



Europa-Universität  
Flensburg

Zentrum für Lehrerinnen- und  
Lehrerbildung (ZfL)



**SCHULADOPTION**  
STUDIERENDE MACHEN SCHULE

A different kind of practical semester at the Europa-University Flensburg

**Jens Winkel, Kirsten Großmann, Johanna Gosch**



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## 1. Introduction

The 10-week practical semester takes place during the third semester of studying in the Master of Education program. The students participating in the school adoption project („Schuladoption - Studierende machen Schule!“<sup>2</sup>) complete the semester at a specifically selected school in Schleswig-Holstein.

Following a preparation phase of multiple weeks, the team of students takes over the school for the duration of a week. During that time, they are assigned all duties and responsibilities normally assigned to the regular teaching staff, who at that time are away to attend an advanced training seminar. Throughout the so-called adoption week the students are mentored and supported by a university team.

## 2. Aims of the project

Over the course of the project, the participants from both the university and the school experience and reflect on the current challenges faced by the school. Through this reflection process they can detect areas where necessary adjustments have to be made. The actions of the participants as well as the individual and institutional ideas of „school“ and „education“ can be reoriented. Students can also develop their professional skills for the teaching profession during the school adoption week. Teachers can adjust their school to current demands through school development. Professors and lecturers get insights on how to shape and further develop internships through the evaluation process.

In order to develop the students' competences, this project pursues the following specific goals:

- a. The students experience challenges and specific situations that the school presents them with. These experiences enable them to take note of the different areas of competence, inside and outside the classroom, that need deeper understanding and further development. They experience the complexity of the professional field by both the organization of the school's routine and the need to plan and implement good lessons.
- b. Through intensive and systematic supervision and support the students are being instructed to acknowledge their successes as well as their failures during the school adoption. They're encouraged to see both as a chance to learn. Students can improve their abilities to reflect due to the instructive nature of the reflection processes.
- c. A teacher's occupational profile includes having to prepare and evaluate the lessons and to organize the school's routines as well as day to day activities outside the classroom. The students have to fulfill these tasks during the adoption week too.
- d. The school adoption focuses on both methodological processing the practical experiences made in school and the preparation and evaluation of the lessons, which require a subject-specific and methodological base.

These goals are specifically related to the students while the school adoption project is also supposed to contribute to the development of the participating school itself:

<sup>2</sup> The school adoption gets its inspiration from the Scandinavian region (with an emphasis on Norway). It is an innovative model in teacher training at Europa-Universität Flensburg. It was tried for the first time in the winter term of 2014 / 2015 in this form (cf. Haugaløkken / Ramberg, 2007; Schulz 2015). The term 'school adoption' refers to the entire project within the practical semester. The 'adoption week' is the period of time during which the students 'take over' the school and the teaching staff is away for advanced training.



- a. The school adoption project gives the school the opportunity to initiate and promote a school development process as well as to think of innovative ideas regarding the development of the school's profile. This process starts with the application to participate in the adoption project and will be supervised during its preparation.
- b. During the adoption week the entire school's staff is attending an advanced training seminar.
- c. The school development process usually takes longer than the school adoption and will be supervised and evaluated.

Europa-Universität Flensburg is also pursuing specific goals regarding the school adoption:

- a. The insights gained from intensive evaluation and supervision can be used to further develop certain areas in the practical school studies, e.g. for training and refining the student's awareness in reflecting and expanding their advisory competences.
- b. The evaluation of the school adoption project reveals essential requirements and demands to the professional newcomers. These key demands can be integrated into teacher training lectures and seminars at EUF and be scientifically reviewed there. This will generally increase the consistency of a scientifically based education aimed at the teaching profession.

### 3. Contents and structural elements of the school adoption project

#### a. The accompanying seminar

The accompanying seminar covers the contents of the practical semester's school pedagogy curriculum but it also includes components linked to entering a new job in the teaching profession, since autonomously and self-responsibly organizing the school adoption week requires more awareness and skills than autonomous and self-responsible teaching does.

The following are a few examples of possible topics:

- Getting to know the school (its organizational plans, the school program, its guiding principles, its identity etc.)
- Discussing the students' sociodemographic backgrounds and situations
- School laws
- Standard ways of communication in the school (when encountering educational and pedagogical challenges)

The person holding the seminar is usually also involved in the meetings of the reflection circle during the school adoption week.

#### b. The reflection circle

A continuous element of the adoption week is the daily reflection circle which is organized by a university team and takes place after classes end. Attendance by all students participating in the school adoption project is mandatory.

The reflection circle is essential for several reasons:

- It creates a space where the students can openly talk about the experiences made during the adoption week.

- It offers a way of coping with the challenges of the school adoption week by offering advice to each other and discussing possible alternatives. This would be comparable to supervision amongst colleagues.
- Experiences and developmental challenges talked about in the reflection circle can be discussed again later by including scientific knowledge, academic processing and designing concepts for action.

Discussions about developmental challenges brought to the table by the students make a good starting point. The students will be instructed to systematically and scientifically reflect on specific items and details of their experiences. They will be instructed to draw conclusions about their own actions and their jobs as teachers. There will also be an incorporation of scientific literature about school and teaching. Creative feedback will be used (see p. 10).

### **c. IQSH networking group**

The students participating in the school adoption form an IQSH networking group. The networking groups pursue the following goals during the practical semester:

- The reprocessing of systematic observation, analysis and reflection of one's own and other's praxis. The reflection can include elements of planning a lesson as well as elements of executing a planned lesson.
- Another goal is the reflection of one's actions as a teacher for the purpose of improving biographical-reflective competences.

Systematic processing as well as reflection factor in the scientific models and approaches learned at the university. Analysis and reflection of one's own praxis and that of other's can be done by considering one's own and other's classroom experiences, case examples, lesson plans or videography.

### **d. The student assessment**

An assessment can take place in the period between the takeover of the adoption school and its return to the regular staff. The students and the teachers would implement the assessment together.

The assessment pursues three goals:

- Clarifying the roles in the teams after the adoption week (teachers / students)
- Practicing an observation of pupils that is non-judging.
- Feeding back information about individual strengths to the pupils.

To that end exercises have been designed which reveal the abilities of the pupils in the following areas:

- motor skills
- creativity
- communication
- social competences
- ability to plan
- handling difficulties
- assume leadership, cede leadership

The pupil's assessment will be carried out in cooperation with IQSH which supervises and moderates the entire school development process.

#### 4. Schedule of the school adoption processes

In order to apply for participation in the school adoption project a school's interest in school development needs to be evident. Furthermore, the teachers, the parents' advisory council and the school's sponsor have to coordinate with each other beforehand. Participation in the school adoption project is voluntary. This applies to all groups of participants. The school's teachers need to be willing to hand over the responsibility to the group of university students for the duration of the school adoption week.

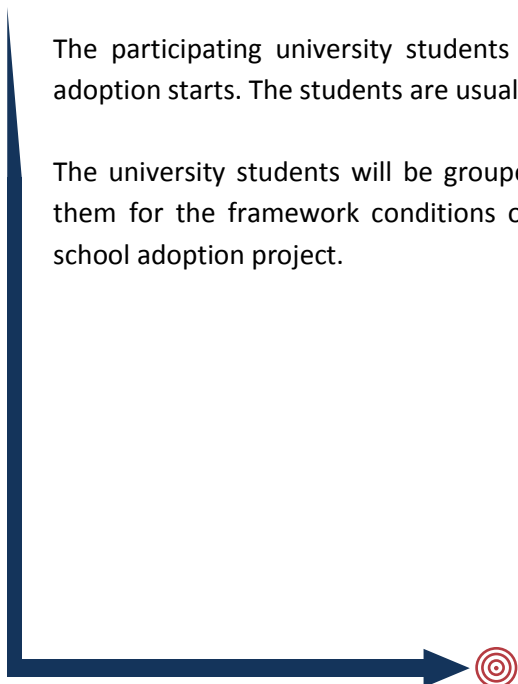
A committee will be formed to select one or more adoption schools. It consists of EUF experts, the competent ministry and the IQSH. As soon as a school is selected the work on the school development plan begins.

After an adoption school has been selected the students participating in the project are being chosen. The students have to write a letter of motivation and fill out a short questionnaire as a part of their application. The students' applications will be collected and evaluated. Additionally, there will be a meeting for the purpose of providing further information and selecting students. The adoption schools and university students who took part in a school adoption in the past contribute to this meeting. Members of the school and the project management from EUF form a team which then selects the students.

A steering group will be formed consisting of people involved in the project. It will remain constant for the duration of the subsequent processes and plan the next steps of the adoption project. Students, teachers of the adoption school and the IQSH and EUF project leaders contribute to it. The steering group meets several times before the school adoption project starts. If necessary, it will also meet during and after the adoption week. It responds flexibly and demand-oriented to possible requests and demands.

The participating university students and the teachers of the adoption school meet before the adoption starts. The students are usually assigned to teachers based on their subjects.

The university students will be grouped together in an accompanying seminar which will prepare them for the framework conditions of the practical semester while also taking into account the school adoption project.



Like all other students the participants will spend 10 weeks at the adoption school. However, the teachers of the adoption school will introduce them to the processes of everyday routine more thoroughly because they will have to take over those processes during the adoption week.

A member of the ministry for schools and vocational education is tasked to ensure legal compliance during the adoption week. In order to do that, the students and the ZfL (Centre of Teacher Training) team will be informed about the legal aspects of acting within a school context and they will be placed under obligation to observe the rules and terms presented to them.

The takeover of the school before the start of the adoption week is a symbolic and ceremonial act in primary schools. The school will be handed over to the students in order for the pupils to realize that the teachers are no longer in charge and that the students are now "young teachers" and therefore their persons of reference.

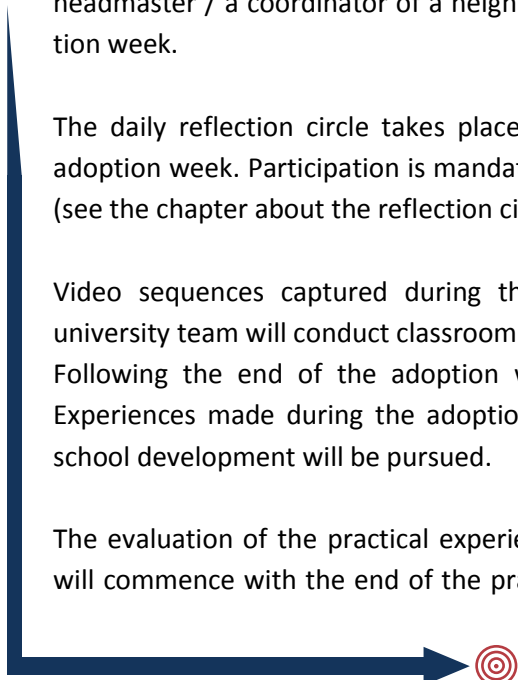
Period	Events
<b>1<sup>st</sup> year</b>	
February/March	Information session for interested schools.
April-July	Individual appointments. Consultation for interested schools.
September	Application deadline for schools. Information session for Master's students (first semester). 1 <sup>st</sup> call for applications (general) by students.
October	Selection of the schools + additional information. 2 <sup>nd</sup> call for applications (more concrete) by students.
November	Application deadline for students. Selection of the students + additional information.
December	Meeting on the school's development goals, organizational preparation. Providing information to the departments (of the subjects), meetings if necessary.
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> year</b>	
January/February	1 <sup>st</sup> meeting of the students.
March	1 <sup>st</sup> meeting of the steering group.
April	2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting of the students (optional).
May	2 <sup>nd</sup> meeting of the steering group.
June	1 <sup>st</sup> accompanying seminar: school pedagogy. Meeting of the students and the regular teachers.
September	2 <sup>nd</sup> accompanying seminar: school pedagogy. Parents' evening with students.
October	2 <sup>nd</sup> or 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting of the students. 3 <sup>rd</sup> meeting of the steering group.
November	Start of the practical part. (Pre-) evaluation.
December	Adoption week (Depending on the practical part, it could also be in November or January).
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> year</b>	
January	End of the practical part. (Post-) evaluation.
February y	Writing the portfolio and working on the research task.
March	Finalization of the project.
May	Results of the evaluation, reports and presentations.

In order to be in compliance with all legal requirements, an acting headmaster is installed (e.g. the headmaster / a coordinator of a neighboring school) who formally runs the school during the adoption week.

The daily reflection circle takes place after classes are over and is a continuous element of the adoption week. Participation is mandatory for all students taking part in the school adoption project (see the chapter about the reflection circle, p. 5).

Video sequences captured during the practical semester will be used for self-reflection. The university team will conduct classroom and teaching observations during the adoption week. Following the end of the adoption week, the school will be "returned" to the teaching staff. Experiences made during the adoption week will be processed and thoughts and ideas from the school development will be pursued.

The evaluation of the practical experiences and its embedding into a scientifically based reflection will commence with the end of the practical unit (practical semester). To that end, experiences will



be reflected in a portfolio and a research report.

The students contribute to the information event for the next school adoption where they share their impressions and experiences.

The school development process of the adoption school is usually not finished by the end of the adoption week and will be further supported if appropriate and necessary.

The steering group meets after the conclusion of the practical semester in order to reflect the experiences gained from the school adoption. The university team and IQSH can use their feedback to make changes to future school adoptions.

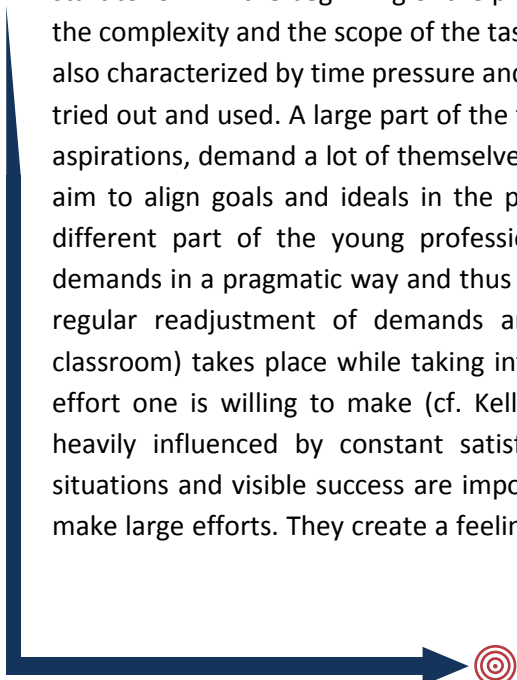
## 5. Scientific aspects of the concept of a school adoption

### a. Shaping the conditions of the practicum

The ratio of teachers and students regarding the supervision during practical school training is often too low. There are too few and too few well trained teachers who could act as supervisors during practical school training. That makes it necessary to match the contents and the supervision of the practical school training to the available resources. This supervision concerns all parties involved in the training, such as the university, the teacher training college and the school (see for example Hascher, 2011, p. 11; Weyland et al., 2015, p. 13). The design of the school adoption counteracts this problem. The ratio of teachers to students has been increased significantly. The learning effects of the students can be expected to rise through more intensive supervision (e.g. earlier meetings with the students, accompanying seminars, daily reflection circles during the adoption week) and more intensive organization and general framework (systematic knowledge about the school, experiences with the school development processes).

#### • **Students: the experiencing of demands as a possibility to develop**

The developmental challenges of the school adoption are partly comparable to those faced by new teachers during their entry into professional life. Uniquely personal perception patterns and judgement tendencies, routines and competences as well as main features of a professional identity start to form in the beginning of the professional life. New challenges present themselves because of the complexity and the scope of the tasks which have not been tried out and trained before. They are also characterized by time pressure and a large scale of responsibility. New behavior is being learned, tried out and used. A large part of the teachers who are only just entering their profession have high aspirations, demand a lot of themselves and are ready to commit and dedicate themselves fully. The aim to align goals and ideals in the professional reality can lead to excessive stress and strain. A different part of the young professionals develops a reference framework to deal with these demands in a pragmatic way and thus does not overstrain itself. In order to master the challenges a regular readjustment of demands and expectations to realistic goals (in the school and the classroom) takes place while taking into account one's own available resources and the amount of effort one is willing to make (cf. Keller-Schneider, 2008, p. 7f.). The entry into the profession is heavily influenced by constant satisfaction and overexertion. Mastered challenges in stressful situations and visible success are important in order to build dedication and gain the willingness to make large efforts. They create a feeling of satisfaction. Situations of excessive demand on the other





hand are accompanied by self-doubt (Keller-Schneider, 2008, p. 11, see also Keller-Schneider & Hericks, 2014, pp. 391ff.).<sup>3</sup>

In the beginning of the practical unit the transferrable developmental challenges gain importance and are being experienced as real demands in the adoption week. Therefore, it makes great sense to offer talks such as the reflection circle (see above). This creates a space where their own dimensions of personality can be reflected and assessed. It also enables the linking of theory related impulses to practical knowledge. (cf. Keller-Schneider & Hericks, 2014, pp. 349ff.).

Results from the first school adoption in 2014/2015 show that students are much more likely to feel confident and optimistic about dealing with the complexity of school demands after taking part in the school adoption project than before. Teaching becomes more of a positive challenge which can be mastered, more easily so after having taken part in the school adoption.

## University students in the school and in the classroom

### Developmental challenge: experiencing demands

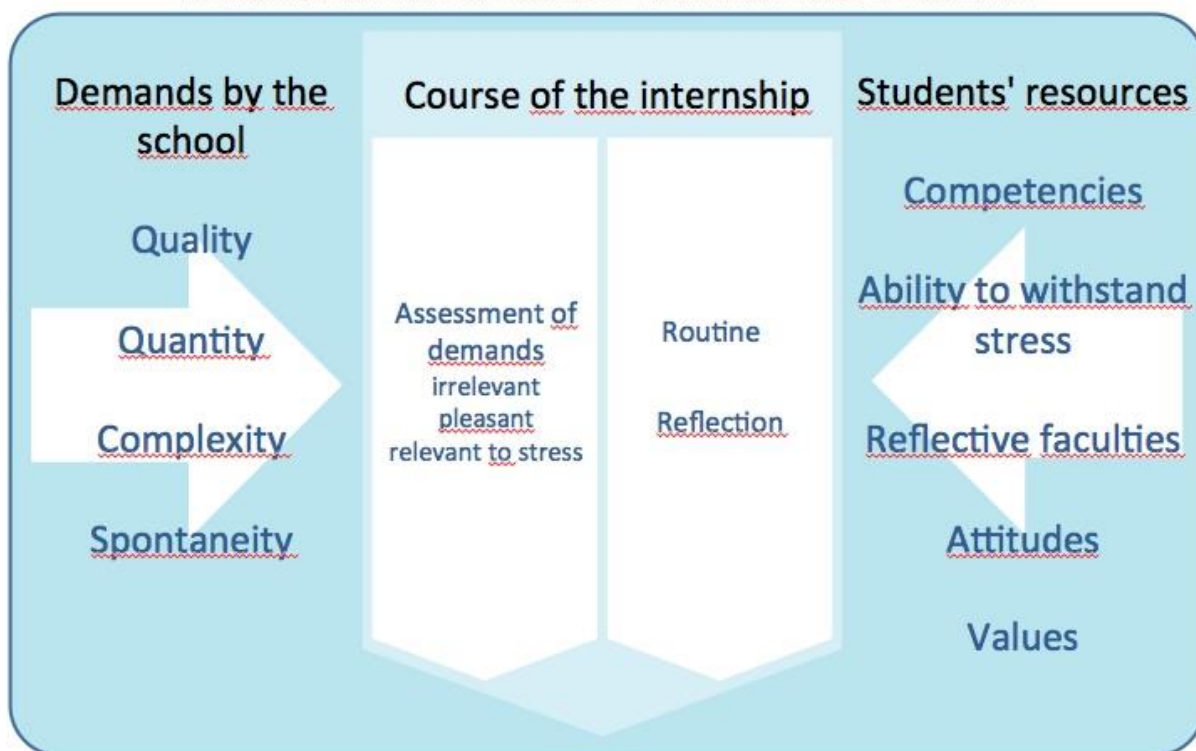


Figure 1: Developmental challenge: experiencing demands  
(Winkel/Großmann 2015)

### **b. Students: reflection in the context of consultation and scientific requirements**

Giving each other advice during the reflection circle meetings by using examples from situations

<sup>3</sup> Keller-Schneider mentions the expansion of the role spectrum as the assumption of the teacher's role and the socialization through the relevant working situation in the school as further developmental challenges (Keller-Schneider, 2008, pp. 9-10). Both challenges occur only partially in the school adoption. The duration of the practical semester is too short for an irreversible absorption of the professional role. There is a special set of circumstances at the adoption school because the teaching staff will be visited by a large group of students and because they will not be present during the adoption week. This rather hampers the socialization into realistic conditions of a school. The developmental challenges are therefore not seen as the goals of the school adoption. One cannot refer to a new phase of life (Keller-Schneider, 2008, p. 11) either.



encountered at school plays an important role. The students have to take the place of teachers equipped with consultation expertise. In this context, a certain perspective or role will be explored and tried out which cannot be expected per se. In the context of consultation, a model by Gerich et al. will be used. According to that model, the level of consulting competence surfaces in the dimensions of communication skills (paraphrasing, active listening, taking other perspectives), problem solving skills (employ strategy, goal orientation, solution and resource orientation, cooperative action), and coping skills (ability to take criticism, dealing with difficult situations). The level of consulting competency largely depends on knowledge about consultation and learning as well as on consultation experiences and one's professional self-concept (see Bruder, Hertel, Gerich & Schmitz, 2014, p. 910). The idea is to teach such skills to the students before the adoption week in the accompanying seminar, focusing on school pedagogics and the IQSH networking group, so the students can put these skills to use during consultation and when giving advice to each other.

Through supervised reflection students should be encouraged to form questions about the expansion of their own competences and work through challenges from a technical, methodological, didactical and personal point of view. A scientific reflection with a researching attitude is to be initiated during the internship. Thus, for graduates of university teacher training in the orientation framework for standards in practical school studies, Weyland et al. formulate the following competences:

„Die Absolventinnen und Absolventen des Lehramtsstudiums sind in der Lage,

1. Aspekte schulischer und unterrichtlicher Handlungsfelder systematisch und Kriterien geleitet zu erfassen;
2. in schulischen und unterrichtlichen Handlungsfeldern eine forschende Perspektive einzunehmen;
3. zentrale Aufgaben des Lehrerberufs zu erfassen und mitzugestalten;
4. den eigenen berufsbiografischen Entwicklungsprozess reflexiv zu gestalten.“ (vgl. Weyland et al. 2015, S. 12)<sup>4</sup>

Key features of the quality of a lesson can be used for the specific reflection of teaching (an overview can be found in Helmke & Schrader, 2008, pp. 18-47). In some cases it's necessary to supplement the generally didactical features of the quality of a lesson with subject-didactic features to not lose sight of subject-specific and subject-didactic skills of the teachers (cf. Lipowsky, 2007, p. 29).<sup>5</sup>

### c. Teaching staff of the adoption school: school development

One major feature of the school adoption is the adoption school's entry into a school development process. During the application of a school it is explicitly asked to present school development interests. The concept follows the understanding of school development by Rolff: „Schulentwicklung ist die bewusste und systematische Entwicklung von Einzelschulen“ („School development is a deliberate and systematic development towards self-sufficient schools“) (Rolff, 2007, p. 48; cf. also Tillmann, 2013, p. 42). At this point it should be noted that a school adoption can pertain to an entire school but that a partial adoption (of a single year) is also possible. A specific school development interest would still have to be evident, even in the case of a partial adoption. A school development idea is specified as a pedagogical organizational development: It is assumed that any organization will be further developed primarily from the inside out by its members. The school's director plays a

<sup>4</sup> Graduates of university teacher training should be capable of: following criteria for systematically identifying aspects of faulty actions at school and in lessons, developing a questioning perspective towards fields of action at school and in lessons, acknowledging and shaping the key priorities in the teaching profession, designing a unique, reflexive occupational biography; personal and professional development.

<sup>5</sup> Lipowsky also stresses the ability to creatively handle unexpected demands of pedagogical and subject-specific nature during a lesson (Lipowsky, 2007, p. 29).



central role in this context. The development refers to either the entire school or a part of it but it is emphasized that this development can only happen gradually. It can tie into the subunits of a school (as for example a workgroup), its issues (e.g. the climate of cooperation), its concepts (e.g. a school program) or its structures (e.g. a department or a subject-specific faculty board) (cf. Rolff, 2013, p. 15). The idea of a pedagogical organizational development can be implemented especially well in the school adoption. Due to its structure, it allows a school's team and the school's administration to implement a school development process together. In this way the people responsible for the development and the school's administration have to work and shape the school development together, since questions and decisions have to be backed up by the school's administration.

Usually, no school development action will be taken without prior diagnosis and establishing of a developmental group responsible for the internal management and regulation of the changes formulated. External consultation and accompanying evaluation is often used. Organizational development is process-oriented and takes the process as serious as the result. The planning usually proceeds in three steps:

1. The school staff or a specific subgroup will be involved (integrated) in the process of the planning phase. They will be mobilized and motivated for that process. Planning and execution go hand in hand in school development.
2. The implementation of the goals developed during planning and execution is usually a long-term and non-linear process.
3. The incorporation / institutionalization is the result of the previous process (cf. Rolff, 2013, p. 15ff.).

#### Development plans and goals

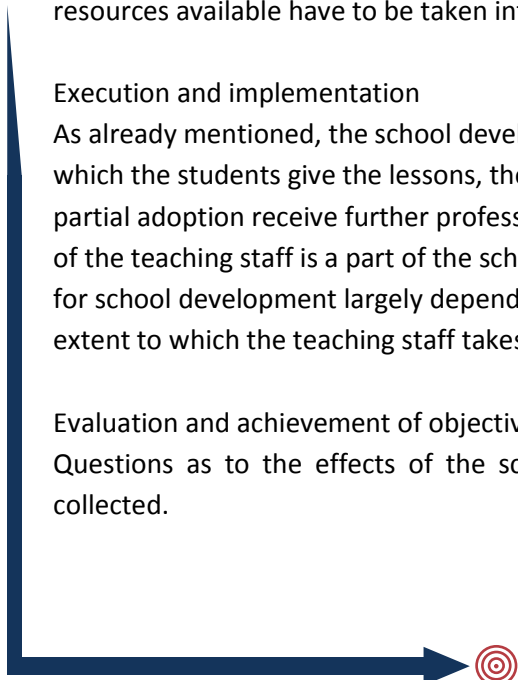
The school adoption deals with challenges in the school development due the process planning. Schools apply for the school adoption with goals for a school development process in mind, so a clarification process regarding these goals needs to take place. This may occur from inside the school itself or with external support (p.r.n. by the university, IQSH or other experts). A school selected for a school adoption prepares itself over the long term for working in the school adoption project. During this process it can be supported by the university, IQSH or other experts. However, the very limited resources available have to be taken into account.

#### Execution and implementation

As already mentioned, the school development is a lengthy process. During the adoption week in which the students give the lessons, the teaching staff of the adoption school or a subgroup of a partial adoption receive further professional training. In this respect, the further professional training of the teaching staff is a part of the school development process. Whether this week gives impulses for school development largely depends on how clear goals were formulated beforehand and on the extent to which the teaching staff takes responsibility for the school development process.

#### Evaluation and achievement of objectives

Questions as to the effects of the school development measures arise. Initial feedback is being collected.



## 6. Open areas for development

### a. Taking subject-matter knowledge into account

Up until now, the subject-matter orientation of classes and of teaching in an adoption school has largely been neglected. Experiencing challenges, consultation and reflection are issues which draw on the areas of education and school pedagogics. The teaching subject is not specifically taken into account. Subject-matter knowledge is a specific dimension in reference to the lesson. It is to be differentiated according to the respective subject. The subject and knowledge areas of a specific subject are reflected in the organizational form of the lesson. „Im Mathematikunterricht werden beispielsweise Aufgaben in Form von Einzelarbeit bewältigt, im naturwissenschaftlichen Unterricht stehen Experimente im Zentrum von Gruppenarbeiten im Vordergrund. Im Deutschunterricht wird in Einzel- und Gruppenarbeiten gearbeitet, im Englischunterricht stehen die Kommunikation im Gespräch und die Übung der Grammatik in Einzelarbeiten im Vordergrund.“ (Seidel 2014, S. 791).<sup>6</sup> Taking subject-specific and subject-didactic questions into account offers a potential which could be used more in future school adoptions. Initial thoughts touch on the possibility of using video recordings as a medium to reflect starting situations in a class. In this way reflection happens not only from a school pedagogical but also from a subject-didactic (or even special educational) point of view.

### b. Learning from the evaluation

As mentioned earlier, regarding the university goals it is desired to use the insights gained from the scientific supervision in specific areas of the school adoption. The development and improvement of the internships at EUF as well as other school practical trainings can benefit greatly. A series of such insights already begins to show. These results will be used to improve the school adoption concept (as it is done in the practical semester at EUF). The reflection of the insights in connection with other practical trainings remains to be done.

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<sup>6</sup> „In mathematics class for instance, tasks are solved through individual work while science subjects put focus on experiments and group work. In German lessons pupils work alone as well as in groups, English lessons need to put focus on communication in conversation and practicing English grammar in individual situations“.



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