

Switzerland (Bern)

Primarschule Lindenfeld

This primary school caters to children aged 5 to 12 (one year of kindergarten to grade 6), who are taught in mixed-age classes including gifted students and students with special needs. The focus of teaching is on the individualization and differentiation of learning, by means of daily and weekly schedules, and different work forms in flexibly composed groups where students can be working on the same object but with different tasks. Teachers act as counsellors who stimulate learning with an emphasis on variety instead of competition. Transitions through school (including skipping or repeating classes) are realized none bureaucratically in the mixed age classes. In addition to regular evaluations, the school uses a self-created form to monitor the students' development and inform the parents four times a year. Professional development of the staff is supported by collaborations with the University of Bern. Methods for internal evaluations involve video recordings of all teachers' classroom practice.

Main Focus of Innovation: LEARNERS, ORGANIZATION, TEACHERS

General Information

Name of the ILE: Primarschule Lindenfeld

Location/Address: Zähringerstrasse 25 3400 Burgdorf

Website: <http://lindenfeld.kibs.ch/>

ILE submitted by: Head of the School

Rationale

Why do you suggest that it should be included in the project? How does it respond to 21st century learning challenges?

- School which (based on pedagogical convictions) keeps six mixed-age group classes¹ (three times grade 1-3 and three times grade 4 -6)
- Teaching development for the topic “mixed-age learning as a pedagogical principle”
- Cooperative/collegial further development and reinforcement of the mixed-age learning
- Professional opening
- Orientation to the actual comprehension of learning and teaching
- School career decisions (skipping or repeating classes) runs un-bureaucratically
- Natural differentiation: activity decided/chosen by the learner, same task, different activities, different requirements
- Grade overlapping learning on different levels
- Learning on the same object, different tasks

Evidence

Is there any evidence or indications showing that this initiative achieves the outcomes that it is aiming at?

Surveys and reports on the evaluation of the realization (see under Documentation **describing or evaluating the ILE** section)

Learning Aims / Intended Learning Outcomes of the ILE

What are the core learning aims and which knowledge, skills or attitudes are to be acquired? (These may include outcomes related to learners’ social, interpersonal, or meta-cognitive development)

- To make use of the possibilities and chances of mixed-age learning
- Use of the heterogeneity of the children for their learning, starting from their individual level of learning
- To experience individuality as an enrichment for the community, for example: learning through stimulation instead of competition, emphasis on variety
- Subject-matter-competence²: to obtain overview over major interrelations; tasks which base on the curriculum are open to the top, challenging and not levelling
- Social competence: to live different roles enables to obtain wider social experiences >>> extends social competence
- Self-competence: self-responsibility for autonomous learning/ to perceive own learning progresses clearly

¹ Classes which contain learners of different grades and age

² competence in one subject like mathematics, English or history, domain specific competence

Learners

Which group(s) of learners is it aiming at? Who is eligible to take part? How many learners are there? What are their ages?

- Kindergarten (age 5-6)
- Primary school grade 1 – 6 (age 7-12)
- Offers for specially talented students
- Quarter school, attribution by residence, no free choice
- Since summer 2009, students with special needs are integrated in our regular classes. This extends the spread within classes. The demand for internal differentiation becomes even more obvious and self-evident.

Facilitators

Who are the teachers/facilitators? Who are the leaders? What are their professional backgrounds? What are their roles?

- Head of the school: Anna Müller, primary school teacher, graduate teacher for adult education, graduate headmaster
- The teaching team is composed of young professionals and experienced teachers. Some possess further training in various areas.
- Remedial teacher complete and support the teaching staff

Professional development within our school is important. It is largely based on the evaluation by the University of Teacher Education in Berne and on self-evaluation. Among others, the evaluation has shown that the present way of differentiated teaching should be extended. The video recordings of the teaching of all teachers and the results of the internal evaluation concerning “age-mixed teaching as a pedagogical principle” have been used to develop teaching. For this development, the focus was on distinct forms of differentiated teaching in combination with characteristics of successful teaching as described by Hilbert Meyer (H. Meyer. (2004). *Was ist guter Unterricht?* Berlin: Cornelsen Scriptor). Video sequences were used as illustration of certain forms of differentiation in varying classroom situations.

During five phases in school year 2008/2009, we theoretically and practically dealt with the design of teaching leading to successful and individualized teaching.

The several evaluations confirmed and elucidated the direction of our school development. Teachers now reflect more consciously on their own teaching - especially on teaching in age-mixed classes and on the use of distinct teaching methods with varying degrees of differentiation. The direction of the development of teaching is defined: Meaningfulness, self-production (by students), and consolidation of knowledge through exchange and cooperation characterize the general orientation. The teachers get stimulation as well as room for their own creation and shaping. As a next step for intensifying cooperation among the teaching staff, it is planned to initiate professional learning communities.

Organization of the ILE

How is learning organised? How do learners and facilitators interact? What kind of pedagogy do they follow? What curriculum is used?

- Learning primarily occurs in class communities: instruction which is organized in the plenum, in differently composed groups, in partner work and in individual work
- In the canton of Bern, the subject specific lessons are variably endowed for different grades. This gives us the opportunity to work individually with each grade group, which allows quicker detection of the learning status and the assistance needs and enables the fostering of small groups
- Mixed-age learning as principle

Age-group-spanning forms are used to introduce themes and common activities, deepening of contents occurs in age-group-mixed and/or performance-homogenous learning groups

We work with “schedules work” (day’s schedule and weekly schedule - (a set of tasks is defined; each student individually plans on which tasks he/she works at what time), but also with projects or by “announcement”

- Examples for subjects and learning forms:
Mathematics: instruction according to age groups / particular themes age-group-spanning (e.g. quantities, geometry, stochastic)
Languages: with open tasks, the learners differentiate according to their preferences and abilities /texts may be modified and extended depending on skills >>mixture of age is encouraging learners
“Schedules work”: tasks with different difficulty levels are offered, accessible to all learners independent of grade >>>> learners resolve what they can and/or join somebody who knows
- We follow the curriculum of the canton of Bern and use the official teaching aids
- In schedules work or project work, the teachers act as learning companions (counsellors). Thereby they have the chance to learn more about the learning status and the learning path of the learners (This is also the case in age-group classes.)

Learning Context

In which context does learning take place? What does the physical learning environment look like? Are community resources used to facilitate learning and how?

- The school has classrooms and group rooms accessible during instruction
- The equipment conforms to the norm of the canton of Bern, no special materials
- Mutual support between teachers and students

History of ILE

Who initiated it? For what reasons was it started and with what purpose? Have these changed since?

In 2004, the “Volksschulkommission” (public school board) of the city of Burgdorf decided to realize the model of mixed-age classes in a freshly constructed school building

In 2006 the school was inaugurated.

The model is proving its worth in the realization.

Funding of the ILE

How is it funded?

Public school – by the state and community – funding level as usual

Learning Outcomes

What are the learning outcomes achieved by the ILE, including academic, social, interpersonal and meta-cognitive outcomes? How is learning assessed?

Learners’ evaluations take place pursuant to requirements of the canton, i.e. by age groups. Additionally we use a form which we specially created and on which we record assessments all year round, in order to inform the parents over the actual state once a quarter (4 times a year)

Besides, in mixed-age classes, children with special gifts or weaknesses may easily be assessed within another age group.

Documentation describing or evaluating the ILE

Is there documentation on this learning environment? Is there a website? Films? Research reports or evaluations? Other forms of documentation? (please supply references or links)

- <http://lindenfeld.kibs.ch/schulentwicklung.html>
- Reports which can be downloaded: report to the interview with parents, discussions with teachers and to the realization of the “MJK Primarschule Lindenfeld”

The University of Teacher Education in Berne launched a project analyzing and documenting the mixed-age teaching at this school. This University is also engaged in an evaluation process of the school.