

20 Years of IPLE and International Productive Learning

Productive Learning – looking back – looking forward Productive Learning within the framework of international educational development

International symposium on Friday, 4 November, 2011

The symposium took place in Berlin on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the *Institut für Produktives Lernen in Europa (IPLE)*. It was in autumn 1991 when we both – together with friends and colleagues – founded the *IPLE*, inspired at the time by our exciting experiences and the extraordinary success of *Die Stadt-als-Schule Berlin*. Wishing to overcome the “strait jacket” of traditional school learning, a project group of teachers, social educators and social scientists transferred New York’s *City-As-School* methodology to Germany and transformed it in accordance with the German educational conditions. For three long years the group was fighting hard in order to gain the political support and to acquire the financial means for the realization of this project. *Die Stadt-als-Schule* worked as well as the *City-As-School* across the ocean. Hence, we decided to do our best to spread the *City-As-School* approach internationally in order to support young people in the pursuit of their own way of learning.

The institute has survived 20 years – sometimes by the skin of its teeth. Within this period of time, the *IPLE* had the opportunity to contribute to school development in Germany, but also in other European regions. This was possible because we always found committed partners in schools, in the boards of education, and also in politics. Today the *IPLE* is an active and significant “player” in the field of school development and teacher training, first and foremost because of our multi-professional, deeply committed and creative team.

We are grateful for the passion and solidarity of our team and of all national and international partners. We are proud of the progress in educational development that this co-operation made possible. But in our view there is still a lot which needs to be done.

That is the reason why we combined our anniversary celebrations with a symposium looking ahead to the educational future and addressing the following questions:

- Is the approach and methodology of *Productive Learning* still adequate in terms of educational demands and the conditions of today?
- What should evolve within our methodology or by broadening it?

- What happened in our countries and what will happen in future that challenges education and schools?
- Which “currents” in educational policy should we utilize or resist? How can we improve our political work in general?
- What could be done to strengthen our international network and to increase its benefits for all members?
- What may help to stabilize and to increase the financial means for our common developmental work?

Three themes structured the symposium discussion:

- The addressees of *Productive Learning*:
Is *Productive Learning* (more) an innovation way for school education of all students or (more) an emergency measure for “learning disabled” students?
- General or vocational education:
Is *Productive Learning* (more) an alternative to traditional general education or (more) an educational program for preparing students for work?
- Educational value of *Productive Learning*:
Is *Productive Learning* equivalent or inferior to classical school education?

Representatives of 13 countries, all of them pioneers of *Productive Learning* in their country, followed our invitation. The symposium was organized as a “talk show”. Heike Borkenhagen welcomed the participants and opened the symposium presenting a series of pictures reminding the history of international *Productive Learning*. After having introduced the theme of the symposium Ingrid Böhm and Jens Schneider interviewed the international guests. This way of discussion stimulated all participants to very animated and lively contributions.

In the auditory more than 100 international guests listened the reports and messages of the pioneers. They were excited about what happened by *Productive Learning* within 20 years in Europe and in New York City and about the power and optimism all the reporters showed to the public: *Productive Learning* is alive and will have an international future.

The symposium as well as detailed descriptions on the past and the future of *Productive Learning* in 13 countries will be published soon in IPLE’s book “*Productive Learning* and international school development”.

Ingrid Böhm und Jens Schneider