

Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg

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Report concerning my Block Practicum B1 with All-Souls-Schools in Cheriton, Kent (UK) in the break before summer term 2008.

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Preface

I would like to thank:

Elke Stortz of the Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg, who organizes the exchange on behalf of the PH.

Anthony Clarke, (title!!) who helped us with the placement, organised our stay in Canterbury, including housing and sorting out our problems with the accommodation department of Canterbury Christchurch University.

Julian Goldsmith, class six teacher at the All-Souls-Primary school in Cheriton, who was not only a mentor but as well provided a role model for me.

Introduction

“Practical experience and professional competence are the guiding principles of teacher education at the Universities of Education in the German Federal State of Baden-Württemberg. [...] The program serves to give students an opportunity to consider their career choice and to introduce them to the occupation of teaching.”¹

¹ Pädagogische Hochschule Freiburg Zentrum für Schulpraktische Studien, „Block Practicum 1: Information and Recommendations“, Freiburg, 1.10.2005, page 1

This practicum was not my first teaching experience, out of my work with the ambulance service I qualified to become a first aid instructor. In this capacity I held many courses for pupils as well as for adults. One of this courses I held in a peculiar bilingual way: About half the students did only speak English, the other ones spoke German.

These courses require an introduction into the teaching of adult groups, an overview on some methods of group dynamics and of course medical background. But this interaction is different in a variety of ways from the interaction as a teacher in the classroom.

I am part of the group of students who do not have to do a Tagespraktikum 1, so this was my first "real" experience in a classroom. The experience was made much more interesting, by the fact that it was in a different language and on a different cultural background.

In this report I will try to highlight some aspects of my experience and some of the differences between the English and the Baden-Württemberg school system. Of course such a report can give only a short glimpse of what happened.

Typical School day

A typical school day at All-Souls-Elementary school starts at around 8: 30 for the staff. Teachers arrive and prepare their lessons, they may as well write reports for upcoming appointments with parents or careers or review their students work.

At ten to nine most students arrive, some may have arrived earlier and had breakfast at the breakfast club. Students then will settle in and wait for the class to start.

The Teaching assistant does a had count and asks students for some statistical data, as to with which means of transportation they have come to the class and whether they will eat lunch from the school or of their own.

Each school day in my class starts with the same routine, the teacher presents about 15 maths questions and then general knowledge questions on the interactive digital whiteboard in the classroom. The interactive digital whiteboard is a very interesting thing, it combines some of the advantages of the traditional chalkboard with those of a digital projector.² Students are supposed to answer these questions into their workbooks. After about then minutes, they will be discussed in class.. The general knowledge questions refer to topics thought before in the class and students should know how to answer them.

² for more information, see for example: <http://www.interactive-whiteboards.co.uk/whiteboards.htm> or see the Times Educational Supplement, 5.5.05: accessed at 1.5.08 21:00: <http://www.tes.co.uk/2221525>

The teacher makes the plan for the day available to students on the whiteboard, to give them an idea about the topics and subjects that will be covered during the day.

A 30 minutes break starts at 10:30 followed by an hour of lesson and another one hour break for students at 12 o'clock.

In this lunch break students can eat in the school gymnasium, the food is cooked at another school and costs one pound 70 pence a piece, the portions are rather small for an adult and include a dessert. Some teachers remarked that the food was not the very good. Accordingly most of the stuff ate either a salad lunch or brought their own lunch from home.

At least once a week there is assembly. All the students gather in the gymnasium and a religious service, including songs and a prayer is held. The headmaster hands out praise and certificates for special achievements to the students. Sometimes a outside person such as a fire fighter comes and gives students talk on special issue.

The school day then lasts until 3 o'clock when students are released into the wild and sent home or collected by their parents.

In total there are not more lessons held then in traditional German elementary school, which teaches students from 7:50 till 13:05 with five minute breaks between the classes and a court break for 25 minutes.

Generally school feels more relaxed here then in Germany, one factor might be adding to this is the use of Teaching Assistants in every classroom.

Testing (SAT)

My internship took place just a couple of weeks before the final exams of the elementary school, which were to determine the student's placement in the secondary school. Exceptionally for most of England, Kent County still has Grammar Schools for the better performing students and Comprehensive Schools for the average students and those with special needs.

A lot of attention is paid to the SATs,, which take up an entire week and are given to schools from a central authority. A lot of time was spend to prepare students to have good marks in the SATs, which will determine the kind of school students will go to later but are

a way of evaluating the performance of the school as a whole as well. These results are published.

Having such tests they are used by the teacher as a way to motivate students to work. "Something like that will come up in the SATs", was a sentence used frequently in the classroom to justify why something was taught to students.³

Role of TA

The role of Teaching Assistants is new to the average German student and certainly new to the German school system. Although "Pädagogische Assistenten" have recently been established in Baden-Württemberg⁴ their introduction⁵ remains controversial and many issues around this scheme remain to be tested, evaluated and reflected.

British teaching assistants are mostly female, 40 % of them have no prior teaching qualifications, most are aged between 35 to 48 years.⁶

Their main task in my school and my classroom were:

- Helping the teacher with administrative work, such as counting students, asking for signatures by the parents,
- Helping to prepare a lesson, by making photocopies, looking for stuff, cutting out things, preparing resources
- Helping weaker students in class, by explaining them things, supervising their work, answering questions or interacting with the teacher
- Arranging displays of student work,
- Doing special activities with weaker students

In general Teaching Assistants in my school and according to the literature are widespread, in every classroom there was at most times more than one adult. This has a variety of

³ For more Information on the SATs: <http://www.parentscentre.gov.uk/foragegroup/7to11years/testsage11/> or http://www.qca.org.uk/qca_8740.aspx

⁴ „Pädagogische Assistenten unterstützen künftig Lehrkräfte an Hauptschulen“, Press release by the Regierungspräsidium Tübingen, from 22.11.07, accessed at: <http://www.rp.baden-wuerttemberg.de/servlet/PB/menu/1236386/index.htm> at: 26.4.08 15:30

⁵ „An der Hauptschule nur Flickwerk“, Pressrelease by the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft, from 19.11.2007, accessed at: http://gew-bw.de/Paedagogische_Assistenten.html at 26.4.08 15:33

⁶ „Teaching assistant (United Kingdom)“, Wikipedia article, accessed: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teaching_assistant_%28United_Kingdom%29 at 29.4.08 15:35

effects on the atmosphere: Teachers can be more relaxed, they have less work to do and don't always have to be on the height of attention in the classroom.

For students there are a variety of benefits as well: students have more than one adult they can relate to, they can get more help. It helps as well to make a more spread out and student related lesson: the teacher can prepare all or parts of the lesson with stronger, average and underperforming students in mind. Or if the aim of the lesson is to produce an object, the TA can help the weaker students, so that they have a product as well.

But of course there are dangers as well: students might get used to a second explanation, get used to somebody helping them, which might be a problem for them later.

Teaching style

My teacher did have a very special teaching style. It is difficult to describe but I will try to give some points here.

He related to the class in a very special way. On the one hand he had a very firm grip on what was done by the children, there were little discipline issues. But he did not have to use a lot of force or overt pressure onto the students. He merely used gentle remarks and humour to drive down his points. Thereby he assured that there was attention to the subject taught but did not have to reprimand a lot.

Assessment style

The continuous assessment by our mentor was very helpful in discussing how to advance my lessons and my planning. I included copies of this reports in the annexe. This assessment was always very informative and helpful in improving my further teaching.

Which school system is better?

It is hard to say from the experience in one school. One cannot even make good guess.

The English system seems to be better in integrating different kinds of students and bringing them together. The use of Teaching Assistants is one such example, they do a lot of work to help integrate weaker students.

It seems to be more advanced in using some new methods, especially the good access to ICT Resources.

But it has its problems, too: Judging from my school building. The constructed form of education did not seem to be a priority.

Reflection

Teaching is process intensely connected to the personality of the teacher. The success and behaviour of Mr. Goldsmith showed that to me. A teacher cannot continuously play or pretend to be someone else.

Secondly lesson cannot be strictly planned. A lesson is always a interactive process, the interaction between students and teachers, between students cannot be completely forecasted. We can create strategies to deal with unforeseen events and prepare our lesson with resources, but the actual execution of the lesson will always contain unforeseeable events and therefore we have to decide if and how to react to them.

Conclusion

A school is always a product of the country in which it operates. The social, legal, cultural traditions that determine what is thought and how it is thought are different. It is much more interesting to teach in a different place and to navigate the cultural differences. It does make yourself more aware about the differences between both countries.

But in the end teaching is teaching, regardless of the cultural background, many of the techniques and forms are the same and shaped more by human nature then by cultural heritage.

Appendix

Week plan, provided by Canterbury Christchurch University

Planning timebables, for four weeks

Lesson plans

Observation of Primary Professional Placement sheets

"Freiburg and Canterbury Exchange March 2008", questions sheet by Anthony Clarke

Pictures