaching, Training event of our project was a two-day Hackathon event which was held in a hybrid format in September 2022 with the on-site activities taking place at the Newman Institute in Uppsala, Sweden. In addition to the core participants on-site students and teachers from the partner universities were able to partake digitally.

Students' associations of "What could a 'Multilogue' be? (Word cloud generated by Mentimeter)

Focus of the event was the conception of a Multilogue with consideration of the technical, didactical and ethical challenges based on a previously and commonly agreed upon theme. Students and teachers alike elaborated a Multilogue concept in a total of four different individual groups, partially in a hybrid setting due to online participants joining some groups.

The Hackathon groups pursed different approaches of integrating a Multilogue on a specific topic in Higher Education, which are briefly presented below:

- A: Mental Well-being
- B: Woman in Tech
- D: Gender
- D: Freedom of Thought

A: Mental Well-being

Team A addresses the issue of mental well-being of University students and coping with anxiety. The main idea underlying the usage of this Multilogue is to share experiences, distribute knowledge and provide a platform for mutual support for the participating students.

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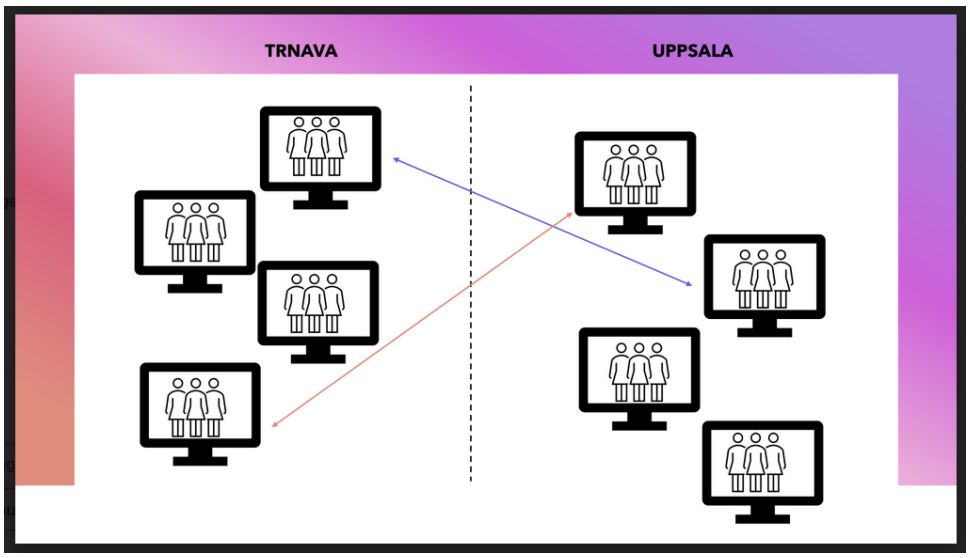
In small groups of five people each, students can discuss a previously defined topic on mental health in a protected environment. The students' interaction is sought to take place online and from two physical settings by giving 2-3 participants per site the opportunity to share a screen. Thus, all groups are interacting in a hybrid format while having on-site communication simultaneously.



According to the Multilogues topic, the group focuses on the well-being aspect of the participants both on the didactical as well as technical requirements for instance by considering the group composition and an app suitable for a safe environment to shuffle the groups.

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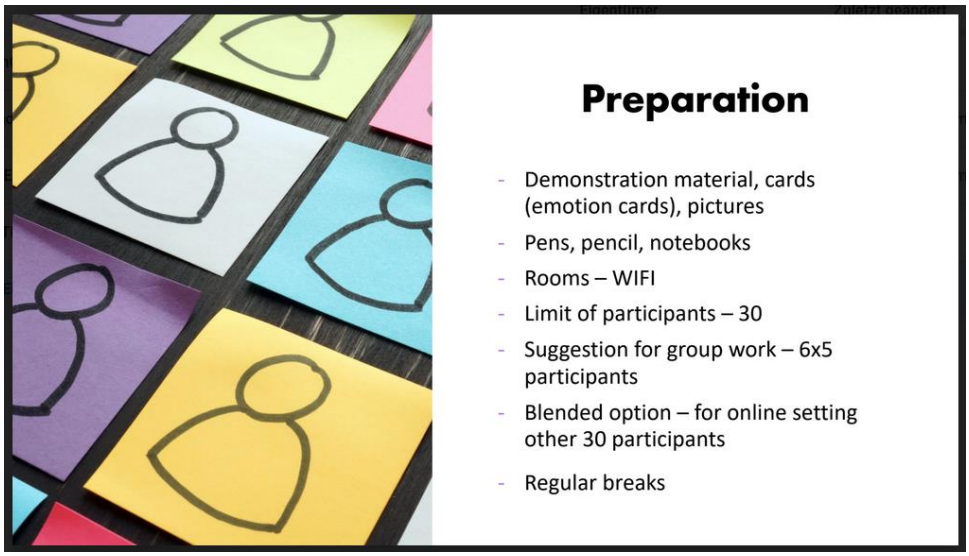

(Source: pdf well-being group)

B: Women in Tech:

The concept of the women in tech- group is aimed at building an international infrastructure of diverse stakeholders to develop measures in order to increase retention of women in global tech companies. One main goal is to connect diverse stakeholder, such as academic institutions, women working in the field of technology in general, women networks and government institutions by using existing global networks and infrastructure of universities. The latter are considered to serve as international contact points and function as regional project management offices by providing regional ambassadors. Based on the extent of all involved stakeholders and the international approach, regional Multilogues for online discussions are supposed to take place.

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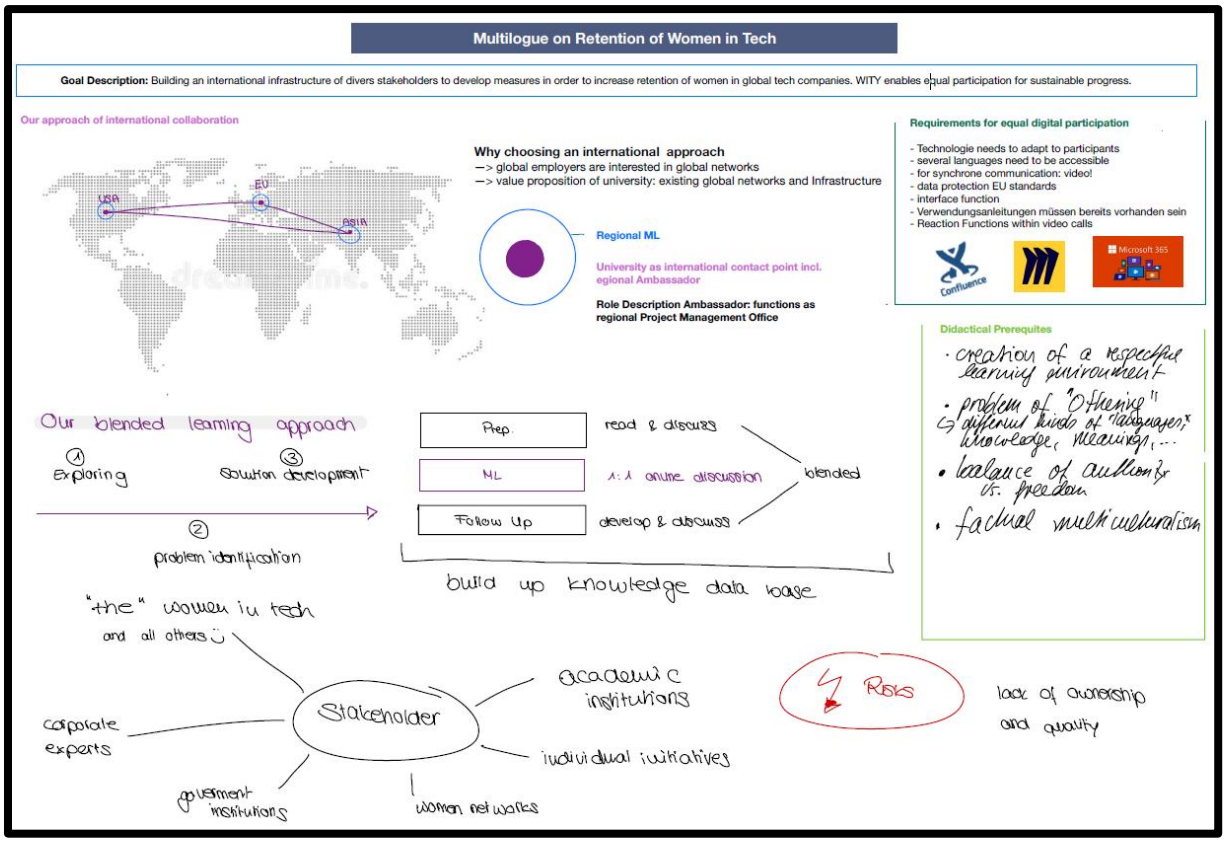

Source: Women in tech pdf

C: Gender:

The 'Gender' group addresses the question of how spatial infrastructures reflect gender policies. They seek to integrate multilogues on a gender topic in a seminar context within the framework of a cross-seminar cooperation between two or more universities. The implementation was designed for a semester-long period with three seminar blocks in a blended learning format. The simultaneous holding of the same seminar at the participating universities is supplemented by several online exchanges during the seminar between the universities.

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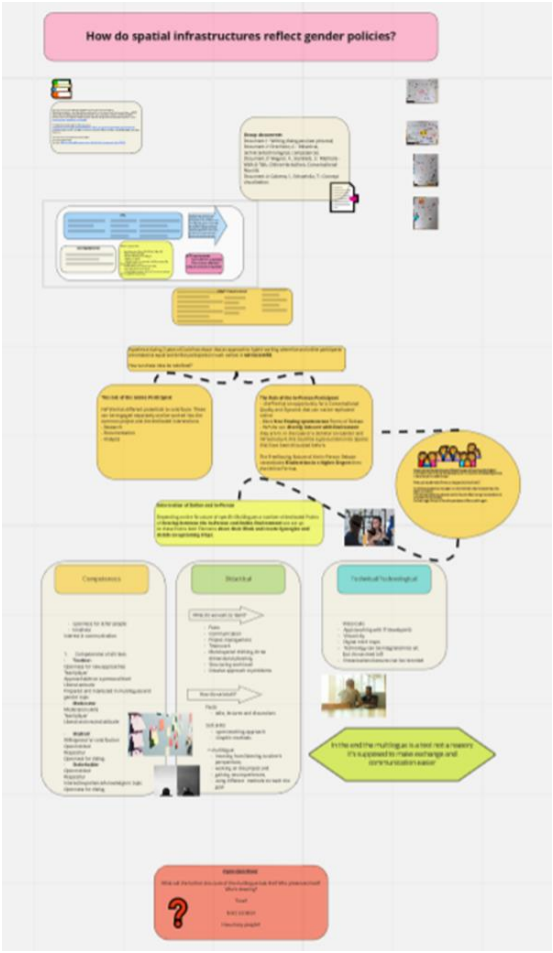

As the multilogue is at the heart of the learning format, among other things, the seminar preparation, seminar procedure and ECTS requirements were considered in detail. The Gender-Group highlighted both the importance and necessity of diverse roles of all participants ranging from students to teacher to other involved stakeholders.

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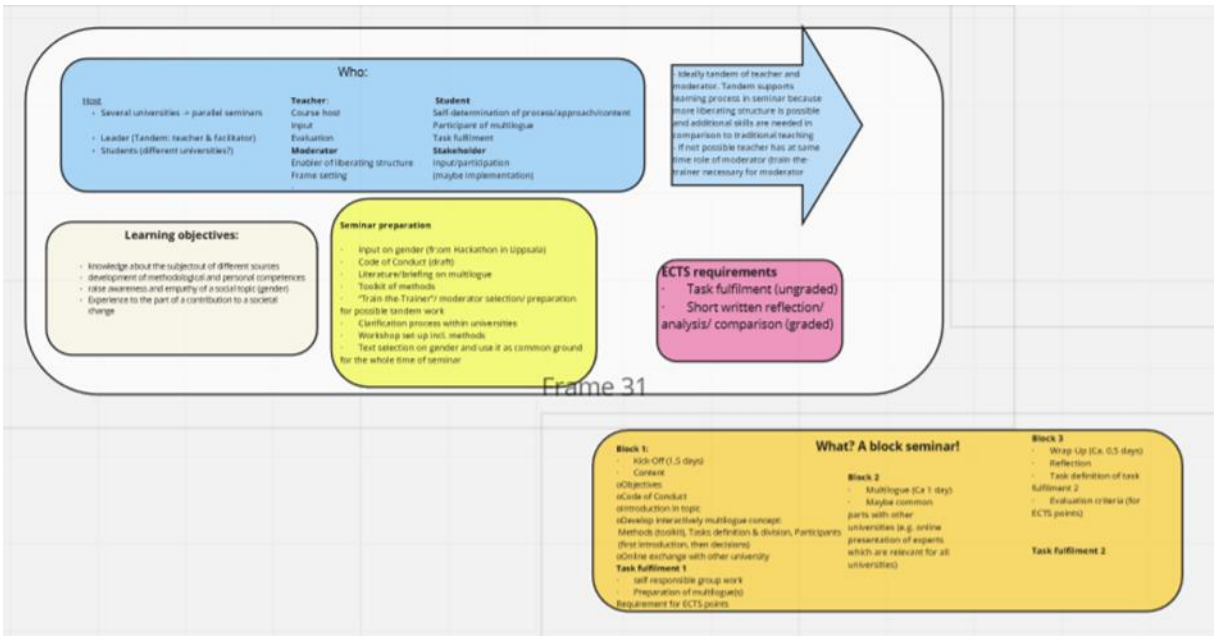
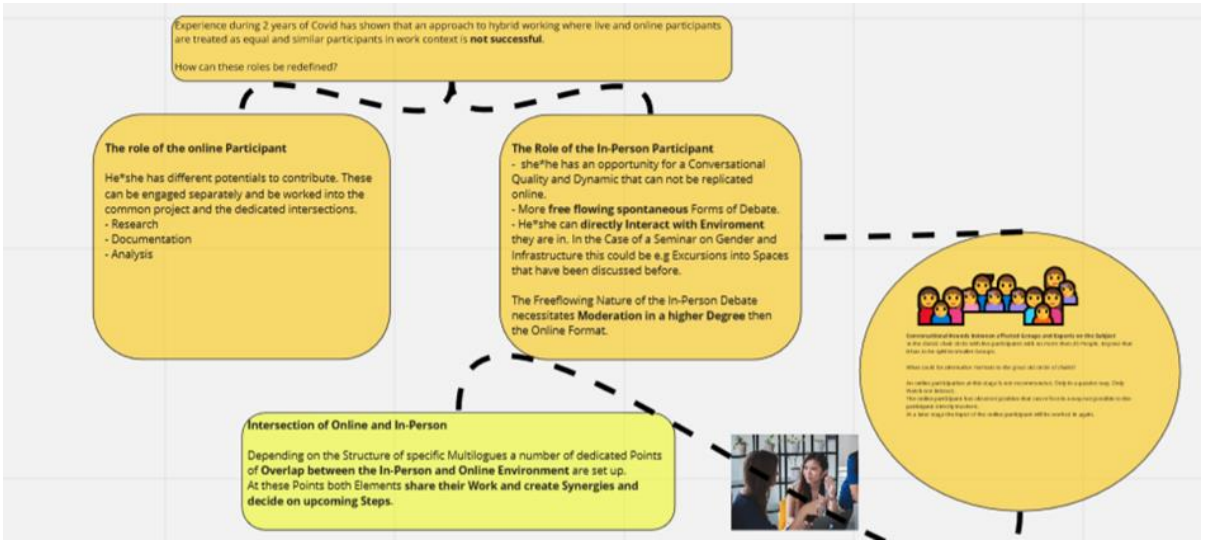


Each individual role identified for a seminar with an integrated multilogue was designed different responsibilities (such as evaluation of the students and input (teacher), being self-determined with regards to process, approach and content (students) and competencies, for instance being open-minded, approachable on a personal level, liberal attitude and respectful behaviour. Furthermore, the 'Gender-Group' acknowledged the need for an additional moderator working in a tandem in cooperation with the teacher to ensure a liberating structure and neutral attitude. In the event that a moderator cannot be provided, the teacher needs to be aware of his/her dual role and be specifically trained for moderation tasks if required.



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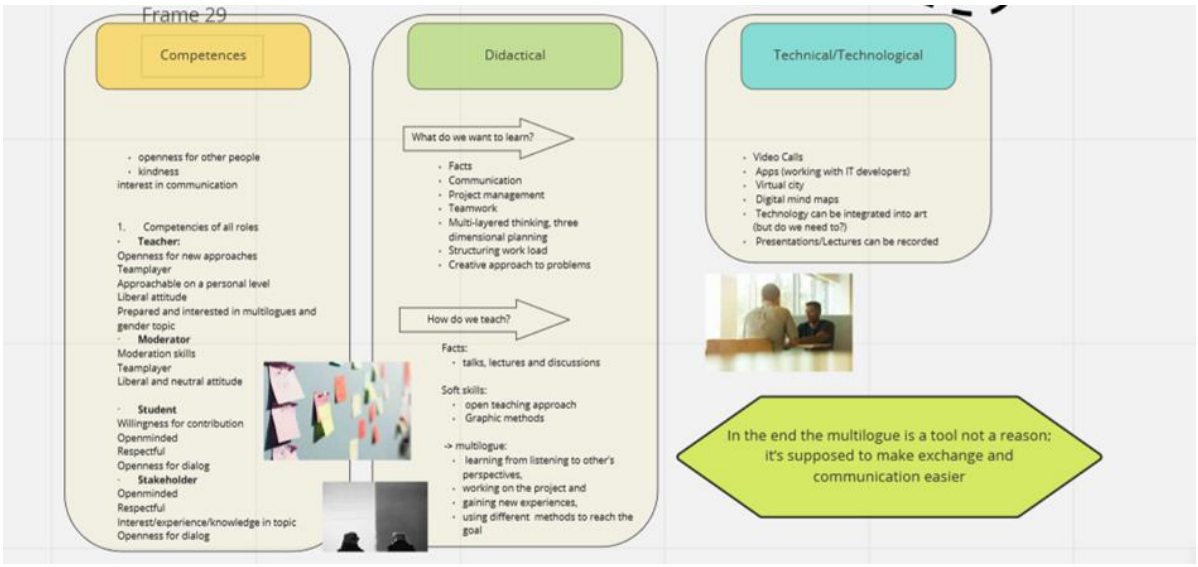
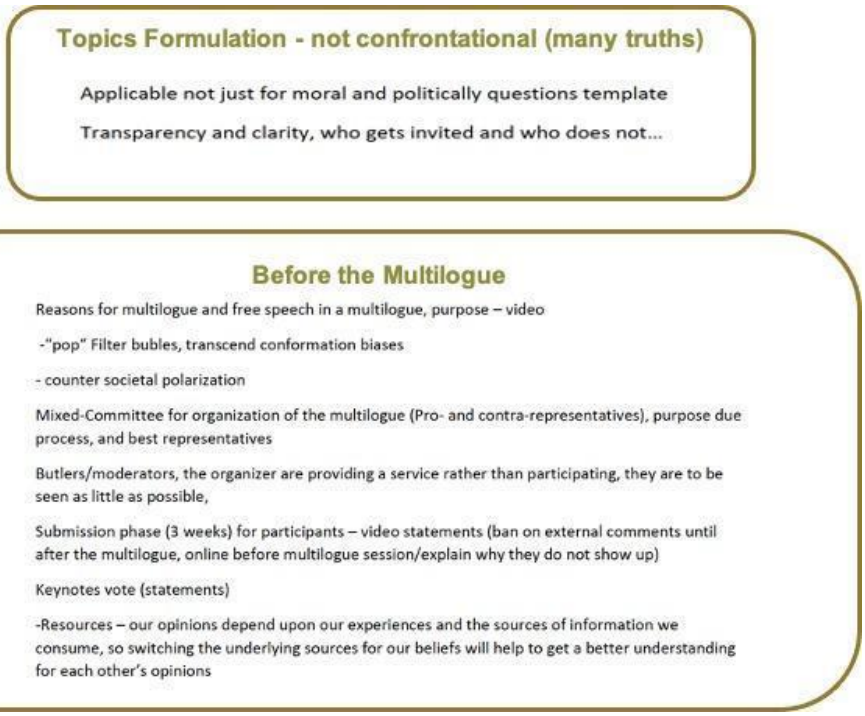


D: Freedom of Thought

The Freedom of Thought-Group developed a script for the implementation of a multilogue, describing the phase before, during and after the actual Multilogue. They placed made suggestions for specific activities, rules and settings within the framework of an Multilogue session that would, among other things, contribute to non-violent communication, a positive feedback culture and the participants' ability to reflect:



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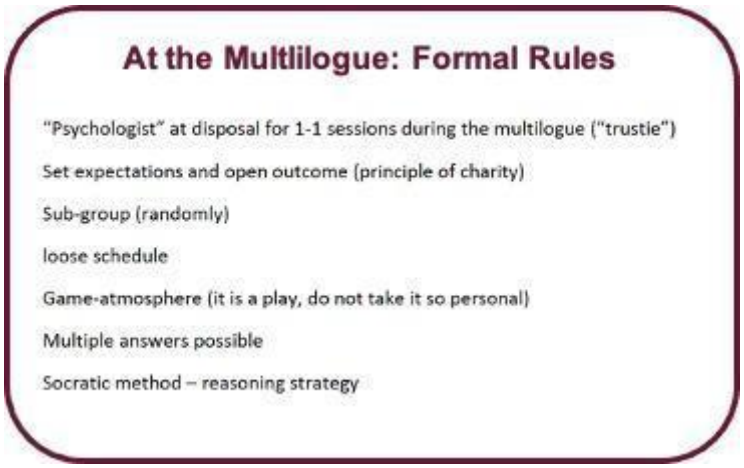

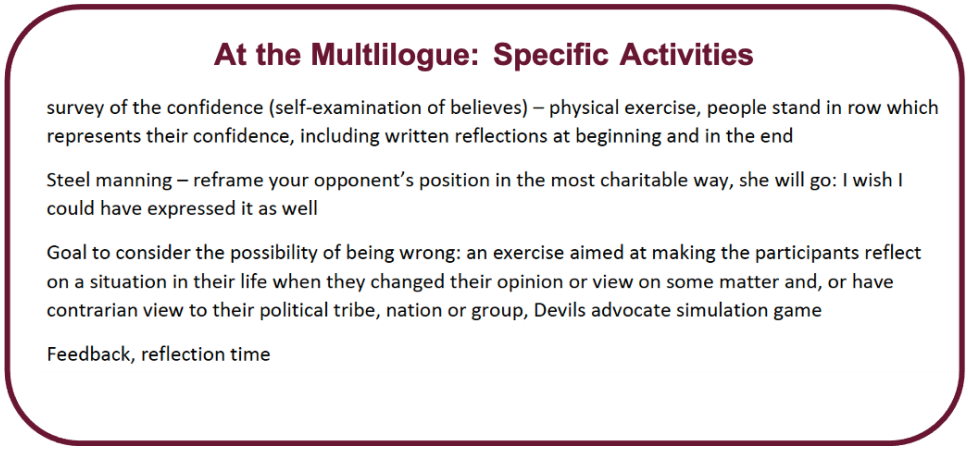

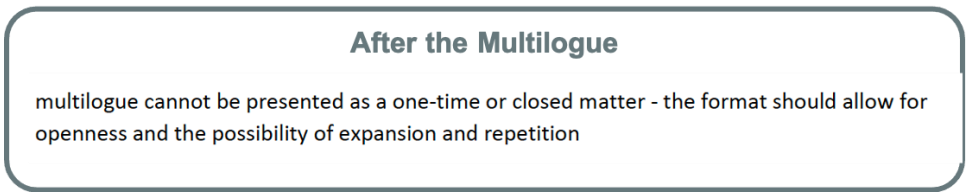

Interestingly, this is the third out of four groups that placed importance on the involvement of an additional person in the form of a facilitator to ensure a neutral stance of the application of a multilogue, albeit such a role was never mentioned by the Hackathon teachers in advance.

Concluding Thoughts:

The hackathon groups different understandings and approaches to integrating a multilogue in the context of higher education illustrate the complexity of the challenges to be overcome and addressed in the development of the toolkit.

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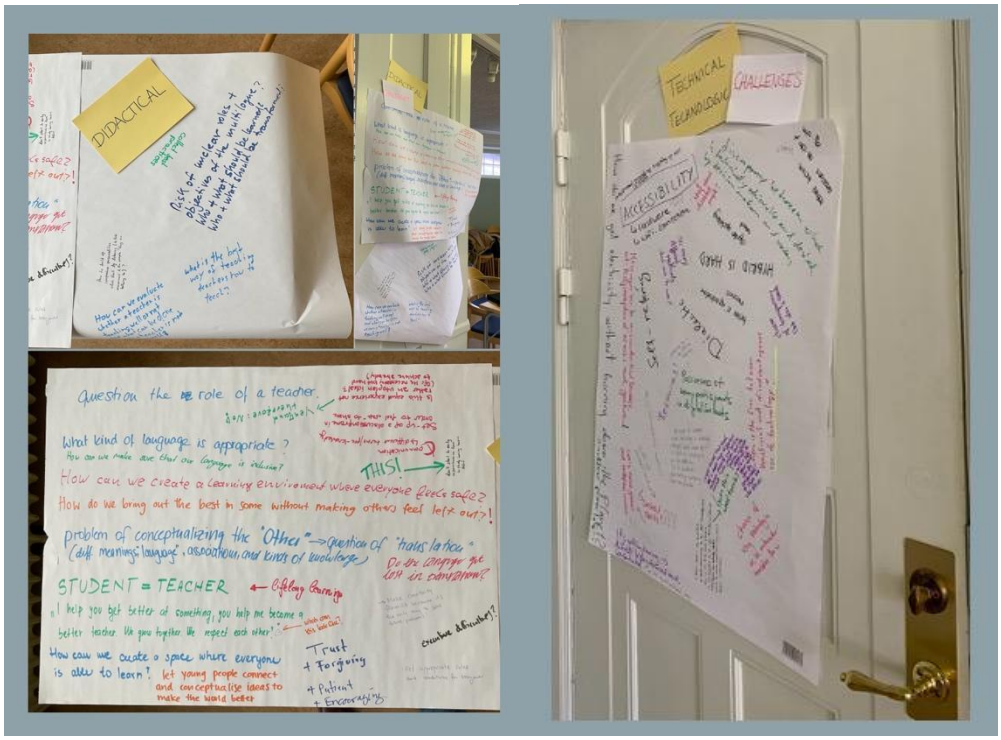
One of the strongest results of the LTT was thus a multi-perspective (of course) collection of challenges and topics to be addressed when designing a Multilogue. Somewhat predictable were the challenges pertaining to a thorough and common understanding of questions related to the Multilogue design (Which objectives and learning outcomes will be achieved? How should we choose the teaching and learning methods?) and challenges relating to the technical aspects of the digitally enhanced implementation of Multilogues (Which tools? Which resources?).



One aspect that garnered particular attention – which was somewhat unforeseen or at least underestimated in its relevance to the participants – was the focus on questions of ethical behaviour and interaction.

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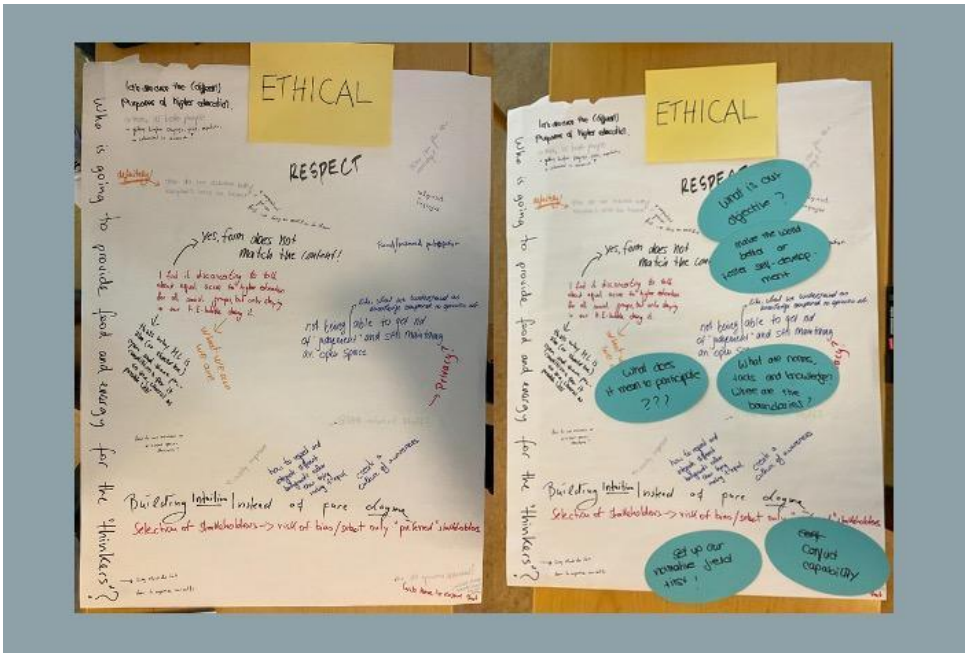

This train of thoughts lead to the development of a code of conduct, i.e. a set of rules or negotiated behavioural norms aimed at guiding the interaction taking place within the Multilogue.

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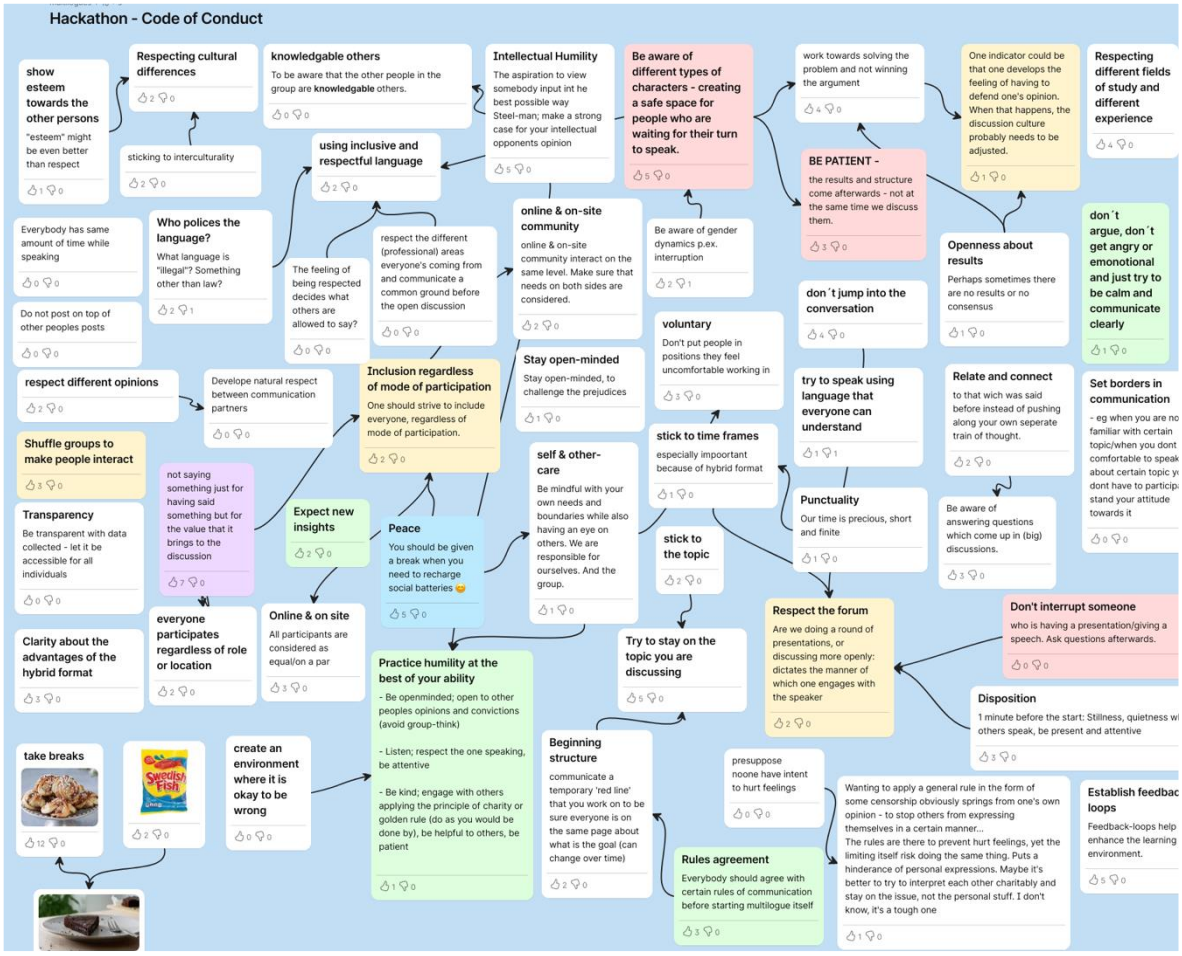

One key takeaway for the project would thus be, that in addition to the design-related aspects and the technical challenges of interaction, educators should also devote a significant section to non-technical challenges such as communication, ethics, equity and discrimination (e. g. racism, ableism, homophobia, status-related gaps, etc.) when designing a multlilogue. Communication across perspectives, diversities, and experiences is indeed characteristic of and inherent to this learning format. As the co-creators of a safe and collaborative environment, the students play a crucial role in these processes.

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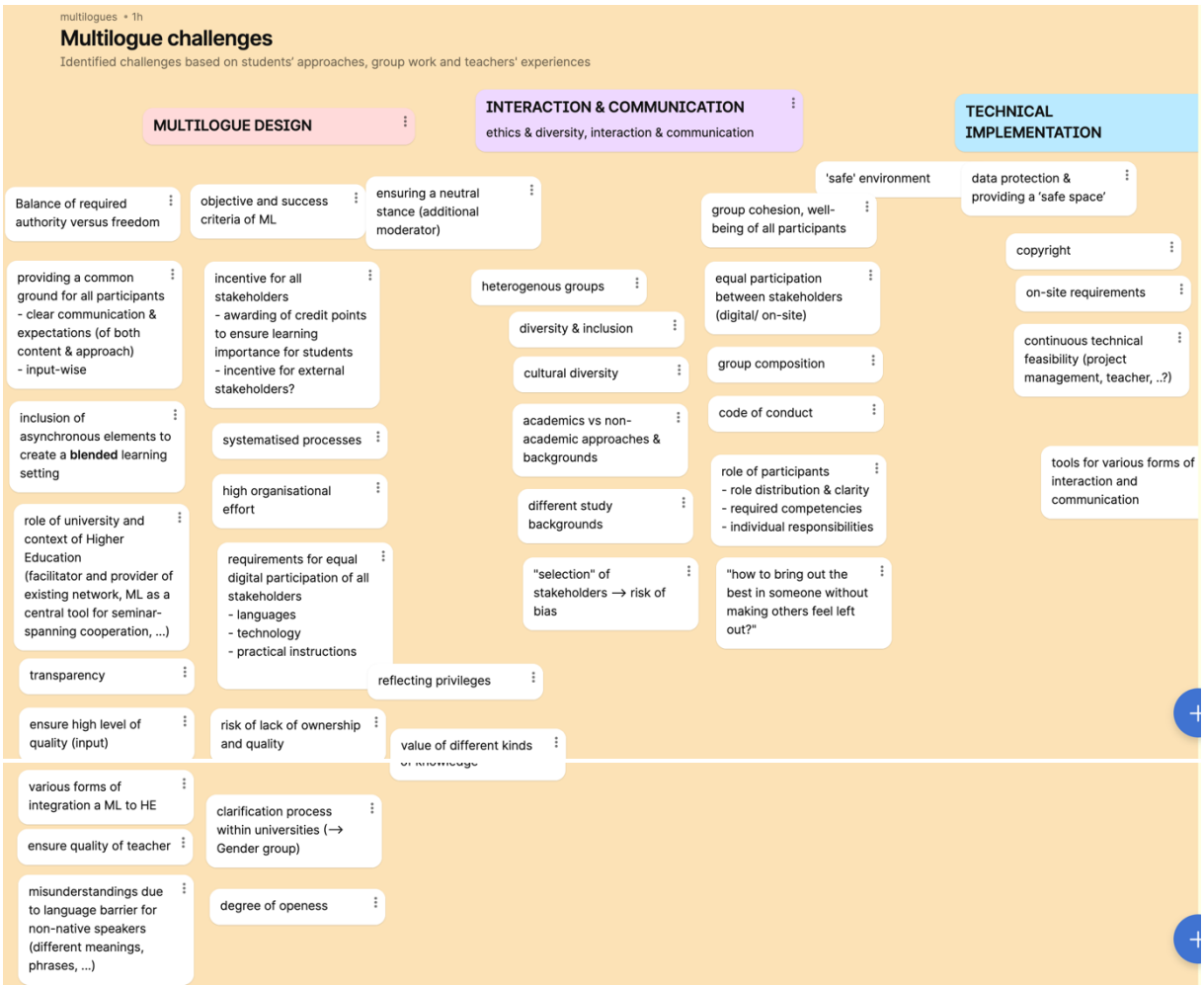

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