

Bridging the gap – a practice orientated workshop program for teacher education students

A lack of practice – the two phase model of the German teacher education

Federalism is a special/ particular characteristic of the German political system. Many policies are exclusively a matter of the federal states (“Länder”). Nevertheless there is some degree of standardization. In terms of teacher education, the federal states share a **basic principle: a theory based university education and an induction program** (“Pädagogischer Vorbereitungsdienst”), a practical school-based teacher training, leading to the second and final state examination, the “Staatsexamen”. During the theoretical part of the teacher education at university, initial practical experiences are gained through two internships at a school, each one for five weeks. Those practical school trainings, provided by universities, which is cooperating with regional schools, is rarely evaluated in an adequate way for individual students. Furthermore, there is no thematic connection between the practical experiences gained during the two internships (Merzyn 2004). Later on, during the induction program, the teacher trainees work at school and teach their own classes independently. Evaluations of their teaching skills are made by observing special prepared lessons – a high challenge for most student teachers, who are expected to display a high level of professional development at this time. The development of practical skills, however, is not being fostered sufficiently before then.

Conclusion:

The stage of professional education is altogether characterized by a **lack of opportunities to learn and perform in the prospective work field**, the school itself, or in relevant basic practical skills for that field.

Project aims

The Academy for Educational Research and Teacher Training (ABL) is as a subject-specific neutral facility between all departments that are involved in teacher education at Goethe-University and therefore interconnected with all relevant participants in university teacher education. Serving as the central institution for teacher training at the Goethe-University, it offers support for this gap between theory and practice by providing a **special practice-orientated workshop program exclusively for teacher education students**, the “PRO-L- Workshops” (L stands for Lehramt and refers to the teaching profession).

The workshop program

The program, containing about 12 - 15 workshops, is offered each semester. The workshops are half-day, full-day or two-day events, taking place alongside regular lectures. **Participation is voluntary and free** of charge and all participants receive a certificate upon completing the course. In the implementation and start-up phase in the years 2009 - 2011 the program was conducted in cooperation with several partners at the university, such as the general soft-skills-department. Today the PRO-L workshop program is operated exclusively by the ABL.

PRO-L Workshops

für Lehramtsstudierende

Research based topics

The topics are selected according to job demand analysis derived from research in teacher education (Schaarschmidt 2005) as well as catalogues of professional standards of teaching like those published by the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany (“Kultusministerkonferenz”) in 2004. Based on that rationale, there is a variety of different topics:

- Classroom Management – How to manage classrooms
- Communication skills for teachers
- Time and self-management
- Intercultural competences for teachers
- Management of vulnerable children
- Voice training and speaking skills

“I feel better prepared for my internships.”

- Since 2009
- 12-15 Workshops each Semester
- 12-16 participants per Workshop
- approx. 150 participants per Semester (i.e. cases)
- about 1.000 participants since the beginning in 2009

Award: “Good Practice-Award”
by NEXUS monthly newsletter of
German Rectors’ Conference

Skill-training

Considering the overall objective of fostering basic teaching training skills during university studies, there is a strong emphasis of practice and „doing“. That means each workshop comprises specific competences relating to the topic that can be exemplified and trained. An important feature is the engagement of high-skilled and qualified trainers, mostly recognised as experts in the topic.

Quality management and evaluation

There is a standardised system of accompanying evaluation, both regarding quality management and achievement of objectives. For that reason each workshop is assessed from the participants’ perspective by filling in a questionnaire. Results show an overall high quality of implementation, achievement of intended learning effects and a good response from the target audience (see Box “Evaluation Results”).

“I appreciate the realistic situations giving me new options to interact in the classroom.”

“The trainings are very useful. It’s the best addition to my theoretic studies.”

Evaluation Results

- from routinely participant surveys of winter 2012/13 and summer 2013 (n=235)
- **all scales range from 1 (positive) to 6 (negative)**
- reported as: mean (standard deviation)

Reason for Participation

- Topic seems important for success in studies: 3,7 (1,8)
- Topic seems important for success in occupation: 1,2 (0,4)

Quality of Implementation

- Various Indicators (structure, didactics, participant orientation etc.): 1,5 (0,6)
- Overall Quality Rating: 1,4 (0,4)

Learning Effects

- Perceived achievement for success in studies: 2,1 (1,4)
- Perceived achievement for success in occupation: 1,3 (0,4)

Lessons Learned & Conclusion

In reference to the great number of participants and the positive evaluation of the workshops, it is safe to say that the PRO-L Workshops are a successful program. It can be regarded as an effective measure for bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher education at university. Nevertheless not all students have the opportunity to participate due to **limited capacity**. Professional trainers are required to **ensure high quality of training** but create a need for more funding, which is uncertain.

We suggest: As the participation at the program is voluntary, it can be assumed that we only attract the high motivated students. Those in need for support in practical skills may not participate. In order to allow both more students in general and students at all teaching skill levels to participate in the program, an **embedding into the curriculum** seems strongly recommendable.