

BaCuLit-Guidelines for Professional Development

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I Central Problems of Traditional Professional Development for Teachers:

Research on professional development for teachers identified two central problems:

1. In traditional professional development, ideas and concepts are communicated to teachers in a **delivery mode** (teachers only listen!) and a lot of time is spent with presenting a certain teaching method. This only leads to **building up declarative knowledge** (knowing about reading), which doesn't help teachers to gain a **situated and generative understanding** of the given information, which helps them become flexible decision makers while teaching.
2. In traditional professional development there also is a **lack of practicing the handling of real problems** that might occur when real students work on real reading and learning tasks.

In addition, literacy related professional development for content area teachers has to be sensitive to the fact that **content area teachers** may not be knowledgeable of literacy practices and strategies. They teach content, but seldom focus on the strategic processes needed for students to learn the content. This can result in frustration and / or resignation on the part of the teacher in a professional development context.

II The Superior Goal of the BaCuLit Approach to Professional Development

Instead of relying on a concept of professional development that only presents information, the BaCuLit project relies on principles of **professional development and learning that have a positive influence on the self-concept of teachers as competent and reflective practitioners**. Our goal is to help teachers change their vision of what it means to be an effective teacher of content. Teaching students *how to learn content* by reading and writing, talking and listening must go hand in hand with content instruction, so that students gain the tools for life-long learning. Content teachers must not only be content specialists but *learning specialists* who are aware of the impact of reading and writing, talking and listening for content learning. When students know how they can use reading and writing for learning content they become more successful learners which leads to feelings of success for both, teachers and students.

III General BaCuLit Principles for Professional Development

Effective professional development for in-service teachers of all content areas:

- ◆ ... is **supportive and ongoing** to ensure an enduring growth of teachers' knowledge, skills, and self-confidence ("long-term effect").
- ◆ ... **builds on teachers' personal experiences** (their personal and professional biography), **their knowledge**, and **their beliefs** about themselves, their students, teaching, and literacy. These aspects influence what teachers can learn and what they want to learn. Teachers' beliefs must be respected; otherwise experienced teachers might be unwilling to make needed changes. In addition, teachers often feel discouraged, devalued, and misunderstood when their beliefs are ignored.
- ◆ ... **respects teachers as experts and adult and active learners** who construct their own understandings. Effective professional development needs to pay careful attention to these aspects to change teachers' thinking and practices.
- ◆ ... educates teachers to be **lifelong learners**.
- ◆ ... **builds on the teaching reality** of the teachers and provides opportunities for teachers to adapt literacy practices to their own classroom practice. This teaching reality strongly influences what teachers can actually put into practice.

- ◇ ... considers the **needs of the teachers** (e. g. for quick solutions).
 - ➔ BUT: Teachers usually **expect to learn new “tricks”** in professional development. To actually change classroom practices, teachers must learn much more than just „tricks“ – they must learn to **reflect on their own teaching habits** and acknowledge the need for improvement. Therefore effective professional development has to meet the challenge of connecting what teachers want with what is necessary to change classroom practices.
- ◇ ... offers exercises, practical experiences, individual feedback, and possibilities for **inquiry into teachers’ own classroom practice**.
 - ➔ Inquiry methods are a promising opportunity to support teachers in building up an understanding of the learning difficulties of their students (e. g. inquiry into one’s own reading strategies and into the strategies that students use). Teachers need an inquiry-based attitude towards their own classroom practice to be able to teach diverse students effectively. Furthermore, this attitude enables them to learn actively while teaching. Inquiry methods involve teachers learning how to “read” their students to find out what they think and learn. This enables teachers to predict the students’ reactions in certain situations and with concrete reading tasks.
- ◇ ... offers **guided practice** to support teachers in conducting these inquiries and in connecting their results with decisions concerning their classroom practice.
- ◇ ... is **collaborative** and offers teachers opportunities to interact with each other. Teachers’ conversations in group discussions and learning communities about their disciplinary subjects, their students, teaching practices, and beliefs are part of the training program. The goal is to effect **“critical collegueship”** in which teachers learn to critically discuss and reflect on their own practice in a spirit of collaboration and trust.
- ◇ ... offers enough time and **follow-up support** by experts (BaCuLit teacher trainers) or collegial support systems (**“social networking “**).
- ◇ ... provides opportunities for teachers to recognize, describe and revise their own **theories of learning and teaching** that underlie what they do. When teachers become more aware of their personal instructional theories, they can examine them more critically and incorporate new knowledge about what it means for students to become life-long learners of content.
- ◇ ... provides **models of good practice** where teachers actively participate in lessons that they can then adapt to their own teaching contexts. Rather than lecturing to teachers about literacy practices, effective **professional develop involves teachers in sample lessons where they have opportunities to experience learning first hand from a student’s perspective**. Once teachers have this experience they need opportunities to adapt these literacy practices to their own contexts and examine them in light of their own theories of learning.
- ◇ ... gives teachers the possibility to be more responsible for the professional development course and for their own expertise (**“professional autonomy”**).

IV Content Area-specific BaCuLit Principles for Professional Development

Effective professional development for in-service teachers of all content areas:

- ◇ ... helps content area teachers (1) to change their belief about their **own role in teaching literacy** and to build up a stable self-concept as teachers for content area literacy, (2) to **engage their students in reading and writing**, (3) to show students how to learn as part of content instruction, and (4) to **support the students in using their out-of-school experiences** to become lifelong learners and participants in a democratic, information based society.
- ◇ ... encourages teachers to **read demanding texts** and involves them into a **conversation on metacognitive processes** – within and across their disciplines..

- ◇ ... provides teachers with guidance about **how to engage their students in metacognitive conversations** where they learn to examine themselves as learners. When students understand basic principles about learning, they can begin to apply them on their own. Just as teachers need an effective theoretical framework for guiding their own teaching, students need an effective theoretical framework for guiding their own learning.
- ◇ ... gives teachers the skills to **structure engaging lessons around content area texts** and helps them to **gain generative knowledge** on reading / writing / discussion strategies and on how to teach them.
 - ➔ Definition of 'generative knowledge' (Greenleaf and Schoenbach, 2004, p. 99): „... knowledge that enables teachers to create, or generate from their deep understanding of reading, informed and helpful instructional responses to students' reading and thinking in the academic disciplines.“
- ◇ ... offers “tools” and methods for **formative assessments** and leads the teachers' attention to **ways of observing and interpreting** of students' achievement that can be useful for a **high-quality and responsive teaching** (e. g. metacognitive assessment “thinking aloud”).
- ◇ ... **offers “tools” and methods** that support content area teachers in becoming teachers for strategic reading in their own discipline (this includes tools and methods that allow teachers to access students' thinking and reading comprehension in an inquiring manner).
- ◇ ... offers **demonstrations of specific teaching methods** in a real classroom and the opportunity to connect these methods with teachers' own teaching beliefs. This supports teachers in developing a diverse and generative repertoire of teaching methods along with opportunities to adapt these methods to their own content areas.
- ◇ ... demonstrates to teachers through sample lessons **how to incorporate teacher modelling and guided practice within their content lessons**. When introducing a learning strategy as part of content teaching **teachers take the stage. They show, tell, model, and demonstrate** how to use the strategy effectively to learn content. As the student learns how to apply a strategy or skill, there is a gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student (cf. cognitive apprenticeship approach).

Resources (to be completed or cancelled):

- Wilson, Suzanne M.; Berne, Jennifer (1999): **Teacher Learning and the Acquisition of Professional Knowledge: An Examination of Research on Contemporary Professional Development**. In: Review of Research in Education, Vol. 24, No. 1, 173-209.
- Greenleaf, Cynthia L.; Schoenbach, Ruth (2004): **Building Capacity for the Responsive Teaching of Reading in the Academic Disciplines: Strategic Inquiry Designs for Middle and High School Teachers' Professional Development**. In: Improving Reading Achievement Through Professional Development. Ed. by Dorothy S. Strickland and Michael L. Kamil. Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers. pp. 97-127.