eLEARNIG INITIATIVE

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Executive summary

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Table of contents

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Organization

The Berufskolleg Bethel [Bethel] is one part of the institution von-Bodelschwinghsche-Anstalten-Bethel. The foundation of the Von-Bodelschwingsche-Anstalten took place in the 19th century (1867). Today more than 14.000 persons are cared for in different institutions including clinics, homes, schools and kindergartens. The departments in the institution are: department for assistance for disabled persons; department of psychiatry; department for vocational training for persons with epilepsy. There are also a number of schools which belong to the institution: remedial schools, secondary school, high school and Bethel.

In Bethel there are 38 teachers and 550 students. The school itself is divided into three departments, namely a department for social assistance, a department for social education, and a department for remedial pedagogy.

Aims:

Bethel aims to train students to work in different social fields: day care institutions for children; child and youth work: residential care; and institutions for persons with special needs. Bethel cooperates with private and public institutions of social work in the area of the Von-Bodelschwingschen-Anstalten and the region.

Teaching / training activities

Bethel provides vocational training and general education. It trains in the following professions: SozialhelferInnen (social assistants) HeilerziehungshelferInnen und Heilerziehungspflegerinnen (specialized care workers), Erzieherinnen (educators, professional child and youth workers), and Heilpädagoginnen (remedial teachers)

Teaching is provided in subjects such as pedagogy, psychology, didactical methodology, German and English language, mathematics, and politics. It also provides supervision for students in their practical placements.

Supporting activities:

Bethel organizes opportunities for professional exchange and discussions among social workers and students through meetings and conferences.

Role in the project:

In the PRAISE project Bethel has worked with other partners to define the concept of viruous circles and to activate and make experimentations with VCs. The Berufskolleg Bethel was responsible for formative plans in the PRAISE project.

Local Experience - Berufskolleg Bethel

This Deliverable describes the planning, process and impact of the experiences of Berufskolleg Bethel in trialling the PRAISE methodology. It begins with a brief introduction to the creation of virtuous circles in the school. A contextual summary is given to aid the reader in understanding how PRAISE should combine with the work of the school. It continues with descriptions of the planning and process of the virtuous circles in the school. Finally, it concludes with descriptions of the results and impacts, including formative needs identified in the process

Introduction

In setting up the virtuous circles at the Berufskolleg Bethel, we took as our starting point the opportunity, but also the necessity to allow for and to incorporate the existing structure of education in the school. This meant building on the existing co-operation with partners, and adhering to guidelines for instruction, as well as achieving integration with specific regional and organisational features. We assumed that the implementation of the idea of virtuous circles could only succeed if we managed to use existing contacts and to integrate the work of the circles with existing commitments, thus achieving a synergy between the project aims and the aims of the von Bodelschwinghshe Institutions of Bethel.

We set up three different virtuous circles with three distinct groups of participants: social workers; experts in the support of disabled people; and students of the college. The college provides supervision and support to students doing practical placement in the fields of social and remedial education. This work brings us into close contact with colleagues in these fields and provided the opportunity to create the first virtuous circle.   The Berufskolleg Bethel is maintained by the largest religious welfare institution in Europe: the von Bodelschwinghsche Institutions of Bethel.   The training of qualified staff with a noticeably social-religious profile is one important reason why this corporation invests in education and training. The corporation employs highly trained staff in the fields of medicine, therapy and education. This provided the second opportunity to set up a virtuous circle with experts in the field of support to disabled people, thereby building on the cooperation between institutions in Bethel and the school departments to the benefit of both. The third virtuous circle was set up with students of the Berufskolleg attending the training course on 'Remedial Education.' Specific contents of the course were delivered within the virtuous circle and the work done in the circle was integrated into the training programme.

In the sections that follow the general procedure used in all three circles is described and then the detailed work in each of the three circles is described separately.

Procedure

In all three circles 'narration' was used as the basic method of inquiry and analysis. In the narration the concept of professional social work is presented from the subjective point of view of one person, and in this way complex and differentiated milieus and

problematic situations are reconstructed and analyzed. Within a given narrative structure different core topics can be reconstructed and analyzed by questioning. Concepts and problems, educational procedures and solutions are explained from unfiltered experience.

In each virtuous circle examples of good practice were presented according to the procedure outlined below. Special emphasis was always given to the narration supplemented by an analysis according to given categories.

Narration procedure

1. Narration of the practical example

2. Questions for clarification and understanding

3. Reactions (associations, critical comments, what was new for me in this field, etc.)

4. Evaluation (What is the special quality of this example?)

5. Analysis and transfer

6. Identification of key words

Virtuous Circle with social workers

This first circle was set up with social work colleagues in different settings including: youth work; fieldwork, and remedial education. The opportunities and difficulties presented in the course of developing the membership and work of this group are described, together with the results and impact of the work.

Planning and process

The school courses at the Berufskolleg are distinguished by their close links with fields of practice: all students have periods of practical training in the fields of remedial pedagogy, leisure education activities elementary pedagogy and home education. They work with children, teens, young adults and elderly people, people with behaviour problems, people with learning disabilities and people with physical disabilities. A two year course at the school is followed by a year of practical training as a requirement for professional qualification. The practical training is closely integrated with the educational input: all the practical placements are supervised by the teachers of the Berufskolleg, and educational exercises take place directly in the social and remedial institutions. The college and the practice institutions work closely together on the aims, content and evaluation of the placements and this formed a good basis for the implementation of the first virtuous circle with the educators in these fields.

It was hard work building up membership of the group. We found that we had to make personal contact with practitioners to encourage them to participate. Often we had to get permission from the responsible manager and it was difficult to find mutually convenient times to meet, partly due to the variety of professionals involved

and their different service demands. Once we got started however, most educators participated in at least one of these meetings and there was a small core group of regular participants. The European aspect of the project generated a lot of interest and there was positive feedback from all those who became involved. However, it was not possible to constitute a stable, united circle, in which each member participated in every session. It was rather the case that some of the bigger group of interested educators took part in some of the meetings – according to their own interests and the chosen topics. We had drawn up a list of email addresses of interested educators and inform them about new meetings and the corresponding topics/cases. The varying membership at each meeting meant that we had to repeat information on the project at each meeting. It was not possible for all members of the circle to write down their narrative in the form that we needed for the PRAISE project, so we supported them in this through audio taped interviews.

Result and impact

To sum up we can state that this circle was characterised by difficult organisational conditions and fluctuating participation. Although there was great interest in the exchange on professional concepts, the great strain of work on the participants meant that a continuous process of analysis and discussion was hardly possible. Another problem was that the integration of the PRAISE project into our every-day routine was a voluntary, additional and guided activity rather than a compulsory part of our school work as a whole.

The process adopted (narration and analysis) was successful. The interpretations of the case studies depended on the subjective point of view of the narrator and those taking part in the discussion. Through questioning by the group, alongside the subjective concept of action of the individual, general conditions of social work could be made explicit, particularly questions of financing, network structures, arrangements and settings for children and so forth. The quality of interaction in the group was very positive; there was a supportive atmosphere, in which the participants were not afraid to present their working practice. Colleagues presenting their projects received a high measure of appreciation. The communication in the circle meetings helped to provide a forum for their own work. The ideas and concepts presented there were useful to other participants and were applied in other fields of work.

Virtuous circle with the partners from the Institutions of Bethel

As a school maintained by an institution well known for the support of disabled people, we thought it important to include colleagues from the practical work of supporting disabled people in a virtuous circle. We saw this as a good opportunity for the exchange of experiences and case examples.

Planning and process

We established contact with executives in the support services for disabled children and young people to provide information and promote the project. The PRAISE

project and the opportunity to implement a virtuous circle met with great interest. The service for children and young people comprises several groups of these sharing apartments situated in the area of Bethel or in the neighbouring town of Bielefeld. The children have learning and emotional difficulties and some are also physically disabled or autistic. The children receive intensive remedial work and nursing care.

At our first constituent meeting, in which the project was once more presented in a power-point presentation to all colleagues present, in response to the request of the management of the service for disabled children in Bethel we agreed the following:

- The virtuous circle was to comprise five executives of the service, who would meet every two weeks

- At each meeting a colleague working in direct contact with disabled children was to be invited to present a narration from his or her practical work

- The narration could be about individual children or interesting group projects

- The meetings were to take place during working hours

- The colleague presenting the case would attend the virtuous circle only once

At first this seemed to us a doubtful procedure, as the colleagues telling the story are faced by their superiors. The PRAISE team wondered if members of the staff would be willing to report frankly on their work to their superiors and then take part in a discussion of the case which would lead to a decision on whether it was an example of good practice. The senior executive told us that this was only practical way of involving practitioners during working hours without incurring heavy loss of time in the direct work with the children.

The meetings followed the general procedure outlined above. One member of the circle chaired the meeting; another recorded the narration and produced a draft for the group after the meeting. The draft was presented to the narrator for correction. The revised narration was then passed to the translator ready for insertion in the database. In the discussion the focus was first on the tasks of organization and administration. After further questioning the discussion focused on the pedagogical work. This resulted in lively professional discussions. The feedback to the narrator generally showed great interest in and appreciation of the work. Often solution-focused discussions developed on the best procedure for educational problems. The every-day educational work became the centre of attention. There were often long discussions on key terms, as main and side aspects of a topic and theoretical concepts were determined here and recorded as a summary of the discussion.

Result and Impact

The doubts concerning the membership and format of this circle were not confirmed. The five people who have presented case histories so far were willing to report on their work. From their reports it became clear that their day to day work, receives little attention from the public and even immediate superiors. Often they have the impression that superiors only notice whether everything is well organized and works.

Through the PRAISE project the direct work with the children/young people was focused on and was appreciated. This was perceived as very positive by all those presenting cases to the circle meetings.

Also the standing members of the circle showed great interest. The chair of the circle appreciated the many interesting details of work which showed good professional thinking. The narration was followed by professional discussions on the 'right' procedure. The narrating colleague was perceived and recognized as a 'specialist'.

The following case examples have been collated at the time of writing:

- Crisis intervention in an institution for short-term nursing;

- Dealing with an aggressive young person in a residential home for disabled people;

- Leisure education activity in the form of a swim group;

- Cooking and self-catering educational activity in a home for disabled children/young people;

- The football team – leisure education activity with young disabled people.

Promoting self-determination emerged as a central theme of all the case studies. This subject was identified as suitable for an additional module within the school curriculum. The following questions were identified as important learning areas:

- How can a child/a young person live in a flat-share group/a home with as much self-determination as possible?

- In what circumstances do the rules of the groups and institutions stand in the way of a self-determined life?

- What must change in the attitude of staff in order to support self-determination for children living in a group?

- What support do disabled children need in order to realize their needs and to communicate them?

- What help do they need to stand up for their interests with self-confidence?

- What is the meaning of self-determination for children/young people who cannot communicate verbally?

The work of the virtuous circle is not finished and will continue at Berufskolleg Bethel.

Virtuous circle with students of the college

The third virtuous circle was set up with students of the Berufskolleg attending the training course on 'Remedial Education.' Specific contents of the course were delivered within the virtuous circle and the work done in the circle was integrated into the training programme.

Planning and Process

The Berufskolleg offers training as a remedial educator as an additional qualification. During their two years' training the students work on a practical project once a week for one year; in this context they work with a child with a disability or with evident behaviour problems; or with a small group of children. This practical project is prepared intensively and supported during lessons in college. The class consists of 24 students, who regularly reflect on their practical projects in four small groups. Each small group is chaired by a teacher. The form of teaching used in the small groups is an intensive method of peer counselling. This method was integrated into the PRAISE project and provided a complementary method with the project methodology.

The integration of the virtuous circle meetings into the lessons at school at first proved more difficult than expected. The product orientation of the virtuous circles was not always compatible with the process orientation of teaching, with tests and curricular demands. The students faced great pressure to perform. Many colleagues were concerned that the expectations on the students were too great, especially as the primary purpose of the peer counselling method is to provide help and support help. The main problem was that the virtuous circle guidelines aim for a tangible result; it is not the students with their case example (and possibly also with their problems) who are at the centre of attention, but the product 'case example'. There was concern that these additional demands would detract from the openness and opportunities to discuss problems and look for solutions that was integral to the peer counselling method. We discussed our concerns that the freedom and openness of previous learning experiences would be threatened.

We were also concerned about producing the case studies in English. There were limitations on the translation facilities available during the course and language barriers were a significant obstacle.

The limited technical equipment available in the college (too few personal computers available for students limited access to the Internet, and little experience with the computer as a medium, meant that it was difficult to work on and with the elearning platform.

On the level of case study and course content the approach of the project was repeatedly viewed with scepticism. The students questioned whether other European countries with different conditions for social work could learn from their examples and vice versa. Furthermore there was concern that this the teaching modules developed from the case examples would be too far rooted in local conditions to be transferable.

To gain acceptance for the circle, we engaged in intensive lobbying. In the end, the curiosity and interest of the students and their constructive proposals for the integration of the circle into the curriculum decided us to risk the implementation of

the circle despite our many reservations. We began with a power-point presentation as an introduction. The first narration was presented by the teacher herself, who beside her teaching activities works as a self-employed remedial educator. This example served as a model for the students. The meeting proceeded according to the general procedure outlined above, but with two modifications; the items 'Definition of the problem' and 'Strategies for solution', were added to the structure of narration. This ensured that the main aims of the peer counselling method was not neglected in the student training.

The intention of the circle meetings to reconstruct examples of good practice was thus broadened to include the aim of giving the students help and guidance for the solution of problems. The meeting was chaired by the teacher herself, a fellow student took the minutes of the narration and later wrote a draft. This was presented to the narrator for correction and revision as necessary. It was not translated during lessons, but by a professional translator.

For their narration the students made use of the written documentation of their projects: observation report (written in the first four weeks of the practical); minutes of the weekly therapeutic exercise with the child; and reflective reports on the hours of exercise with the child. The written documentation served as a rough division of the narration. We found it was important for the narrator to turn away from the texts, so that she was able to tell the narration from memory. This free narration together with the answers to questions from the participants gave a more complete picture of the conditions in which the projects were carried out than provided by the written documentation. In most cases the result was a far more complex view of the child's situation and of the other persons concerned (e.g. the role of the teacher and the physiotherapist in the mobility training with a physically disabled child).
The narrator as well as her fellow students in the circle defined the problem as they had perceived it in reality and during the narration. Subsequently the participants offered solution strategies to the narrator which were accepted, modified or rejected; sometimes completely new solution strategies were developed. The complete process of narration and interpretation was conducted in a constructive and appreciative way.
The focus of these circle meetings was on the work with disabled people. In this context examples were given of the work with deaf children, with autistic children, with children with delayed development as well as with physically disabled children. Examples of therapy from the fields of psychomotorics, play therapy, and remedial education, etc. were explained.

Result and Impact

Narrating and discussing the problem provided the narrator with the opportunity to reflect on her practical project. She allowed all the others in the group to engage with the successful and also in the failed parts of her project. This was done with great frankness and mutual appreciation. The written minutes of the narration provided the opportunity to supplement important aspects. They also served as a draft for the written reflection on the practical project, if need be, and as summative document for evaluation. This synergy effect was very important for the students, as their voluntary commitment was recognised and contributed to their evaluation.

In the case example 'Mobility training with a severely physically disabled girl' it became clear that the narrator had not realized before the evaluation , which was carried out in the form of feedback by the other participants, how much obvious progress she had achieved with the child. She was confirmed in her previous approach and received further suggestions for the continuation of the practical project.

Unlike the other two virtuous circles, the case examples in this circle contained examples of therapeutic processes with children that extended over one year. This made the students ask very concrete questions concerning the functional limitations and social restrictions for the child and possible methods of dealing with the resulting more difficult conditions of education. Here are some examples of the questions asked:

- how does a child learn a language? How does language develop?

- What help does a deaf or hard of hearing child need to acquire the ability to speak?

- What possibilities are there to support language by gestures?

- Can sign language replace language?

- How can I communicate with a child that is hard of hearing without knowing sign language?

- What further diminutions of perception does the child have?

- What carefully planned approaches could help this child?

The work in the circle meetings revealed some gaps in expert knowledge of the individual kinds of functional limitations and social restrictions associated with, for example: complete or partial hearing loss; physical limitations; emotional difficulties; and visual impairments. Students also identified the need for module development in specialised skills for educating, accompanying, supporting and teaching disabled children. Future teaching modules and courses will contain input on methods of:

- Non-verbal communication

- Planned improvement of (verbal) language

- Psychomotorics for visually impaired children

- Play therapy

Case studies

The table below shows a sample of the case studies produced in the circles and illustrates how key concepts and practice and learning themes were developed from the discussions.

Case study title	Key concepts	Practice themes	Learning themes
		Could include practice knowledge or unknowledge; informing practice; reforming practice; organisational context	Theoretical and/or research work applied Relevance to learning; module development
Theatre project: What do you believe in?	Network, theatre, community work, tolerance, dialogue between religious groups	Realizing the multicultural community in a town near Bielefeld, the staff of a day-care-centre has built up a network to carry through an intercultural theatre project. Schools, clubs and representatives of 3 religions taking part.	Community work. Network. Intercultural work. Cooperation of different religions. Indirect relevance to the learning module development, being a positive model of cooperation in a intercultural sense.
www.bielewelt.de	Media competence, democracy, community work, mobile work, participation of children	Mobile child-work in Bielefeld, analysis of the possibilities of a city for children, using the internet and public meetings to create an awareness for the needs of children.	Participation. Commitment for children's rights. Children from different cultures. Media Competence of children. No relevance for the learning module development.
Participation of young people in a youth centre	Participation, integration of different youth scenes, democracy, transfer of power, commitment	Open child- and youth work in a youth centre with children / young people from different cultural background and different youth scenes. Attempt to encourage young	Participation. Encouraging young people to respect each other and take over responsibilities. Process of identity formation. Adolescence.

		people to be responsible for their own place.	No relevance for the learning module development.
Fashion from Rubbish	Work with girts, open youth work, fashion, ecology	Cooperation of social workers in a youth centre and an organization for work with girls. Funded by the EU as a model project in ecology. Taking up the girls' interest in fashion and offering methodologies to make girls interested in ecology / technology.	Ecology. Gender socialization. Methodologies to reach girls in a technical field. Nor relevance for the learning module development.
Language Treasure Project	Bilingual early education, parents with migration background, multiculturalism, day-care-centres	Educators in a day-care-centre in Bielefeld confronted with a large number of children with a Turkish migration background and difficulties with the German language. Project financed by sponsoring. Discussion of the possibility of serving as a model for similar situations.	Language acquisition. Working with parents. Migration. Needs to include language acquisition in the formation of educators. Starting-point for the development of the learning course.

Summary and concluding remarks

The virtuous circles described here took into account the different conditions of the organization. The circle involving colleagues in the fields of social and remedial education was based on voluntary participation with the consequence that continuity of membership could only be achieved up to a point. We lost some of the benefits of sustained participation but gained a more varied exchange of experiences. The circle with students of the college was shaped mainly by the framework of training and examination guidelines and thus could also only be organized as an optional part of their training. The advantage of this circle lay above all in the close interlocking of training and practice. For four students the outcome was particularly successful because the developed their skills in writing their narrations and produced a case study. The other students needed more time for their narrations and were concerned about the quality of their work. We concluded that we would need to develop our

process and methods further if we were to fulfil our training obligations and meet the personal development needs of all students.

Only the circle with the partners from the Institutions of Bethel was characterized by a high degree of obligation. This was costly in terms of time for the permanent members, but did lead to valuable exchanges of opinion and development of knowledge among experts.

Two results are of special importance to us: All the participants in all three circles have experienced a high appreciation of their work; and practice settings and the school have proved themselves as 'learning organizations'. The opportunity to be able to make one's activity public, to reflect on one's work critically has motivated many participants to continue the exchange in the virtuous circles.
In each circle an intensified exchange among experts and between professionals and school has been achieved. Through the organisation and development of the circle networks the school has gained new recognition for some fields of work, and for some practitioners in the field, and has intensified the exchange between training and practice. The school has also benefited by bringing training right up to date through the communication in the virtuous circles. This exchange takes place through face to face dialogue at the moment. We see potential for the elearning environment in extending this dialogue, but do not imagine that communication via elearning will replace face to face exchange.

In our opinion the question as to whether regional networks can be extended to international networks cannot yet be answered conclusively at this time. Judging from the experiences described here it is necessary to provide more resources (time, money, and staff) for European partnerships in elearning. We assume that learning and working together is feasible in Europe. Here we must bear in mind that concepts with a regional cultural 'touch' can be transferred to other European contexts, as long as cultural differences in the sense of a 'right to differences' are maintained.

Acronyms and Abbreviations

Acronym	Description