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Literatur

- Heiner Barz (Hrsg.); Unterrichten an Waldorfschulen; Springer 2013
- Richard Landl, Jürgen Peters, Alexander Röhler; Qualitätsentwicklung an Waldorfschulen; Peter Lang 2016
- <http://www.waldorfschule.de/waldorfpaedagogik/qualitaet/verfahren-zur-qualitaetsentwicklung/>

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Developing Pedagogical Quality at Waldorf Schools



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Developing Pedagogical Quality at Waldorf Schools

An accredited method developed by the German Association of Waldorf Schools (Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen) to foster the quality of teaching and collegial cooperation.

Today quality development has a high priority at Waldorf schools and its importance is ever increasing. The German Association of Waldorf schools now offers its member schools an accredited method for the development of their pedagogical quality.

The Concern

The quality of a school depends largely on the practice of teaching and the cooperation between the colleagues. The quality of teaching is always determined by highly complex processes.

The method we offer is based on the assumption that all teachers want to evaluate and constantly improve their own teaching through a developmental process which maintains and strengthens their enthusiasm for teaching. Our research shows that it is particularly helpful for this process when colleagues observe each other's lessons for mutual reflection and support.

This is also the starting point of our method. It is based on classroom observation by colleagues and external mentors, followed by clearly guided reviews.

Results so far

From 2008 to 2010, a pilot project was carried out in three schools and since 2011 the method has been available to all Waldorf Schools. An academic evaluation process conducted over seven years confirmed the success of the method. All the participants reported that the project helped them to improve their teaching and their cooperation with colleagues. (See also: The Evaluation)

The Advantages

- A colleague observes the lessons and helps the teacher to reflect on her practice in a guided and protected process. In the evaluation process, personal strengths as well as points for further development are identified.
- The teachers realize how helpful collegial cooperation can be and that pedagogical questions can be reflected upon and solved in many different ways.
- All the colleagues improve their professional competency by acquiring skills and techniques, which enrich professional dialogue.
- The method helps to establish new and positive working relationships between colleagues.

- The process is organized by a steering committee, so therefore not every colleague has to get involved in organisation issues.
- To ensure continuity, the school enters a two-year contract and informs the parents.
- So far, the method has been welcomed by all the parents of the schools involved.
- After successful completion of the process, the school is awarded a certificate which can be used for PR purposes.

The Certificate

In 2013, the method was certified according to DIN En 45011 and ISO EC 17021 by SocialCert-GmbH, an accreditation agency in Munich.

Furthermore, each school may apply for a certificate, which confirms that the method has been successfully implemented and sustained.

The Elements of the Process

Three courses are offered to practice the following skills and techniques:

Collegial Reflection Groups

The college of teachers is split into groups of five, according to specific criteria. The groups meet every other week during regular conference times. One of the participants presents a methodological or pedagogical issue which is then explored and considered for sixty minutes as follows. After the presentation of the issue, a certain picture arises and is discussed. Then, the situation is analysed, practical actions are decided upon and the process is completed with a round of feedback. These steps help the participants to understand the question better and possible solutions are developed in the group.

Classroom Observation with Colleagues

Teachers within the reflecting groups observe each other's lessons. Ideally, this happens in groups rather than in pairs. They then review the lessons in a clearly guided process.

Classroom Observation with an External Mentor

An external mentor observes every teacher at least twice in her classroom. At the end of the feedback they agree on attainment targets to foster the teacher's professional development.

The mentors have themselves been teaching for many years and are very experienced. They come from various German Waldorf schools, have been trained in mentorship and pursue their own ongoing training programmes.

The Procedure

1. Interested schools get in touch with one of the contact people listed below.
2. An expert introduces the method at the teachers' conference and answers any questions.
3. Should the school decide to participate, they enter into a contract with the coordinating body (Bund der Freien Waldorfschulen).
4. The college of teachers chooses a steering committee, which is responsible for the organisation of the process.
5. The college of teachers receives a thorough introduction and training in collegial reflection and classroom observation.
6. The teachers regularly reflect on their experiences together.

7. On the occasion of the visit by the external assessor, the teachers review the work and the process together.
8. After successful completion of the two-year process, the coordinating body confirms that the teachers are sufficiently trained to continue the quality development on their own.

Teacher Education

It is important to include classroom observation tasks in the initial teacher training or seminars. Here are two examples:

- The teacher training at the Freie Hochschule Stuttgart includes mutual classroom observation by students during their teaching practice. The students' experiences become part of the reflection groups in the teacher training.
- In the Seminar für Waldorfpädagogik in Hamburg, the method is part of phase II of teacher training and a few schools integrate it in their collegial work.

The Evaluation

The Institute for Empirical Social Research at the Alanus Hochschule has conducted an ongoing evaluation process of a two-year pilot project. The final report by Charlotte Heinritz and Jürgen Peters stated that:

"One of the schools' motivations to take part in the pilot project was the expectation that they would at last tackle something they had planned for a long time: Colleagues' observation of each others' teaching.

The classroom observations by external mentors paved the way for it. Because the mentor was seen as an expert, even experienced teachers were able to accept hints and suggestions without questioning their own professionalism.

The vast majority of teachers valued the results and insights of the collegial reflection group and wants to firmly establish the method as part of their professional development.

The aim of the overall project was to improve the pedagogical quality of teaching, but over 90% of teachers reported a positive effect on the whole school, particularly in terms of collegial cooperation."

More about the evaluation in: Landl/Peters/Röhler (2016)