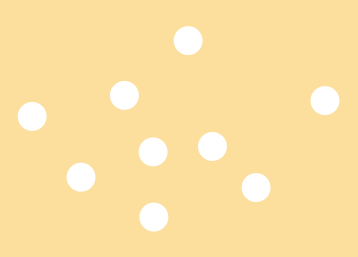


**BE
STUDENTS
NOT
STRANGERS**

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co3learn.de



Learning better together!

Welcome to „*Be Students Not Strangers!*“! With the help of our continuously evolving set of questions, university courses can create deeper connections between students that ultimately lead to better learning outcomes. Being part of a community not only creates a safer learning atmosphere, but also emotional connections that link what has been learnt to one's own life and thus consolidate this new knowledge in the long term.

Students attend numerous courses in which they have to constantly adapt to new topics, spaces and people in their surroundings. At the same time, they are expected to acquire and categorize new knowledge, contribute their expertise to courses and, if possible, further engage with the content they have learned. These changing contexts, in addition to a high density of information and corresponding curricular requirements, can quickly become overwhelming. Researchers working on student health assume that personal involvement in courses can counteract the feeling of being overwhelmed, facilitate learning, and reduce pressure.¹ Various studies show that knowledge is understood more sustainably when a (study) group works on tasks together in a self-directed manner. By supporting each other, group members establish a common practice which can lead to better results.² Through positive interdependence, collaborative work brings individuals together to form a community. The cohesion within this community has a beneficial effect on both, the sustainable teaching of course content, and students' fundamental attitude towards the contexts in which learning takes place.³ Student communities can develop in the context of learning communities⁴ within courses if there is room for exchange that goes beyond subject-specific cooperation and favors the formation of deeper human bonds with peers. The sense of belonging that develops as a result gives students the courage to actively participate in class. They gain more confidence in their abilities and thus have fewer inhibitions about contributing their own ideas.

Co³Learn aims to support teachers and students in having a positive experience at the start of courses, to enable a constant exchange and favor the formation of a learning community. To this end, we have developed the „*Be Students Not Strangers*“ question set, which can create collective learning communities that not only help to consolidate the taught content, but also promote interdisciplinary exchange and a sense of belonging among students. „*Be Students Not Strangers*“ is a collection of different questions that enable a type of student exchange that goes beyond the usual small talk before and after class: these questions are discussed in small groups at the beginning of the course so that students are activated and at the same time inspired to open up within this setting. Any degree of openness is welcome – students can share what they feel comfortable with in the respective situation. Ideally, the conversations will make students feel more confident and see their fellow students as part of their own community. A minimal investment of class time can thus bring about a noticeable improvement in the working atmosphere. The teacher who creates the framework and conditions for a supportive learning environment, serves as an important facilitator within the community-building process.⁵

¹ Cf. Gusy, Burkhard; Wörfel, Franziska; Lohmann, Katrin: Erschöpfung und Engagement im Studium. Eine Anwendung des Job Demands-Resources Modells. In: Zeitschrift für Gesundheitspsychologie (2016), 24 (1), pp. 41–53, here: p. 51–52.

² Cf. Mitchell, Corky; Cours Anderson, Kelley; Laverie, Debra; Hass, Ashley: Distance be damned: The importance of social presence in a pandemic constrained environment. In: Marketing Education Review (2021), 31 (4), pp. 294–310; Stammen, Karl-Heinz, Ebert, Anna: Lehre auf Distanz. In: Holger Angenent, Jörg Petri, Tatiana Zimenkova (Eds.): Hochschulen in der Pandemie. Impulse für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung von Studium und Lehre (2022), pp. 232–245, here: p. 235; Vincet, Sarah; Marsh, Wallace; Goodwin, Maria; Farr, Jane: Impact of Providing a Living Learning Community for First-Year Pre-Pharmacy Students. In: American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education (2021); 85 (1), pp. 23–27, here: p. 26.

³ Cf. Osterman, Karen: Students' Needs for Belonging in the School Community. In: Review of Educational Research (2000), 70 (3), pp. 253–406, here: p. 359.

⁴ Seufert, Sabine; Moisseeva, Marina; Steinbeck, Reinhold: Virtuelle Communities gestalten (2000). Online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/36386886_Virtuelle_Communities_gestalten [last checked on 11 July 2023].

⁵ Cf. Totic, Janina; Sprenger, Torsten; Boonkhamsaen, Janjira; Polat, Özlem: Beziehungsgestaltung als inkludierender Faktor der (digitalen) Lehre. In: Holger Angenent, Jörg Petri, Tatiana Zimenkova (Eds.): Hochschulen in der Pandemie. Impulse für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung von Studium und Lehre (2022), pp. 416–435, here: pp. 420–421.

What advantages does this offer students?

- **Facilitating participation:** By encouraging low-threshold exchange in the first few minutes of a class, students are potentially less inhibited from participating throughout the remainder of the class.
- **Establishing a culture of open dialogue:** The developing sense of community and the resulting security make it easier for students to ask questions and openly communicate gaps in their knowledge.
- **Improving learning outcomes:** The emotional connection between participants in the course increases attention and thus enables students to better memorize learning content and to feel more involved in the course.

What advantages does this offer teachers?

- **Long-term time savings:** Students who are networked and feel connected to each other help each other with content-related and organisational questions, and are more likely to form learning groups in which they find common paths and approaches to answer questions. As a teacher, you'll probably receive fewer redundant emails and the time you spend supervising is reduced.
- **More interaction in class:** Students who feel safe in class are less inhibited to participate. As a result, discussions can run more smoothly and the diversity of perspectives is increased because more students actively participate.
- **Increased productivity & more sustainable learning:** Students who are attuned to each other and see themselves as part of a community work together more productively. Feeling integrated reduces the likelihood of conflicts within the group, allowing students to concentrate better, pay more attention to learning content, and interact with each other on a professional level. This can increase the overall quality of the course.

How to use the questions

The „*Be Students Not Strangers*“ question set consists of different question types with thematic categories and varying time requirements. You can decide which questions are suitable for your course and how much time you are prepared to invest. Our descriptions and recommendations will help you implement and integrate the questions into your course!

The length of the discussion depends on the size of the group. The smaller the group, the easier it is to create an atmosphere in which more in-depth discussions can be held. We suggest the following two group sizes: Two to three people come together in the Small Circle and four to five in the Big Circle. The time frame for answering the questions in each group is between 3 and 10 minutes. You will find information on time and recommended group sizes at the bottom right-hand corner of each question card.

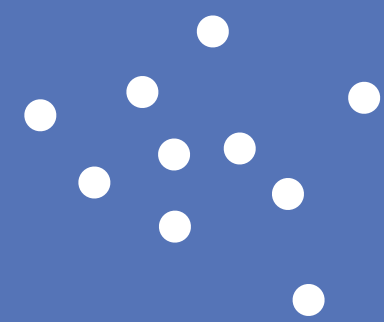
After selecting the question and briefly explaining the procedure, time limit, and group size, your task as a teacher is to answer further questions students might have. Other than that, you should keep a low profile to favor open exchange between students. We also recommend displaying a timer that is visible to everyone so that students can keep an eye on the time during their exchange. After the end of the exchange, it can be useful to ask a follow-up question to create a seamless transition to the seminar topic. We recommend thematically linking individual aspects of the course with the previously selected question from the question set.

We hope you enjoy integrating the question set into your course!

tl;dr: The most Important points briefly summarized:

- Thematically varying question cards
- Small Circle: Groups of two to three people
- Big Circle: Groups of four to five people
- Exchange within the group approx. 3 to 10 minutes
- Further recommendations: visible timer, teacher keeps low profile after initial explanations, follow-up questions as transition to the course topic

What would you have liked to know before enrolling at university?

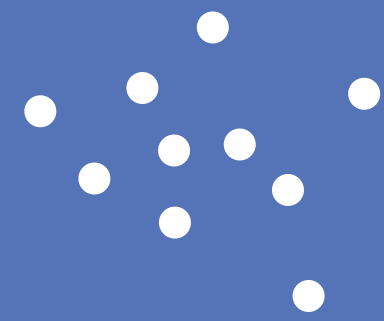


Small Circle or Big Circle
approx. 3 to 7 minutes



University Life

When you look back on your time as a university student in 5 to 10 years, how would you like to describe it?

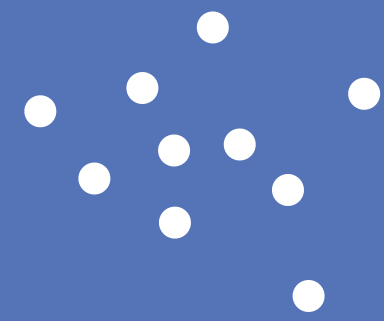


Small Circle or Big Circle
approx. 3 to 7 minutes



University Life

Ten years from now, your time as a university student will be turned into a movie: What genre would the movie be? Do you have a title for your movie in mind?

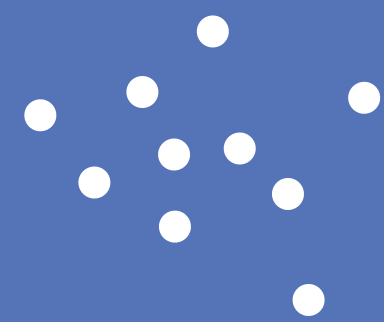


Big Circle
approx. 5 to 7 minutes



University Life

Looking back, what advice would you give yourself before starting your first semester at university?



Big Circle
approx. 5 to 7 minutes



University Life

**What has really made you
laugh recently?**



Feel-Good

Small Circle or Big Circle
approx. 3 to 7 minutes

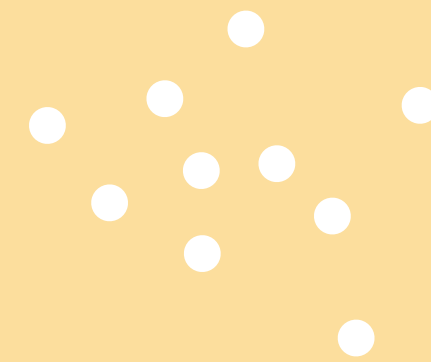
**What insight has recently enriched
your life?**



Feel-Good

Small Circle
approx. 3 to 5 minutes

Which of your achievements are you especially proud of?



Feel-Good

Small Circle
approx. 3 to 5 minutes

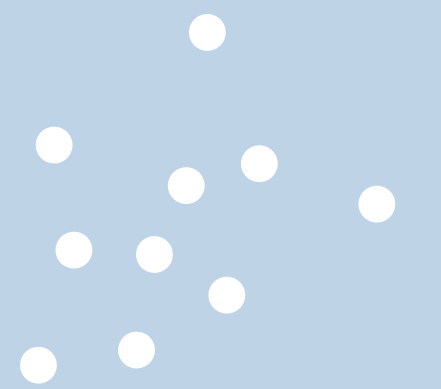
**What is your favorite place on campus
and why?**



Feel-Good

Big Circle
approx. 5 to 7 minutes

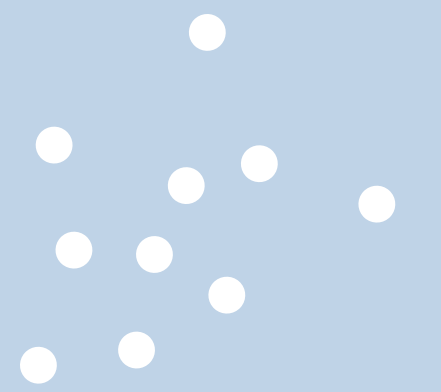
**What is the funniest/weirdest thing
that has happened to you in your own
home?**



**Creating
Connections**

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 8 minutes

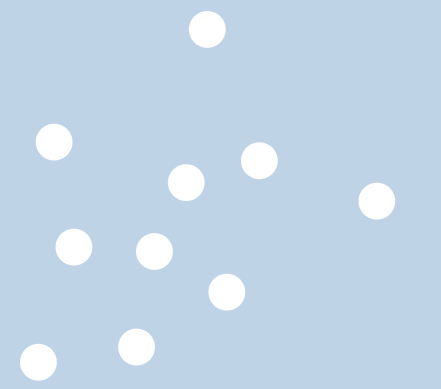
**Is there something you would like to
be really good at? What is it?**



**Creating
Connections**

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 7 minutes

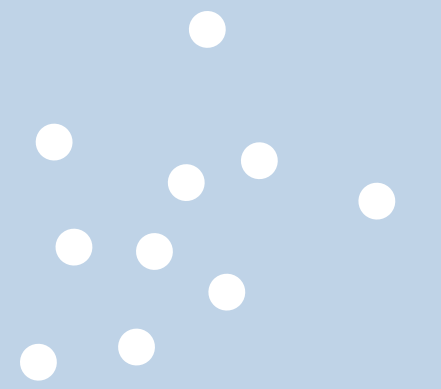
What is your most unnecessary talent?



**Creating
Connections**

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 7 minutes

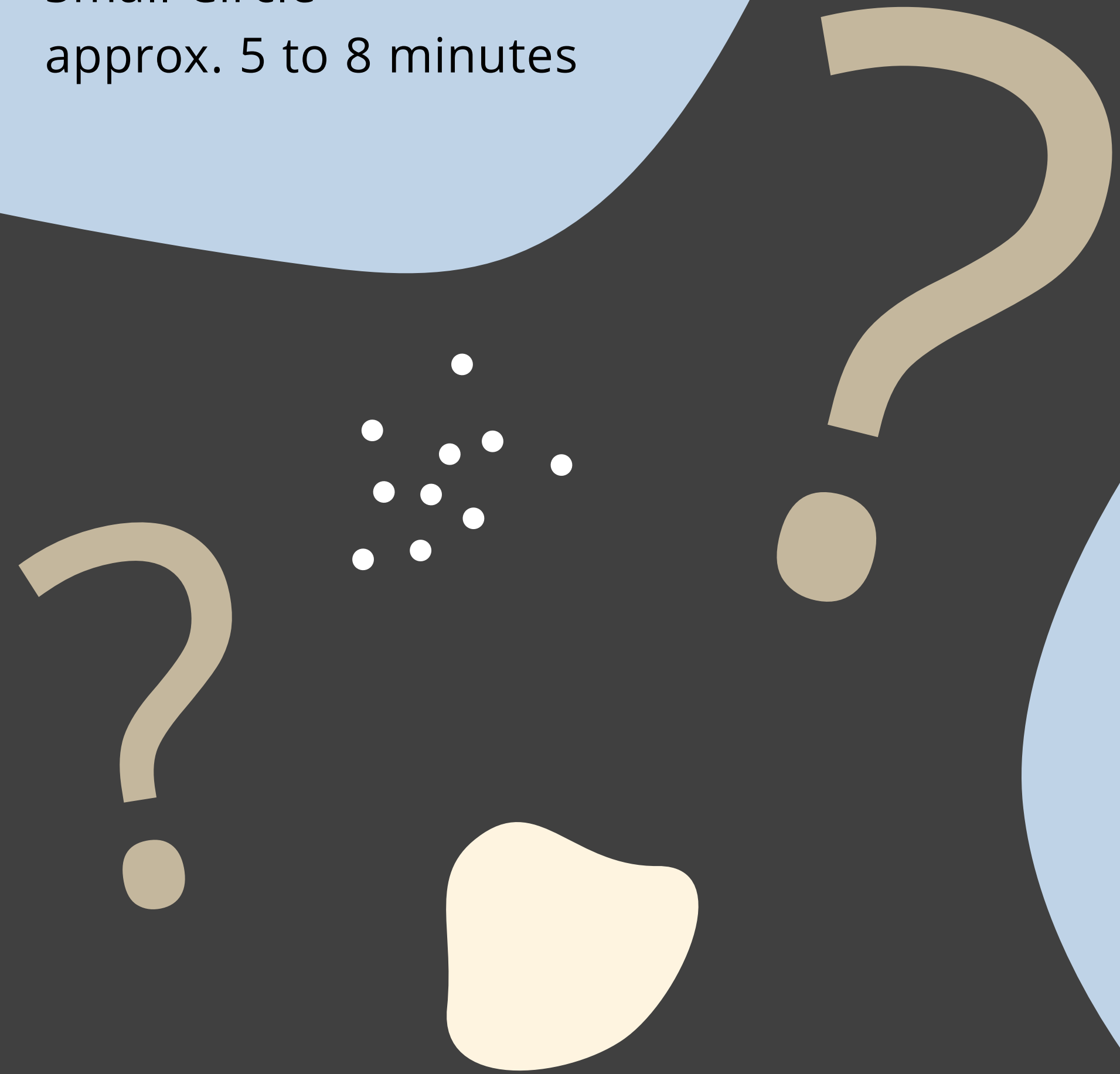
What is the most random fact or piece of knowledge you know?



**Creating
Connections**

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 7 minutes

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 8 minutes



**How do you deal with
pressure during your
studies at university?**

**Mental
Health**

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 8 minutes



**What are your
feelings right now?
Do you know why you
might be feeling this way?**

**Mental
Health**

Small Circle or Big Circle
approx. 5 to 8 minutes



**What is something that
has been easy for you
to do recently?**

**Mental
Health**

Small Circle
approx. 5 to 8 minutes



**What would you currently
not want to change
about your everyday life?**

**Mental
Health**

Thank you for trying out new things to make teaching and learning even more sustainable! We look forward to your suggestions and feedback and hope that you feel well supported by „***Be Students Not Strangers***“.

We welcome feedback, further questions, requests and suggestions directly by e-mail: **info@co3learn.de**.