

# What is *Productive Learning (PL)*?

## *Productive Learning and the Common Understanding in PROVED*



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## 1. ***Productive Learning* as a basis for the Erasmus+ project PROVED**

*Productive Learning* is an activity based form of education which replaces subject based schooling during the last two or three years of secondary school. One of the main characteristics of *Productive Learning* is the participation of adolescents in social activities, particularly in professional life. In the frame of general education students learn up to three days per week at a practice site, e.g. at a carpentry, in an old-age home, in a kindergarten, vegetable shop, museum or in some other real-life situation chosen by themselves. The “practical experiences” are the starting point for learning “on the job” as well as reflection. The reflection is continued in school and connected to academic learning.

The philosophy behind is, that cultural traditions – including the competences addressed in school subjects – are recognized and used as “tools” to improve one’s understanding as well as acting in the situation. The curricula are individualized to a high extend to meet the demands of the activity situation as well as the educational preconditions and interests of the individual student.

The concept development was inspired by the “City-As-School”, an alternative high school in New York. An adapted concept was designed in the late 1980th and tested in the pilot project in Berlin (“Die Stadt-als-Schule Berlin”). According to the good results an experimental program with 15 schools and three institutions in the field of non-formal education started 1996. In parallel the approach of *Productive Learning* was picked up in several European countries (see dissemination of *Productive Learning*).

The project aim of PROVED is to transfer *Productive Learning* methodology from the field of general education to the VET system. In the frame of the Erasmus+ project PROVED (2014 – 2016) *Productive Learning* was transferred from the field of general education to the VET system. The five participating vocational education institutions from Germany, Finland, Greece and Lithuania developed concepts of *Productive Learning* with regard to their national and local conditions and demands (the common understanding of *Productive Learning* in the consortium see point 1.2, concepts see ).

### **Curriculum Elements and Methodology (example Germany)**

To implement the model into the legal frame Educational Objectives of *Productive Learning* were formulated and a Framework Curriculum for 8th to 10th grade of general education was developed by *IPL*E in cooperation with the participating schools and institutions. The framework curriculum assures the necessary scope for individual curricula on the one hand side as well as the equivalence of the school leaving certificates on the other hand side. According to the opportunity to take part in different professional fields *Productive Learning* offers an integrated and effective vocational orientation.

According to the school regulations the curriculum structure and time table differs slightly in different federal states of Germany. In the core element “Learning in Practice” the young people choose a placement in a company or in social, cultural or political institutions. The interval for one learning period (“internship”) is approximately three months. Per school year the students visit up to three different sites. They participate up to 20 hours per week in the procedures at the site and, at the same time, explore, question and reflect on their own activities. The *Productive Learning* educator visits and counsels the students individually at the practice site as well as in school.

For three to five hours per week, students process their experiences in the so-called “Communication Group” where they reflect and discuss in a group, document experiences, search for information, prepare further activities and explorations etc.

Eight hours per week are linked to subjects to assure the competence development in key fields of general education: German (respectively the national language), English and Mathematics in *Productive Learning*, the learning areas “People and Culture”, “Society and Economy” and “Nature and Technology” and an optional subject. Nevertheless the “subject-oriented” learning is linked to the individual experiences and the application of the subject competences in real-life situations as much as possible. Learning a foreign language, usually English, is connected to International Learning facilitated by international exchange with partner schools in the INEPS (see below).

All school learning takes place in the “Learning Workshop”, which replaces the traditional classroom and is equipped with self-learning equipment. According to the individualized approach educational counselling, the development of individual curricula, individual support and evaluation are center activities of the educators in *Productive Learning*. For the group work, exchange and reflection they use methods of moderation and facilitation as the Theme-centered Interaction (TCI) by Ruth Cohn.

### **The efficacy of *Productive Learning***

The successes of *Productive Learning* speak for the adequacy of the educational paradigm and the methodology for increasingly rapid social changes. High completion rates on all German school levels and a high rate of successful transitions towards vocational training and professional life – 70 % to 80 % respectively - show that *Productive Learning* is not only theoretically plausible but that it is also successful and workable. It proved particularly to encourage students at risk of dropping out of school to continue and complete general education successfully. Accordingly the approach is recommended by the “Kultusministerkonferenz” (Handlungsempfehlungen 2007)” and by the EU Commission for “Reducing early

school leaving” (see [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/doc/esl-group-report_en.pdf)).

### **Dissemination of *Productive Learning***

1996 *Productive Learning* was introduced in Berlin, in the meantime 25 schools integrated the approach into their school program. Since 2002 seven secondary schools in Brandenburg and 21 secondary schools in Sachsen-Anhalt introduced *Productive Learning*. Since 2005 27 secondary schools in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern started *Productive Learning* programs and in 2006 six secondary schools introduced *Productive Learning* in Thüringen. From 2009 eight schools in Sachsen introduced *Productive Learning* programs.

Internationally the approach of *Productive Learning* was picked up in several countries, e. g. Finland, France, Hungary, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Russia and Spain. The curriculum and methodology was adapted to the national school law and standards, the structure of the educational system and the specific aims in the different countries. In some countries the experiences of pilot projects contributed to develop nationwide programs (e. g. the programs “My Own Career” and “Flexible Basic Education” in Finland). In other countries elements of the methodology were used mainly “in addition” the standardized curriculum (e. g. Russia). In some countries, e. g. Bulgaria and Romania, interested schools are still struggling for the formal permission to introduce pilot projects.

### ***International Network of Productive Learning Projects and Schools (INEPS)***

The *International Network of Productive Learning Projects and Schools (INEPS)* consists of schools and other educational institutions from 15 countries, mostly in Europe. The network partners regularly exchange their experiences in seminars and at conferences; they also set up youth congresses and carry out exchange programs for educators and students. Experience has shown that the common methodology and, in particular, the practice experiences of the students help to overcome language difficulties and cultural barriers during exchange activities.

## 2. *Productive Learning* – The common understanding in PROVED

Due to the different experiences with *Productive Learning* in the participating countries and the new context of vocational orientation and education it was necessary to find a common understanding what *Productive Learning* means in our project PROVED. Especially the following preconditions of the partners were partly very different and the basis for a big range of views and understandings:

- prevailing national educational systems
- knowledge about *Productive Learning* in general education
- experiences with learning in practice (outside of school)
- cooperation between schools and companies (educational system and the “market”)
- experiences with individualized learning

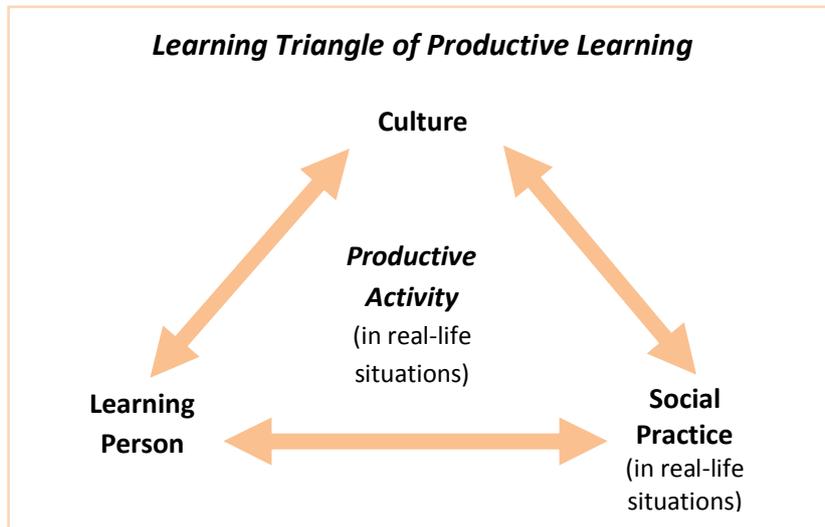
In the beginning of the project the partners got basic information about the theory of *Productive Learning*, the realization of the concept in general education and examples of implementation. Experiences in general education and examples of methods and instruments of this “different way of learning” were topics in the first partner meetings, seminars and school-based trainings. In this way all the partners got an equal basic understanding about the ideas of *Productive Learning*.

The development of the concepts was a very important process for the partners to reflect these basic ideas of *Productive Learning* and to transfer them (partly) into the educational work in the planned learning groups of the PROVED project – regarding the different preconditions. The realization of the adapted ideas in the “Implementation Phase” of the project was a good possibility for the partners to “test” *Productive Learning* by own experiences and to deepen the own understanding of its working/realization.

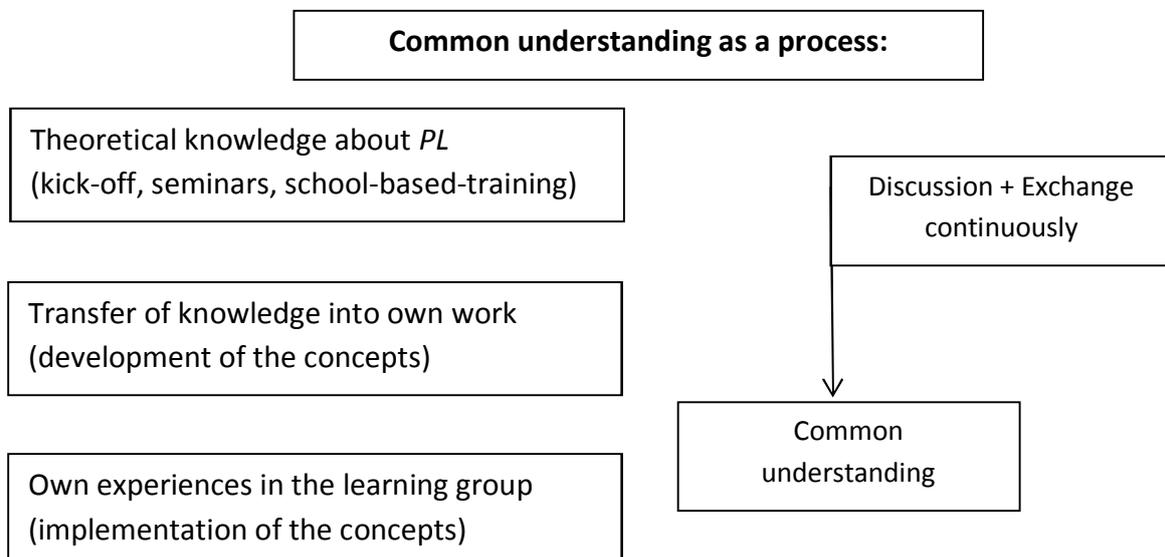
The different views and experiences of the partners concerning the basic ideas of *Productive Learning* were continuously exchanged and discussed. Here it was useful to remember the basic aspects of *Productive Learning* and to focus on these:

1. *Reference to the Person in Productive Learning, (“individualized learning”)*
2. *Reference to the Practice in Productive Learning, (“learning in real life situation outside of school”)*
3. *Reference to the Culture in Productive Learning, (“connecting own experiences with school learning”)*

The relationship between these aspects – shown in the *Learning Triangle* – was also one common background in the discussion:



The growing theoretical knowledge about the ideas and the experiences with *Productive Learning* in the own educational work at the same time widened the individual understanding and made the continuously discussion about the common understanding necessary. At the 3rd Partner Meeting of the PROVED project the partners were focusing on the “common understanding of *Productive Learning*”. In the discussion it became clear that the different conditions in the educational systems and at the partner schools were offering different “ways of realizing *Productive Learning*” and because of this the common understanding about “What means *Productive Learning*?” was defined more in a general and not in a very specific way. (see annex: results plenary discussion). This “general common understanding” makes it possible for all partners to follow the directions – although they may realize *Productive Learning* in their school in a way that differs in some regards.



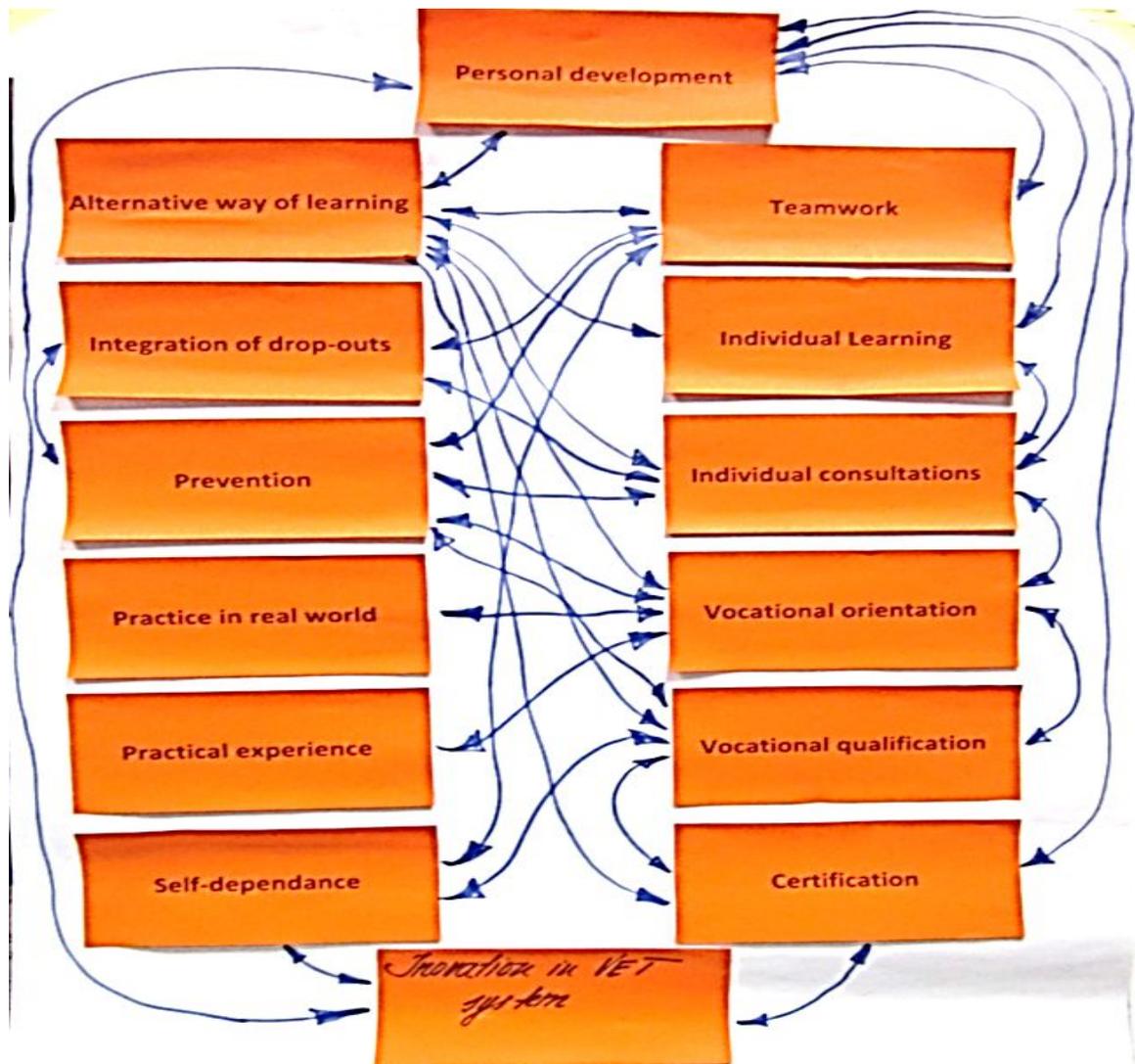
**“What means *Productive Learning* to the PROVED partners?”**

**Results from the plenary discussion**

**at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Partners Meeting, 21 to 23 March 2016, in Patras-Greece**

*Productive Learning*: The coordinators from *IPLE* implemented an interactive group work among the participants, shared into two days, concerning the common understanding about *Productive Learning*. The results were that all the three groups concluded in almost the same hierarchy of the philosophical and methodological approaches of the *Productive Learning* concept which facilitates further the common work of PROVED.

**Example of group-work result:**



The following keywords helped to describe the common understanding of *Productive Learning* in the PROVED partner meeting.

Integration of drop-outs	
Individual Learning	Teamwork
Practical experience	Certification
Practice in real world	Alternative way of learning
Vocational qualification	Individual consultations
Vocational orientation	Self-dependance
Personal development	Prevention

These words were added by the workgroups: Active citizen, Responsible, Support, Innovation in the VET system

**In the discussion some general aspects were pointed out.**

***Productive Learning* means....**

- working on the personal development of the students,
- learning also outside of school in real life situations,
- focusing the students – not the subjects,
- connecting on the student's learning interests and the practical experiences,
- learning individual and in groups in a suitable learning environment,
- having good relation between student and pedagogue (small team),
- having good relation between student and pedagogue (small team),
- vocational qualification, personal development, practice in real working live,
- a novelty to motivate students,
- a prevention school, giving opportunities to young people to obtain and improve their personal and social skills and thus obtain a strong personality able to face different kind of problems (drugs, alcohol and internet addiction, social, job exclusion, bullying etc),
- a hope and an opportunity to find one's place in life in general by means of getting a broader variety of educational options and pathways. *Productive Learning* embeds a new genuine and meaningful cohesion between the school and the world of labour which establishes new relations among actors representing the local community.





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