Designing Inclusive Doctoral Support: From Symbolic Equality to Structured DEI in German Universities of Applied Sciences

Abstract

Doctoral education at German Universities of Applied Sciences (HAW) in Social Work is a strategic site for advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)—yet equality often remains symbolic. Building on my dissertation (document analysis plus seven expert interviews with actors from doctoral support/organizational development and equality practice), this talk translates empirical findings into design principles for inclusive, intercultural, and digitally supported doctoral support.

First, I show how ostensibly neutral routines (personalized selection, informal evaluation, delegation of responsibility) produce blind spots for women and other minoritized candidates. These mechanisms are frequently masked by universal categories (e.g., "fit," family status, class) and by discourses that decenter gender within broader "diversity" frames. Second, I identify leverage points where DEI becomes structural: gender-sensitive selection criteria, data-driven monitoring, neutral counseling hubs at the doctoral interface, and shared governance responsibilities.

The contribution then proposes a Critical Virtual Exchange (CVE) blueprint for doctoral support that connects intercultural learning with conflict transformation: (a) short online role-play scenarios for supervisors and committees (e.g., "merit vs. care" trade-offs, bias in topic selection); (b) asynchronous CVE micro-modules for cross-institutional peer mentoring; (c) reflective analytics that turn CVE participation data into actionable quality assurance. Each element is tied to concrete organizational routines (recruitment, supervision, progress reviews) to avoid "event-based" DEI.

The session will be interactive: participants experience a 5-minute micro-role-play and receive an implementation canvas (learning outcomes, facilitation prompts, assessment rubrics, and minimal digital infrastructure). By linking empirical insights to CVE and role-play pedagogy, the talk demonstrates how DEI can move from discourse to enforceable practice in doctoral education—scalable across HAWs and compatible with transnational collaboration.

Format: 20-minute presentation + interactive demo. Relevance to ROCKET: DEI, Critical Virtual Exchange, Role-Playing Games, Interculturality, Conflict Transformation.

Short Bio

Maren Lange is a doctoral researcher and coordinator at HAWK (Hildesheim/Holzminden/Göttingen). Her dissertation examines equality in doctoral support at German Universities of Applied Sciences (UAS/HAW) in Social Work, combining a document analysis with seven expert interviews from doctoral support/organizational development and equality practice. Her research focuses on gendered organizations, the gap between symbolic and structural equality, and governance routines in early-career education. She develops transfer-oriented tools that embed DEI into selection, supervision, and quality assurance, including Critical Virtual Exchange micro-modules and short role-play scenarios for bias-aware decision-making.