A Strong and Compassionate Leader

Sarah Lynne Bowman (Uppsala)

Prof. Dr. Hiltraud Casper-Hehne has been an exceptional leader for our Erasmus+ Higher Education Cooperation Partnership, ROCKET, an innovative project between the universities Göttingen, Uppsala, and Groningen. ROCKET employs role-playing games to teach conflict transformation skills through Critical Virtual Exchange. The aim of ROCKET is to address issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education.

The seed of the project started when Prof. Dr. Casper-Hehne invited future team members including myself to Göttingen to explore the possibility of a partnership. I immediately noticed and continue to appreciate her leadership abilities, which manage to be both kind and directive when necessary. Her steady hand on the project direction allows for creativity and input for team members with a measure of deep respect. However, she also clearly and directly addressing issues that inevitably arise in the team. As someone who struggles with conflict – hence my desire to improve my own skill set and help others do the same – I find her approach inspirational.

Prof. Dr. Casper-Hehne's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion is clear not only in her activities that foster intercultural exchange in her work as department head of Intercultural German Studies, but also in the way that she cares for and provides encouragement for her team members to exchange ideas and share their work. Together, we co-supervise the Ph.D. work for the wonderful Alexandra Schreiber, who also teaches for the Intercultural Learning Lab. I have appreciated how supportive and encouraging Prof. Dr. Casper-Hehne has been of Alexandra's development as an academic and colleague.

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Similarly, when we have had concerns within the project around travel funds for project assistants, Prof. Dr. Casper-Hehne has proactively made sure that our team members could attend the meetings in-person and help facilitate workshops. Such actions show her commitment to inclusion and team unity regardless of rank or academic background.

I also admire her ability to stay calm and focused in times of escalated intensity. While she can be quite directive in addressing issues that arise head on, she always does so with a measure of respect and concern that feels incredibly supportive.

I hope to grow into a leader as kind, compassionate, and effective as Prof. Dr. Casper-Hehne in the future. While her retirement brings with it a degree of sadness for me that we will have fewer opportunities to collaborate in the future, it is well deserved after her years of service and the clear impact she has had on the lives of others, if our team members are any indication.

University environments can sometimes be filled with coldness and hierarchical judgment. Prof. Dr. Casper-Hehne's leadership is proof that academic communities can be created and maintained that embody strength, compassion, and care, not only for colleagues, but for the good of students and society beyond on the whole. I am honored to know her.