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Sweden – South Africa virtual exchange in PhD education: Emerging research in science and technology education

The challenges of our time require that universities make science and technology education for sustainable development (STESD) and Global Citizenship Education (GCED) an integral part of their education programs (Rocksén et. al.), including doctoral education. Integrating global perspectives and experiences into doctoral education is crucial in equipping scholars to address contemporary challenges and contribute meaningfully to global sustainable development (Doyle, 2013).

The Virtual Exchange Program is part of a collaboration project among a group of senior researchers from University of Witwatersrand, University of Limpopo and North West University in South Africa (SA), and University of Gothenburg and Karlstad University in Sweden. The overarching purpose was to provide opportunities for young researchers to present and discuss research interests and questions regarding sustainable development, its significance for future education, and establish international contacts with support from senior researchers. Five senior researchers and eight post-graduate students and one post-doc were engaged in a Virtual Exchange Program during 2023, which consisted of a series of on-line seminars focused on both different aspects related to the students' own work, and selected readings. During the seminars students compared and discussed similarities and differences on how sustainability challenges are addressed in the two countries, and shared, gave feedback and discussed their work. Additional to the virtual meetings, physical exchange activities were conducted the second half of 2023, included the group from SA visited Gothenburg University and the group from Sweden visited universities in SA.

At the end of the Virtual Exchange Program, the program was evaluated by the participating PhD students.

Students working in mixed pairs representing both countries, discussed and elaborated on open questions about their experiences from the Virtual Exchange Program. The written responses were categorized in the following key themes: 1) Collaboration and networking, 2) Exposure to diversity and different perspectives, 3) Communication and presentation skills development, 4) Assessment and feedback, 5) Enjoyment and social interaction, 6) Global perspectives and personal growth, 7) Cultural and academic development. It is clear that engaging the PhD students in the Virtual Exchange Program project contributed valuable insights about knowledge and scholarship in different higher education systems. The experiences highlight the great potential in taking part of a diversity of ideas and perspectives by engaging with the knowledge and academic values from other cultures, which a program like this may facilitate.

References:

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