

## Introduction to the Symposium on 4<sup>th</sup> November 2011 in Berlin by Heike Borkenhagen

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you - on behalf of our institute and on behalf of my colleagues - to our international symposium. Approximately 100 guests from 16 different countries are gathered here today: together we want to reflect on the development of *Productive Learning* in our different countries; and together we want to explore new ideas for the future. I would like to thank everyone for being here today – because this diversity and the difference of your experiences and your perspectives make it possible for us to see the bigger picture.

We can be proud of what we have achieved. Here are a few examples:

- Our international network combines more than 60 members from 14 countries.
- Since 1991 we meet regularly at congresses and seminars and exchange ideas, plan joint projects and further develop our ideas and conceptions.
- Since 1991 nine international youth congresses took place.
- Since 1991 10 000 students participated in Germany in a PL project - in 84 schools, in 7 federal states.
- 80% of them attained a school-leaving certificate and ...
- the majority of these pupils was able to progress into steady employment.



Despite this success we are all aware of the fact that there is no cause for contentment. We need to develop further, and we need to find new answers to new questions. For this it is important that we exchange ideas, that we question our actions, indeed, that we sometimes raise doubts.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe himself once wrote '*More knowledge means more doubts*'. Without doubts there is no thinking, there are no questions, and there is no development.

20 years of history presented sufficient occasions for raising doubts: Are we still on the right track? Do we consider new challenges, prospects, and insights sufficiently within our thinking and during our actions? What shall we preserve, and what shall be changed?

It was not always possible to be united in these questions – neither within our institute nor within our international network. We had fierce debates, and long discussions, and we struggled in order to make positions clear. For example, within INEPS we have often revisited the following question: How to balance „openness“ – to network with a wider group of partners – and „identity“ – to concentrate on the specific goals of *Productive Learning*?

At our institute similar questions were raised: Should we focus all of our resources on *Productive Learning* or should we support and develop a variety of activities in this field – including less *radical* ones – in order to engage more schools and students?

In spite of these conflicts – or perhaps because of it – we always had a common and uniting viewpoint: we wanted to change things, and we were prepared to fight for our ideas and convictions – even when faced with opposition and sometimes also with risks.

“*Believe in the impossible*”– This sentence by Barack Obama in 2006 would also have suited Ingrid and Jens when they founded our institute in 1991. “*Believe in the impossible*”– this very attitude contributed immensely to where we are today: Ingrid and Jens we would like to thank you both for this.

Together with my colleague Conny Miksch, I have prepared a short retrospective presentation about the history of the IPLE and the INEPS. Though before I start, I hope that - during the next few hours - you will be able to appreciate a whole range of developments, that you will be able to talk about successes and about difficulties you have experienced, and that you will be able to return home with new ideas.

