

Opening of the seminar, 1st November 2011

by Heike Borkenhagen, IPLE

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you – on behalf of our institute and on behalf of my colleagues – to our 23rd International Seminar. This year, we are welcoming 31 participants: 15 from Germany (please make yourselves known) and 16 participants from abroad. In alphabetical order: from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Russia and from Sweden. Welcome to Berlin!

‘Productive Learning – Challenges for educators in our day-to-day work’: this is the title of this year’s seminar. We all are very familiar with the challenges of our educational day-to-day work – the optimistic feeling at the beginning of each school year or with every new learner group, our own high expectations with which we set our goals and the many big and small stumbling blocks on the way towards achieving our goals, *in short*, the many small surprises that are waiting for us every day.



And not always is our co-operation characterized by harmony and unity: may this be the case between pupils and educators, or within the team of educators itself, or between educators and school management or school administration. Sometimes there is helplessness, sometimes differences of opinions exist and sometimes even conflict.

However, this is all part of the game, because we have to live by the slogan: *“That, which blocks our path, brings us forward”*.

Challenges are exhausting; they mean work and sometimes may even cause stress. But they are also the engine and drivers of change *and* the very basis of an interesting job.

But what are these challenges in *Productive Learning*?

To learn differently also means to teach differently. When pupils are meant to learn to be more in control of their own educational process, when they are meant to develop their own interests in education and activity, when they are meant to explore their chosen field of practical activity with curiosity, and to connect it to the learning that is taking place at school – then this surely must translate into new and challenging tasks for their educators – and with this new questions arise, for example:

- How can I support a pupil during the process of exploring his or her practical place of learning – how can I stimulate his or her curiosity, to encourage him or her to observe attentively, to formulate questions and to find answers independently?

- How do I deal with the fact that instead of doing what is expected of him or her, the student expects questions and ideas from me?
- How can I help a student in matters of mathematics when I am an English teacher myself?
- How can I establish a relationship based on trust without becoming a mother or father figure, a partner or a friend?
- How can I utilise the individual experiences at the place of practice of one pupil for the whole group? Which common greater themes can be derived from such individual experiences?
- How can we secure that we are working together as a team?
- How can we organise our exchange and develop further?

From such questions it becomes obvious that it is not enough to acquire a different or more comprehensive repertoire of methods. Working in *Productive Learning* means, therefore, also to question one's own personal attitudes, one's self-image as an educator, and one's role expectations. Changes are based on experiences – within practice and with such practice, and also through a joint day-to-day routine with pupils. But not exclusively so: sometimes changes require the perspective and the support from outside.

At the very moment when we seemingly have accomplished something, have settled nicely into routines, when tasks and roles are finally clear, we often start to simply function. In this event, what becomes more important is regular stocktaking, the checking of our own position, and naturally the exchange with others. Hopefully, our seminar will make a vital contribution to this.

As a slogan for our exchange, I have chosen the following quotation: “*Problems are hidden opportunities*”. I very much hope you will enjoy many interesting discussions throughout the coming week.