



WHAT IS PRODUCTIVE LEARNING?

In 1987, out of concern for a growing student drop out rate and a lack of alternative solutions to address it, a committed group of innovative teachers and social educators opened **Die Stadt-als-Schule Berlin**. They were determined to offer a progressive alternative education for a certain set of students seeking something beyond the conventional school setting. These forward thinkers took their inspiration from the alternative **City-As-School in New York**, which since its founding in 1972 had followed the philosophy that places of learning can be found outside the classroom throughout the city.

The principle: In this educational model, young people use the "city as a place of learning", becoming active in functional roles in real world settings of their choice, exploring and developing their working environment and integrating their practical, hands-on experiences with their own core curriculum. These new life experiences became the basis of their educational process.

After years of positive results in Die Stadt-als-Schule, the founders established both the **Institute for Productive Learning in Europe e. V. (IPLE)** at the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences for Social Work and Social Education Berlin in 1991 and the **International Network of Productive Schools (INEPS)**. Between the two entities, there are currently more than 50 educational projects in 15 countries aiming to broaden and share the successes of Productive Learning.

Activity as the basis of learning

At the heart of *Productive Learning* (PL) is *activity*; in the PL program, young people grow from immersing themselves in a practical undertaking and developing it with pedagogical support for their broader education. This means that the students first become engaged for the sake of the novel task : to try something out, to produce, to improve, to achieve, to question, etc. Only then do they see this endeavor as part of a function of learning and are able to more deeply qualify their experience. The notion of activity is thus essential to the pedagogy of *Productive Learning*.

Examples:

André leads a project in the preschool group of a kindergarten on the topic of "Numbers" through.

Sevgi is involved in making a costume for a performance at the Children's City District Theatre.

Productive learning in practice

These days, study in a conventional setting is largely for the sake of earning grades, passing an exam, joining the job market or starting a professional career, but hardly to satisfy the basic human drive of acquiring knowledge and skills that individuals consciously strive for and desire to choose for themselves.

Productive learning has the intention of making learning **practical, meaningful and reflect real life**. The young people first decide on a practical activity outside their school, e.g. in a company, a local shop, or a workplace so that they have the possibility to widen their horizon of experiences in a real life situation. They are encouraged to design an individual, personal educational programme in cooperation with mentors at the partnering sites, collaborating with educators and questioning, processing and generalizing their practical experiences and establishing professional, technical, social and other cultural awareness. Subject content is given personal relevance and meaning through their own experience.

In **individual educational counseling**, which takes place at school or at the practice place, the participants are supported in evaluating their practical experiences and preparing new ones, developing questions, establishing links between practice and theory, documenting what they have learned, addressing particular challenges and finding solutions for difficult situations.

In the **communication group**, the young people gather to share insights they've gained, present activities and work processes to each other, document and share results and solicit feedback from their peers. Here is an opportunity to ask clarifying questions and jointly develop problem-solving strategies, as well as exchange current and life-related topics with each other.

Students in *Productive Learning* need time and practice to grasp, accept and use this new form of learning. The fact that education can and should be tied to their personal development must first be rediscovered by them.

Example:

Karim wants to do "something with his hands" and therefore looks for a practical job with a carpenter. There he builds a small laptop table out of wood.

Steffie's family is planning to look for a new flat. She uses her practical placement at a small property management company as an opportunity to look into the Berlin housing market, the topics "rent cap" and "rent index", to conduct an interview with her mentor and to create a guide for the flat search.

However, the *practical relevance* of this type of hands-on experience also offers insight into operational procedures, legal regulations on safety at work, criteria for the working atmosphere, etc. These insights are rooted in the work experience, and therefore the corresponding experiential education is a natural one, rather than something that feels imposed by a stale curriculum. .

Example:

Maria experienced at her practice place at the hairdresser that an employee was dismissed. She found out about the reasons and the legal regulations for dismissal. Her report in the communication group triggered a controversial discussion. In the learning area of society and economy, the experience was a reason for Maria to look into the problems of small businesses and the political measures to combat unemployment. To do this, she enquired from her mentor about the taxes and duties of the business, among other things.

Students select the specific subject knowledge and skills they need to navigate their tasks and become productive. The process is taught systematically and correlates with the chosen activity as a means to an end.

Example:

Katerina works in a car workshop and is interested in the function of catalytic converters. She saws up a discarded car catalytic converter, researches physics, chemistry and automotive science textbooks and gives a presentation in the communication group on how different exhaust catalytic converters work.

A week with Katerina in *Productive Learning*

Katerina is in the 10th grade of *Productive Learning* in Berlin. This term, Katerina is working in a car workshop. In practice, she is active like all the other *PL participants* in her learning group on **Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays** - that's a total of 18 hours per week for three months. On **Mondays and Tuesdays**, she spends time at school with her learning group and her two *PL* teachers - an additional 14 hours per week.

The week starts with the **communication group**. The young people tell each other how their last week in their activity went. Some have brought products they have made themselves, while others show photos of services they've performed. Experiences of success and challenges are shared. Katerina reports that she is currently disassembling a car catalytic converter to understand how it works.

In the learning area of **nature and technology**, Katerina uses her individual working time to research on the Internet. There she reads that nature was the model for the catalytic converter used in cars and that similar processes take place in living beings. She wants to find out more to include information about it in an upcoming presentation.

In the **German lessons** on Monday and Tuesday, Katerina works on her learning plan. Together with the teachers, it was agreed that she would practice her spelling and grammar for the exam. For this, she collects pro and con arguments for an article about the compulsory helmet laws for cyclists and takes a stand on it in her own words. In the collective working time, the learning group writes a test paper in preparation for the EBBR.

In the **math lessons**, the teacher conducts a skills review with the *PL participants* in preparation for an exam. They use the Pythagorean theorem to calculate missing side lengths of triangles.

In **English class**, Katerina writes a fictitious email to her practice mentor explaining everything she learned in the car workshop.

Tuesday closes with another **communication group** and some mental preparation for the three practice days with her learning group.

From Wednesday to Friday, Katerina goes to the car workshop. She continues to dismantle the vehicle's catalytic converter and takes photos of her individual work steps. She numbers and comments on the photos in the documentation folder. On Thursday, her teacher visits her in the workshop for the weekly **Individual Educational Guidance**. Katerina reports on her work and her challenges in preparing the presentation she will give next Tuesday in the learning group on how different exhaust gas catalysts work. A round of questions from the group are discussed and later clarified with the practice mentor in the workshop.