

Chapter 7

Feminist Collaboration

Feminist Collaboration: A Conversation

Brigitta (Britt) M. Abel

Macalester College

Brigitta (Britt) Abel is Associate Professor of German Studies and Director of Writing at Macalester College (St Paul, MN), which sits on the ancestral homeland of the Dakota people. She is a lead author and co-project director of *Grenzenlos Deutsch*, an open access, collaboratively produced online curriculum for beginning German, which is funded in part through a digital humanities advancement grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. Relevant publications include: “Activism and Academia” [*Women in German Yearbook*, vol. 30, 2014, pp. 186–96] and a co-authored piece on feminist collaboration, “Grenzenlos Deutsch: Co-Creating Open Educational Resources through Feminist Collaboration” [Abel, Brigetta M., Erika Berroth, Angineh Djavadghazaryans, Maureen O. Gallagher, Adam R. King, Karolina May-Chu, Simone Pfleger, Faye Stewart, and Amy Young. *Feminist German Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2020, pp. 1–23].

There were things I loved about graduate school: being surrounded by people who felt passionately about the things that I also cared about; great discussions about texts and life and teaching; hours of reading and re-reading, writing and re-writing; Friday knitting and beer with a circle of friends; getting involved in the Coalition of Women in German (WiG) and finding a place there, complete with long hours of typing articles for the WiG newsletters in the early days of computers; working

with wonderful professors, most particularly Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, who spent hours talking with me about my work.

At the same time, I think we all knew that some things weren't so great about grad school: earning poverty wages with no hope of saving money or building a safety net for ourselves; the uncertain job market and not knowing what will happen next; the feeling of powerlessness that many of us experienced; the pressure to prove ourselves, again and again, and the many hoops we had to jump through in order to do that—and the imposter syndrome that many of us faced while jumping through those hoops. Indeed, while the work itself and the people with whom I worked were the best parts of grad school, the context in which we worked and labored together was structurally less than ideal.

When I look back now, I think my biggest regret involves the way in which that context undermined what I loved the most about grad school. I was finally surrounded by people with whom I had so much in common and whom I liked and respected enormously. Yet the pressure to prove ourselves often seemed to mean that we had to prove ourselves at the expense of others. My graduate student colleagues and I were competing for the same funding and the same research and teaching opportunities; we were competing for time with our professors and for ways of demonstrating that we really did belong where we were; at times, we were competing for the same jobs in a cutthroat market. In the midst of all this, we built friendships and we worked together, yet always with the underlying tensions of the academic context. Not every relationship I had was tinged with underlying competition and tension, but it was hard to subvert the trap that graduate school, with its hierarchies and power structures, laid out for us. Where was collaboration in this model? Was it even possible? Only a few moments of my early academic career allowed me to explore collective work, either by doing it myself or by witnessing its potential.

One of my models for collaboration during my graduate-student years came from my work with *Signs: The Journal of Women in Culture and Society*. When Ruth-Ellen and Barbara Laslett were editors of the journal at the University of Minnesota, I worked as the editorial assistant for a year and had the opportunity to witness how each issue of the journal came into being. I attended the monthly editorial board meetings and had the daunting task of taking detailed minutes of the board's discussion of submitted articles. Sitting in a room with the best feminist minds on campus was an amazing experience, as was listening to the discussion about each article. But even more powerful was the

experience of seeing how this group of faculty worked together. Yes, there were disagreements, but the consensus model of making decisions was powerful, as were the ways in which Ruth-Ellen and Barbara guided the conversations, listened to others, and helped ensure that each article was discussed fairly. While these meetings constituted a step in the gate-keeping that is so prevalent in academia, Ruth-Ellen and Barbara made certain that every voice in the room was heard and valued, that articles were evaluated critically and based on their merit. As I documented these meetings, I witnessed the potential of this type of feminist, collaborative environment and the fruits that such an environment could bear.

A few years later, while I was writing my dissertation, Ruth-Ellen built a similar feminist, collaborative space, this time for scholars at the beginning of their careers. She had several advisees writing dissertations at the same time, and she proposed that we meet monthly and discuss our work. Ruth-Ellen convened the group, but we functioned as a collective: we took turns sharing and discussing our dissertation chapter drafts with one another, and while the general structure of the work was similar to what I had seen during those *Signs* board meetings, the meetings had a different tone that reflected the purpose of the sessions. We were there to support each other, after all, and there were none of the hierarchical ranks that pervade most academic gatherings. If I thought the *Signs* meetings held feminist potential, these meetings represented even more of the feminist collaborative spirit that I had craved throughout my graduate career.

I remember these sessions so fondly. We would convene at Ruth-Ellen's house, chat and catch up, share stories, laugh, and then get to work discussing a selection from one or two dissertations-in-progress. Now, I don't know how other students felt about these meetings, but in my mind, they stood out as one of the best times of graduate school. We were isolated as we wrote our dissertations. Finding a structure for that writing was hard, and I struggled, more than I ever had in my academic life. But these meetings gave me a sense of audience; after all, these were the people for whom I was writing. More than that, the collaborative space that opened up to me was unlike any I had experienced in grad school before. Maybe it made a difference that we met off-campus. Maybe it made a difference that we were all ABD (all but dissertation) and had negotiated all the academic steps except this last one. Maybe it made a difference that we were all just doing our best to write, write, write. But what clearly made a difference is the way in which Ruth-Ellen created this space and welcomed us all into it by

fostering a truly collaborative and supportive spirit. I felt fortunate to be working with Ruth-Ellen throughout my academic career. Yet of all the ways in which she supported me and her other advisees, this initiative felt like the most significant one to me.



FIGURE 7.1

Twenty years later, I still think of that collaboration and of its possibilities. That experience shaped the work I do now and how I do it. I'm no longer a graduate student, and I've had my "duh!" moment in realizing that it's not just graduate school that discourages collaborative work. True collaboration is just as, if not more, difficult for a professor as it is for a student, particularly given how the neoliberal university functions for faculty in the humanities. Collaborative work is often not recognized in the tenure and promotion process and finding both time and space to collaborate is a continual challenge given the ever-present quandary of too many things to do. The busy-ness of our lives pushes us apart in much the same way the competition for resources did in graduate school. And yet, I still thrive when I work with other like-minded people—in fact, the most significant work of my academic career has been done collectively.

I am currently working on a collaboratively conceived and produced project: an open-access, online, first-year German curriculum that aims to build inclusivity and accessibility into the language-learning process. Born out of growing frustration with traditional textbooks for beginning German, *Grenzenlos Deutsch (GD)*; <https://grenzenlos->

deutsch.com) seeks to provide materials that reflect the lives and realities of our students today, including a nuanced examination of gender and the ways in which it functions in the German language as well as topics such as sustainability and social justice, all with interactive activities and authentic content.

A feminist collaborative process distinguishes the creation of *Grenzenlos Deutsch*. The project was conceived in a colleague's personal Facebook rant about sexism and the lack of gender and racial diversity in first-year German textbooks¹; the discussion on my colleague's wall quickly progressed to a proposal for an open-access textbook that would not only be constructed around inclusive content but would also be available online for free, thus building accessibility for instructors and students alike. The two project directors, Dr. Amy Young and I, knew that multiple voices were necessary for building an inclusive curriculum; we also felt the need to work collaboratively on a project such as this. How could we achieve our goal of diversity and inclusion without a diverse set of voices contributing to the project? We sent out a call for participants and were overwhelmed by the number of responses we received. The result is our Collaborative Working Group of ten authors and twelve editors for the *GD* team. When we received a digital advancement grant from the National Endowment of the Humanities in August 2017, we were able to bring the entire team of authors to Vienna² for four weeks to gather content and to author the material. During this time, we learned how to use the technology tools for authoring our online materials and made many of the decisions that shaped the curriculum. While we already had a general outline of topics and structure for the materials, we built in enough flexibility so that our

1 Special thank you to Dr. Brenda Bethman, Associate Teaching Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Director of the University of Missouri Kansas City's Women's Center, for her post and the discussion that it fostered. While Brenda was unable to participate in the *Grenzenlos Deutsch* project herself, her observations and comments came at just the right moment to initiate the project.

2 "Why Vienna?" is a question I hear frequently. During the first two phases of content collection, collaborators traveled to Germany and Austria to record interviews, take photos, and gather the material we would need to author such a curriculum. This larger, third phase of the project took place in Vienna for both ideological and practical reasons. One of the goals of the curriculum is to de-center notions of Germanness and the Germanocentrism of many textbooks, so establishing Vienna as a home base made sense. At the same time, because Central College, Amy Young's home institution, ran a study-away program in Vienna, we were able to rent their suite of offices at the University of Vienna for our use during the entire month of July. This practical consideration made the decision about location easy for us project directors.

entire group could make decisions together about how we envisioned the curriculum and how best to make that vision a reality.

For many of us, that intense workshop time in Vienna was foundational to our *GD* project work—it shaped both the product, the *GD* curriculum, as well as the process for creating the product. As you will read below in a conversation with several of my collaborators, many of us looked back on that germinal time fondly, particularly because of the collaborative space that opened up for us and how that time and space has shaped the way we work together now. Since that summer in 2018, our project has been collectively and collaboratively run. While Amy and I, as co-PIs for the grant, take care of details, the bigger decisions—about how to continue our authoring, how to make small and large revisions to the curriculum, and where we want to go next—are all based on consensus of the larger group. We have extended this collaboration to include jointly written articles³ and conference presentations, as well as working-group meetings to support each other's progress on this—and other—projects.

I couldn't imagine talking about feminist collaboration without the voices of my collaborators. In what follows, several of my collaborators responded in writing to questions about their involvement in *Grenzenlos Deutsch*, about how they define feminist collaboration, and about which moments of our work together particularly exemplified that definition. I sent out a call to the entire *Grenzenlos Deutsch* authorial and editorial board⁴ asking for participation in this essay, and five members were able to contribute at the time I wrote this essay. Their contributions were made individually, and I have woven them together—along with my own responses—to create an asynchronous conversation. I am grateful to the whole *Grenzenlos Deutsch* team for our work together and for the inspiration each member has provided to me. I wish in particular to thank Amy Young (Central College), Tessa

³ See, for example, Abel et. al. and Young et. al.

⁴ The entire *GD* team consists of: Brigetta M. Abel, Erika Berroth, Angineh Djavadghazaryans, Maureen Gallagher, Ron Joslin, Adam King, Karolina May-Chu, Isolde Mueller, Simone Pflieger, Elizabeth Schreiber-Byers, Faye Stewart, Louann Terveer, Tessa Wegener, and Amy Young.

Note that I list names here in alphabetical order, while the names that follow in the main text are listed in reverse alphabetical order. How we attribute our collective work has led to numerous conversations about pushing against the conventions that dictate name order, debates about the pros and cons of using a collective team name, and suggestions for supporting the most precarious of our team members.

Wegener (Middlebury College Language Schools), Simone Pflieger (University of Alberta), Maureen Gallagher (Australian National University), and Angineh Djavadghazaryans (Oakland University) for the time they spent responding to my questions for this essay.



BRITT: *What made you decide to join the Grenzenlos Deutsch collective?*

MAUREEN: A desire to smash the patriarchy! But, seriously, it was mostly borne of a frustration with the books that exist and a desire to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, or part of the great masses of people who complain but don't take action. I know that some advocate for teaching against the textbook, but I don't think that's compatible with the extortionate cost of many first-year language textbooks from commercial publishers. How can we ask students to pay hundreds of dollars for textbook purchases or rentals that contain unacceptable sexism, misogyny, xenophobia, ethnonationalism, racism, and heterosexism? I was inspired by the almost utopian vision of *Grenzenlos Deutsch* in offering curricular materials with more diversity, representation, and accessibility, available at no cost to teachers and students.

SIMONE: My decision to join *GD* was influenced by my own teaching experiences as both an instructor and a PhD student in a traditional German studies department. Having taught with three different textbooks over the course of eight years, I had grown increasingly frustrated not only with the kinds of identities and bodies typically represented and how these images often shape our students' perception not only of German language and culture, but also how they marginalize, trivialize, and even silence those identities that are illegible according to the hegemonic standards imposed on subjects in contemporary society. Since I am sensitive to issues of diversity and inclusiveness, and I attempt to create a classroom atmosphere that assures mutual respect, by joining *GD* I saw a chance to help develop materials that foster a more diverse and inclusive approach to language learning and provide students

not only with an awareness about diversity in the German-speaking world, but also with vocabulary that they might find useful in their personal and professional lives.

TESSA: As soon as I heard about this project, I was intrigued, because it spoke to me on multiple levels. I saw this as an opportunity to create something entirely new for our discipline, to be part of a feminist collaborative initiative, and to develop a radical alternative to existing textbooks on the market. The idea of creating an open access German curriculum was very exciting to me; throughout my graduate career at Georgetown, I had been engaged in curriculum development and reform. I was therefore very eager to be part of this innovative project. Not only would it be a new challenge and learning experience for me, but it would also—more importantly—completely change the textbook landscape in German studies.

BRITT: I'm glad Tessa mentioned the process here as well. I think many, if not all, of us were drawn to the idea of *fixing* the problem that we saw in traditional textbooks. That continues to be true, but I think many of us now value the process as well as the product, the sense of working in a collective to create a product we can be proud of.

TESSA: Aside from the digital format and accessibility, I was drawn to the idea of what the collective was seeking to achieve with its content. This project, for me, is a form of activism; it seeks to present a more inclusive approach to *doing* German studies. It challenges past models of (heteronormative, racist, classist, ableist, homophobic) representations of everyday life; it takes students seriously as intellectual adult learners from complex, diverse backgrounds; it shifts our focus toward underrepresented cultures of the German-speaking world; and it seeks to amplify voices and topics that have not been previously included in mainstream textbooks.

ANGINEH: I decided to join the *GD* collective at first because of the nature of the project. I was just finishing grad school and getting ready to start my first job ... and was increasingly experiencing exclusionary situations in my classes due to textbook and

curriculum limitations, among others. I had just started a project working on inclusive teaching strategies (mainly gender inclusivity) when the call for participation came out. So, I was very interested in the idea of creating something that was based on inclusion. Honestly, at that point, I had not thought much about what collaboration on such a project would mean. But the nature of the collaboration is probably one of the reasons why I decided to continue being part of the *GD* collective.

BRITT: Angineh's comment resonates for me. This project was born out of frustration, just as Angineh, Maureen, Tessa, and Simone mention. Again, I think most of us share the same initial spark for our involvement in the project. But when we started the work—and started to consider bringing people together to produce the curriculum collaboratively—I had no idea how important the collaborative *process* would become, for both my personal and professional life. This project has shaped me in ways I never anticipated because of the intense collaboration and the rapport we established through our work together. While the collaboratively-produced product was the initial goal, the process of collaboration turned out to be as important and transformative as the product itself—if not even more so. Amy highlights this distinction below.

AMY: I helped create the *GD* collective because the project is the embodiment of some of the things that I want to be as a feminist: we're changing the landscape of materials available to teach first-year German, and we're doing it in a way that we hope will support the others in our collective.

BRITT: *How would you define feminist collaboration, especially in light of the work we have done together?*

MAUREEN: Before being involved with *Grenzenlos Deutsch*, I don't know that I had any kind of concrete idea of what feminist collaboration was, outside of spaces like WiG that had a special energy and were non-hierarchical, where input was valued from everyone, regardless of academic status or position, and where there were opportunities for real dialogue. From day one in Vienna, something about our collaboration felt very special—we were all united, working together to accomplish something truly

amazing. I am still a bit awed by the ambition (and perhaps also the naiveté) with which we entered the project, and it's hard to describe what that month in Vienna felt like: with ten of us in a room, united toward a common goal, one much larger than any one of us would be able to accomplish on our own, working independently and together simultaneously, and taking time to support and learn from each other. It was a collaboration that was non-hierarchical, cooperative, and relied on consensus-based decision-making.

BRITT: I have to laugh at Maureen's mention of our ambition—or naiveté!—because I agree with her so much. We all had this big idea and a vision of how we wanted it to happen, and it's still somehow hard for me to believe that we've made so much of it happen. Okay, so we didn't write the whole curriculum in a month—not a surprise!—but somehow, we were able to lay down the entire framework and to build the collaborative structures we needed to move forward. I love the way Maureen describes our time in Vienna, since she puts words to the way I felt about that collaborative space, too.

SIMONE: Feminist collaboration, I believe, can be defined as working practice that values dialogue, mutual respect, trust, and multi-focal and -vocal positionalities of all those involved in a given project. It means sharing responsibilities and ownership and is committed to a recognition of inherent privileges, as well as differing abilities and precarious institutional settings. Feminist collaboration in the ways that I have experienced it as part of *GD* signified a sense of togetherness, care and support, and a mode of working with and being in relation to others in ways that are non-threatening, non-profit- and output-driven, or non-destructive.

ANGINEH: I could write a lot about this, but in its core and in light of the work we did together, I would define feminist collaboration as working together (or maybe “being together” as I think that feminist collaboration goes beyond the actual working part) in a supportive and judgment-free environment that recognizes that each person's strengths AND weaknesses contribute valuable voices to the project.

BRITT: I really like how both Simone and Angineh bring up the idea of shared responsibility as well as strengths and weaknesses and the sometimes precarious context of what we do. I think one thing we've all struggled with at different times in this process is the natural ebb and flow of our work. We have all had Big Life Stuff happening while we've been working, including employment changes and challenges, and we've all had times when we couldn't contribute as much as we would have liked or when we fell behind. I think our natural response is to feel guilty during these moments. And now we're trying to retrain our brains, to recognize that this happens and that the value of the collaboration is that one of us can pick up where the other has left off. It has been interesting to see how all of our roles shifted during our collaboration, especially as two of our editors, who were not part of the authorial team in the Vienna workshop, took on larger roles: substantive editing and authoring when we needed more support in that area. The sense of shared responsibility came through at these moments when we took on the tasks that others weren't able to do at a particular moment in time. And our recognition of precarity, too, came into play as we divided the work and considered which tasks made sense for which team members. For example, I remember when Amy and I were deciding which institution should house our National Endowment for the Humanities (*NEH*) grant proposal. Amy has tenure; I do not (my appointment is off the tenure stream). Amy suggested that if housing the grant at my home institution would aid in securing my position, then we should strongly consider that factor in our decision-making process. We also tried to manage tasks with attention to those who were on the job market or working under the tenure clock, whenever possible.

One of my questions is: how is *feminist* collaboration different from collaboration in general? Collaboration should revolve around shared ownership and decision-making, around an open work process in which everyone feels empowered to participate equally. But I think the way Simone brings in the political is important to the core of what feminist collaboration is: this recognition of precarity and privilege that we've all discussed so much throughout our work. Tessa had some additional thoughts about this aspect, too.

TESSA: Feminist collaboration, to me, is characterized by mutual support, democratic processes, organic contributions and development, and genuine empowerment to create, imagine, and produce. Throughout these past years of collaboration, we received unwavering and uncompromising support from Britt and Amy—and from each other as collaborators. We were constantly encouraged to take our ideas and transform them into reality; we were empowered to use our expertise and interests to produce our best work; we all knew and understood that not one individual has ownership over any single part of the project—we were in this together and knew that we could produce our best work when everyone was involved. Though we came from various academic backgrounds and had different areas of research expertise, we worked in support of the project's overall goals of promoting inclusivity and accessibility.

AMY: In my mind, feminist collaboration aspires to continually remember and empower the people that heteronormative, white supremacist, ableist patriarchy would prefer we forget: women, people of color, queer folk, people with disabilities, poor people. We also tried to let this remembering influence the structures that we build and the work that we do. Ideally, we also get beyond remembering to transforming. James Farrell, in *The Nature of College*, pointed out that everything we do as academics either reinforces the status quo or transforms systems for the future. I think that we are fundamentally doing very small tasks, one at a time, in a collective effort to contribute to transforming the system.

BRITT: ... as, for example, re-thinking the order in which we list noun classes or genders, the way in which we name and discuss linguistic gender, and adding non-binary language choices in our curriculum. We do these “small things” that undermine the status quo even while we attempt to tackle bigger structures, like how we access curricular materials.

TESSA: [Yes,] feminist collaboration means breaking down barriers, challenging hegemonic systems, and thinking and acting radically. I'd like to think that our project did all of these.

BRITT: *Is there a moment, an insight, or a story from our GD work so far that represents or embodies that definition of feminist collaboration?*

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TESSA: When I think of feminist collaboration from our *GD* project, I immediately recall our entire group sitting around the large table at our “office” in Vienna during our weekly meetings, hashing out ideas, debating sequencing, etc. While it was challenging at times, I realized that what we were doing was undeniably feminist—Britt and Amy sought to create a truly democratic structure within our group and, rather than calling all the shots themselves, wanted us to feel empowered to have ownership over the project as a collective.

SIMONE: I think a moment that highlighted feminist collaborative processes for me during our work on *GD* was when we had to negotiate together how to best organize the curriculum. We had some heated discussions about what grammar and vocab items should come where and how these items should be best introduced and practiced. I remember distinctly that some of us had very strong and firm opinions of what worked best and what should be included in a first-year curriculum to be useful to a variety of German programs and departments, opinions that were in opposition to one another at first. Through many conversations, weighing the pros and cons, arranging, adjusting, and readjusting, we were able to settle on what we, as a team, deemed to be the optimal solution for *GD*. I still value greatly how these conversations were handled respectfully and with care, understanding, and appreciation of a variety of opinions and voices.

BRITT: I love reading what Simone says here, particularly because I remember one heated moment when I told her that I didn’t give a shit whether students could use the genitive case after completing first-year German. While that sounds pretty disrespectful, it wasn’t intended as such (imagine a playful tone to the comment!), and it led to a discussion of the curricular standards different universities and colleges employed for placement and articulation. In other words, a moment of disagreement became a productive conversation about our institutional locations and how they influenced our perspective on curricular development. And I’m glad Simone seems to have forgiven me!

MAUREEN: For me what best exemplifies our collaboration was how we made our decisions about how to label genders and what we wanted our charts to look like (maskulin, feminin, neutrum? Neutral? Femininum, Maskulinum, Neutrum? Masc., fem., neut.? F, M, N? etc.). It truly was a model of consensus-based decision-making. We didn't vote or take sides, no one pulled rank, we just talked things through until we reached a solution that was acceptable to everyone. It certainly took longer than if things had been handed down by edict, but it nonetheless allowed us to weigh the pros and cons of various options and to think through what was important and what mattered to us. These long discussions that resulted in mutually acceptable solutions ultimately strengthened our collaboration and allowed us to feel like we all owned the final product equally because we all helped shape the final form it took.

BRITT: Like Maureen, I was also surprised at the turn that some of those conversations took, but it makes sense. We wanted to produce something that presented gender—as both a linguistic and social construct—in a different way, so decisions about the small details that Maureen mentions loomed larger than we expected. It really helped that we were all committed to that shared value, as well as to presenting the material in a way that would help students who were approaching the bewildering world of gendered nouns for the first time. The ironic thing is that after those long and—at times—heated discussion, we've now moved away from those “mask/fem/neut” labels entirely and are shifting to “noun class” rather than “gender.” But I wouldn't call our long discussion about linguistic gender labels obsolete or unnecessary despite the shift we've made, because it was such a crucial moment for defining our collaborative process.

MAUREEN: I also think our efforts to manage our time, particularly while we were in Vienna, said a lot about how feminist our collaboration truly was and still is. No one was expected to be a brain on a stick or to work like an automaton or to sacrifice work/life balance or leave partners or children at home. We worked hard, long hours, but we also gave ourselves time to socialize and enjoy the city and take evenings and weekends off if and when we needed them. I think it says a lot about the strength

of our collaboration that even after hours-long meetings and work sessions, we still all wanted to take meals and socialize together!

BRITT: Thanks for bringing up the issue of time, Maureen, since that's something we've discussed a lot, too. I'm hyper-aware that we're all volunteering our time for this project and that we needed to respect everyone's time and what we could give to *GD* when we could give it.

While we were in Vienna, we were lucky to have rented the Central College office suite at the University of Vienna for the month. We used the space for our meetings, of course, but those were the only required times to be there; otherwise, people worked in the office suite, in their rented apartments or rooms, in cafes; people went out for breaks or to take photos or record interviews. We came and went as we needed and wanted, although we fell into a general routine, with many of us working in the office starting around nine and leaving around five, but with a lot of flexibility in between. Sometimes we ate lunch together, and sometimes we didn't. And of course, the social times were the most memorable, like when most of us headed to the international food festival in front of the *Rathaus* and got caught in a brief but torrential downpour. We were working so intensely that those moments of fun and non-work time spent together were precious.

In general, I loved the trust that was palpable in the way we managed our time: we knew that everyone would take care of themselves to do what they had to do when they could.

MAUREEN: Even after we left Vienna and continued the project from our home institutions, we were respectful and considerate of everyone's various personal circumstances and job changes.... We had worked to support each other to continue forward progress without an expectation that we would all work inhuman hours or sacrifice all of our personal time to finish the project.

BRITT: I also really like how we've created structure for ourselves and the work that made our progress sustainable and fun. In the summer of 2019, we had virtual working meetings every weekday morning. Anyone who wanted could join in, and we would check in on what we were working on, set some goals, and then write. While it was a poor imitation of our time in Vienna, it still brought

me back to that collaborative space and helped me so much personally: in making progress on the project, of course, but also in shaping my day, in creating a structure for my work, in connecting with my colleagues, and in rediscovering the collective joy that was a hallmark of our intensive workshop in Vienna.

In the spring of 2020, as we were all working from home during the global COVID-19 pandemic, Maureen suggested that we revive this practice. Throughout the spring and summer and into the academic year 2020–2021, we again had standing working group meetings, and it's something I continually look forward to, especially during the challenging time in which I write this essay (summer and fall of 2020 and early winter of 2021). During our meetings, I know that some of us were continuing to build *GD*, while others were doing the other things that we needed to get done. But we're working in the same virtual time and space regardless, which means that our collaboration had extended beyond the *GD* project.

ANGINEH: The working group meetings we had in the mornings during this time of uncertainty, chaos, and lack of routine created such a supportive environment that went way beyond the work on the project for me.

AMY: I think that the moment that best embodies that definition [of feminist collaboration] is actually a non-moment. Using previous textbooks, I was forever supplementing materials, so that students could talk about their real lives. I had to add material so that students from blended families or with LGBTQIA+ identities could talk about their lives. When I have taught with *GD*, students had most of the language that they needed to talk about their lives without feeling like they're weird or causing me extra work. It also feels very empowering to know that as we learn more, we can adapt the curriculum to work better. We can literally transform this system we have created on a nearly daily basis, so that it will be better for the future.

BRITT: I think all along we agreed that the issues we faced in our language teaching couldn't be solved by an additive approach. In other words, we can't simply supplement certain vocabulary terms or topics as a corrective, since the problems are so deeply

embedded in the materials that are published. By this I mean that we can't just add words to describe *non-traditional* families, for example, when all the characters and narratives in a textbook revolve around heteronormative, white, able-bodied families. The additive approach doesn't fix the structural and systemic problem. But by telling different stories and representing different identities, we start to shift the overall framework. What we did was certainly imperfect, but it's a start. I would argue that our start was moderately successful because of our attention to process.

Perhaps this is really the point: we initially had ideas about a *product*—both what we wanted and what we didn't want—but we had to land on a *process* that would enable us to get there, to produce the type of materials that we wanted to use in our classrooms. I've spent the past two academic years (2019–2021) piloting our materials, and it is a true joy to teach with materials that I don't have to apologize for. I don't have to teach against the textbook, as Maureen mentions at the outset of this conversation, but instead can let the materials speak for themselves.

But there's another more private joy that comes from teaching with *Grenzenlos Deutsch* for me: so many lessons harken back to our time together in Vienna, and I end up teaching with a huge grin on my face. With the images, the videos, and the ideals that we've created together, it feels like all my collaborators are there in the classroom with me. I'm so grateful for that.

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