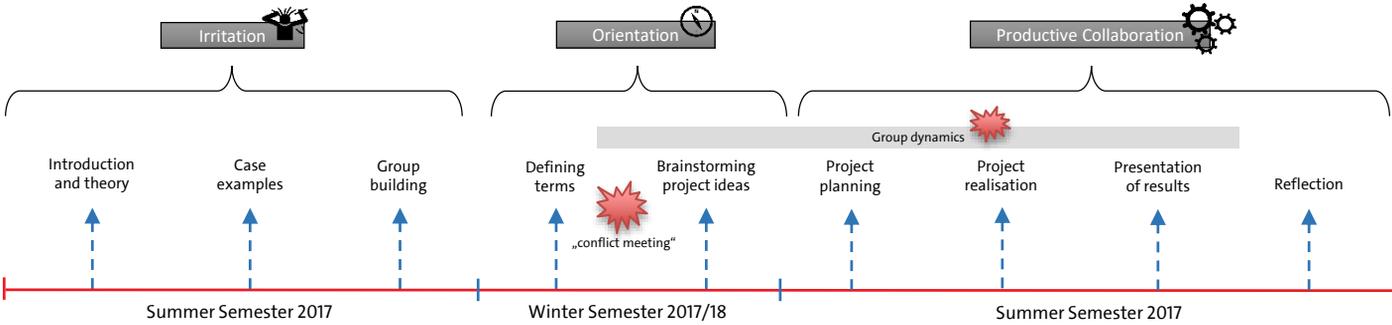


# Community-oriented Research-based Learning as Teaching Approach for Inclusion in Higher Education

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**Setting:**

During three semesters we were teaching and researching in a **project seminar** which addressed the topic *forced displacement and migration* in the study program *educational science*. The project seminars work under the slogan *University and its social responsibility*. They are part of a reform process that is led by students who are struggling against the universities' growing formalisation and market orientation. In class the lecturers followed a radically **open and discursive approach**. Topics and working methods were negotiated in a collaborative process by the group. After intense discussions **inclusion** became an important key word and a focal point in the examination of the topic **forced displacement and migration**. With this thematic focus students developed (research) projects which were designed without any content-wise or formal restrictions. It turned out that most students followed an interview approach in order to sharpen the term *inclusion* by interrogating scientists, students, pedagogical professionals and others. Results were that there is no distinct understanding of inclusion. It is framed either as a broad or a narrow concept (inclusion of all people vs. inclusion of people with disabilities).



**Definition:**

We understand inclusion as “a process that helps overcome barriers limiting the presence, participation and achievement of learners” (UNESCO 2017, p. 13).

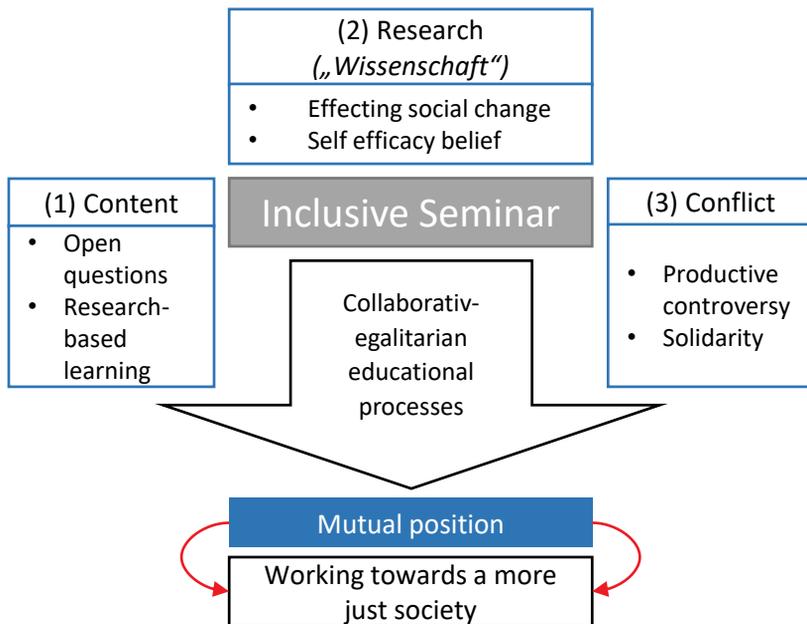
**Method:**

The course was examined using an ethnographic approach (participant observation, interviews and document analysis) in order to create a “thick description” (Geertz 1973).

**Assumptions:**

Working towards an inclusive society is a pedagogical task. In the context of Higher Education, this can only be achieved if the form and content of lectures are inclusive. In our opinion, three components are necessary:

- (1) openness in terms of the content (in the form of common questions) leading to a process of mutual research-based learning
- (2) opportunities for productive controversy and the ability/willingness to deal with conflicts (in a group that is characterized by solidarity)
- (3) an understanding that research should and can have a (positive) effect on society (and vice versa)



*Inclusion as the educational process of „learning to be together“*

**Analysis:**

**Reg. 1** Research-based learning gives a central place to students' investigative work, i.e. addressing their own questions and solving problems (Aditomo et al. 2013).

In the project seminar, the topic of "inclusion" was negotiated as a in an open debate. In the beginning, inclusion was seen as an alternative to integration, but later rather as its extension. Students conducted research projects on the topic.

**Reg. 2** Action research (Lewin 1948) or Community-based research (Strand et al. 2015) aim towards social change *through* research by involving community-members in the process. As the overall goal, we consider the overcoming of exploitation, oppression and social inequality.

All student groups came to the conclusion that they initially needed an understanding of what is meant by inclusion and that this understanding must be developed together with actors from science and practice.

**Reg. 3** Conflict is a necessary step towards inclusion. We understand conflict following Habermas' notion of "competition for the better argument" (1981) as a debate seriously pursuing a (common) concern. Trust and equality are required for this.

In the project study, there was a very important meeting, the so-called "conflict meeting", during which different positions on the seminar concept and content were openly expressed and clashed. It was only through this conflict that we were able to work out what the common concern was and reach a higher level in our work.

**Conclusion:**

Inclusion in teaching consists in the facilitation of cooperative-egalitarian educational processes with the aim to develop a mutual position and the perspective to overcome injustice.