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How to become a good business teacher: Developing competences of prospective business education teachers

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HOW TO BECOME A GOOD BUSINESS TEACHER
DEVELOPING COMPETENCES OF PROSPECTIVE
BUSINESS EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract

The mission of teacher education is to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour they need to deliver their best performance in the classroom and at school. This paper presents ideas for optimizing teacher education using the example of the master's program of Business Education and Development at the University of Graz, placing a special focus on the acquisition of teacher competences. The biggest milestone in the curriculum is the teaching practice, the success of which strongly depends on good cooperation among students, teachers, schools, university, and school authorities. The second part of this article will be devoted to the introduction of various instruments designed to support the mentoring process during the teaching practice and to guide the development of teacher competences by the student (self-perception) and the mentor (external perception).

Introduction

Principals expect applicants to possess the necessary formal qualification and appreciate practical teaching experience. Yet neither practical experience nor formal qualification can guarantee that a given applicant has actually acquired all the necessary job related competences and appropriate personality traits, which are what principals, are actually looking for. Outstanding teachers know their subjects extremely well, they follow current developments within their fields, they can simplify and clarify complex topics to help learners and they think about their own thinking by analyzing its nature and by evaluating its quality (Bain, 2004). Peterssen showed that a holistic ability to take actions results from the intersection of professional, social, methodological and personal

competence (2009). Concerning **teacher competences** in business educations this can be structured as follows:

- Professional competence: Firstly, teachers need professional knowledge e.g. in accounting, finance and economics both on a theoretical and practical level. Secondly they must be familiar with business didactics and teaching methodology in order to use effective methods, explain complex contents, optimally support students in learning and assess their performance.
- Social competence: Teachers have to deal with various people. They need to build up a productive relationship with students using communication strategies and problem solving. Furthermore, they often cooperate with other teachers and staff members.
- Methodological competence: Teachers need to adequately apply their knowledge and skills. They have to know how to access new research results and teaching ideas. Leading, mentoring, communication and presentation skills are also required in this profession.
- Personal competence: Being a teacher requires a basic attitude of openness, toughness, innovation and willingness to learn as teachers often have to adapt to new educational issues. (Schelten, 2009).

Independent from these competences teachers must generally have a positive attitude towards young people and display an inclination towards teaching, caring and educating. This is linked to **teacher personality**: Lots of things you can learn, but some things you just have to be (Schelten, 2009). Teacher personality can be defined as the relatively stable traits of a teacher which are significant for performance, success and well-being in the teaching profession. However, changes from learning, training and further development are possible, at least to a certain extent (Helmke, 2009; Mayr & Neuweg, 2006). Numerous empirical studies have been done to describe human personality (e.g. Five Factor Model, McCrae & Costa, 1999). Concerning the teaching profession several research results show that three traits have a significant correlation with personality, performance and well-being of a teacher. These three traits are:

- Extraversion: This is the tendency to be very outgoing, enthusiastic and energetic. People seek and enjoy the company of others. They like to talk and draw attention to themselves.
- Emotional stability: This is characterized by freedom from persistent negative feelings. People tend to be secure and confident. They stay calm under pressure.
- Conscientiousness: Conscientious people are efficient, dutiful, well-organized and show self-discipline. They prefer planned rather than spontaneous behaviour.

The results show that these personality traits are attended by diligence while obtaining the degree, good performances during the teaching practice as well as competent performance and well-being in the teaching job (Urban, 1992; Mayr & Mayrhofer, 1994). As a consequence risk factors are introversion, strong neurotic tendencies and diminished self-control. To transfer these findings to teacher education implies that it is necessary to address not only on the competences but also the personality of students during their degree. Students should be encouraged to experience

their own strengths and weaknesses, to reflect their learning processes and to become able to control their own development of teacher competences and personality, of course always supported by lecturers, coaches or mentors.

Teaching practice in the master program
Business Education and Development in Graz

The master curriculum Business Education and Development of the University of Graz, Austria, was introduced in 2009/10 (Curriculum Graz, 2009). It was designed to succeed a bachelor degree in business administration, economics or other pertinent qualification. Students pass their oral final master examination and receive the title Master of Science after five semesters, totalling 150 ECTS (European Credit Transfer System) credits. Due to the indisputable integration of the teaching practice, the curriculum covers five semesters instead of the four semesters usually required for a master's degree. It is characterized by its marked orientation towards business administration – a tribute to the polyvalent nature of the discipline and its occupational fields.

The teaching practice takes place in the fourth semester and comprises 16 ECTS credits, including an accompanying seminar. Further opportunities for a scientific post-processing of the teaching practice are provided by a seminar on the topic of education management (comprising 3 ECTS credits) and the master thesis (comprising 20 credits). Students can integrate an active experience of their potential future occupational field into their scientific training and test their personal suitability for the profession, thus getting the opportunity to put the theory (knowledge, abilities, skills) acquired in the course of their studies, as well as their attitudes to the test, and draw their own conclusions for the further exploration of this theory from their practical experience.

In accordance with an edict of the Ministry of Education, the teaching practice takes place over 12 weeks at a higher and medium level secondary vocational college (2011). The ministry prescribes the following objectives: Students of Business Education and Development are supposed

- to use their knowledge, abilities and skills with regard to educational science, business didactics, teaching methodology and business administration in real school life situations,
- to ingrain confident and competent behaviour with regard to classroom management,
- to meet the organizational challenges of everyday school life in compliance with legal requirements,
- to independently design and execute competence oriented lesson plans and
- to gain comprehensive insight into various not-directly-teaching-related activities of teachers (Ministry of Education, 2011)

Students should be optimally mentored and prepared for their future occupational field. The re-design of the teaching practice in Graz has led to an increased focus on accompanying reflection and professional orientation; in addition to the mentoring

students receive at school, which requires optimal coordination of mentors and university. In order to acquire the competence for reflection, students have to approach their own teaching performance (covering classroom management, education, diagnosis, counselling, assessment, organization and evaluation) in a sustainable and self-aware manner (Kliebisch & Meloefksi, 2006). This has led to the establishment of accompanying self-reflection in Graz, as pedagogical expertise and professional competence cannot be gained without reflection (Arnold, 2005). Based on these objectives, the organization of the teaching practice has been designed as illustrated in Figure 1.
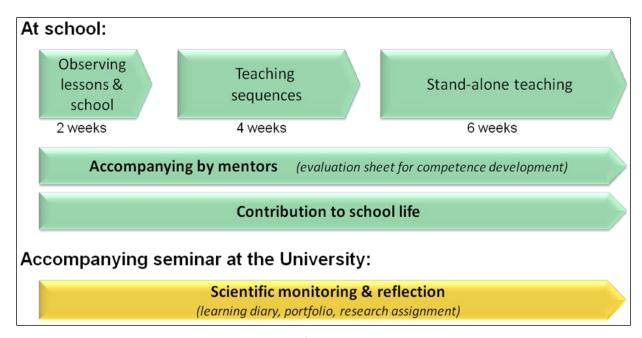

Figure 1. Model of the Teaching Practice

The teaching practice generally covers four subjects: business administration, accounting, business informatics and some subjects concerned with personality training and competence acquisition (such as business training, project management or the practice firm). Students start their 12 week teaching practice with an observational phase, in which they analyze their mentors' lessons and the development of the classroom sociogram. This phase is followed by a training phase, which allows students to develop their classroom management skills and gain confident and competent behaviour by designing and conducting isolated lessons and teaching sequences. The main part of the teaching practice consists of the teaching phase, in which students independently plan their own lessons over a longer period of time, conduct them alone or in the presence of their mentors and assess their own progress. Students are mentored by experienced teachers, who have been required to undergo a three semester training course for future mentors and engage in continuous further training. Weekly mentoring sessions provide students with feedback on their teaching performance (first level) and the opportunity to discuss their ideas for lesson plans and the required background knowledge (second level) with their mentors (Niggli, 2001). On this occasion, the evaluation sheet for competence development is used. In addition to teaching classes, students also get the opportunity to participate in everyday school life in their function as student teachers, for example by cooperating with other colleagues or contributing to school events.

In addition to the teaching practice students also attend the accompanying seminar at the university which takes place in the same semester and is conducted by team

teaching involving two members of the department. The seminar provides a framework for scientific mentoring, accompanying reflection and support of students' individual professional orientation. Theoretical models are combined with practical requirements, personal experience is exchanged in workshops dedicated to reflection and problems are discussed. Twice every semester, external experts from school or school-related fields are brought in to discuss topical challenges such as the implementation of quality management systems in schools, the future of the teaching profession, violence among adolescents or the role of teachers with regard to cyber-mobbing and internet security. A round-table involving mentors, university lecturers and students, organized by the university, contributes to closing the theory practice gap and provides quality control and development concerning the teaching practice.

Stakeholder Involvement

An important factor of success of this kind of student teaching is the common strategy and cooperation of all stakeholders involved. When all people involved are integrated, they can follow the same objectives and collaborate closely. This leads to an essential acceptance of and identification with the implemented procedure and its instruments. Figure 2 illustrates the many stakeholders involved in this teaching practice: the university, the individual student, schools with learners and their teachers who act as mentors, the regional school authority and the ministry of education.
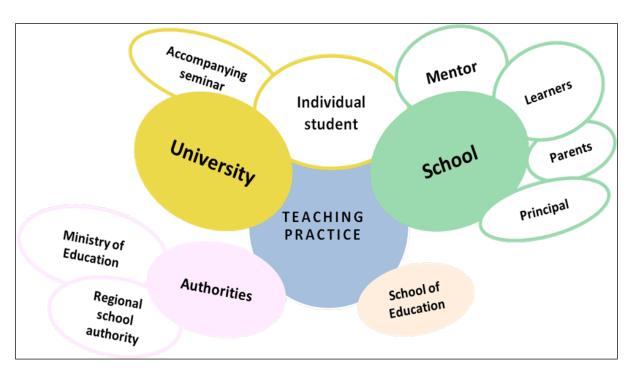

Figure 2. Stakeholders of the Teaching Practice

The **university** offers the master program Business Education and Development with its teaching practice and the accompanying seminar, including several instruments such as evaluation sheet for competence development, learning diary and ePortfolio. It is also responsible for an introductory meeting, the coordination between the individual students and mentors and the evaluation of the teaching practice. The **school** selects the mentors together with the school authority. The mentor provides continuous feedback, offers weekly mentoring sessions, thus providing an opportunity to discuss competence development. The regional **school of education** organizes further education for teachers

and the training for mentors. The **authorities** are in charge of rules and administration. The Ministry of Education enacts general regulations for the teaching practice, e.g. procedure, payment of mentor, amount of working hours and weeks. The regional school authority takes care of the selection of schools, the allocation of students to the selected schools and the approval of mentor training. The mentors are nominated by their principals.

The enormous challenge is to coordinate all these stakeholders, especially as their daily needs, wishes and problems are very different. Yet they pursue a common goal, developing good business teachers.

Instruments supporting a competence-based teaching practice

After explaining organization and course of the teaching practice, the following paragraphs will be dedicated to the description of the most important mentoring tools used in the accompanying seminar and the mentoring sessions. Objectives, process, distribution of roles and expected benefits of tools such as the evaluation sheet for competence development, the learning diary and the ePortfolio are introduced. All three tools share the common purpose of promoting students' occupation with their own learning process and performance. In the course of their self-reflection students engage in an interior dialogue, questioning their own learning process and evaluating their learning results. Of course, the teaching practice also involves traditional forms of student assessment such as prognosis (e.g. the grade students receive at the end of teaching practice, providing assessment of learning) and diagnosis (e.g. feedback given by mentors, providing assessment for learning). The three tools introduced above in contrast primarily aim at metacognition – thus providing assessment as learning. This form of student assessment requires learners to become active in the critical evaluation of their own performance and enables them to supervise their own learning processes in a way that allows them to reach their individual learning objectives (Earl, 2003). However, learners should be supported in this endeavour by a targeted promotion of their competence for reflection.

Evaluation sheet for competence development

The aim of this evaluation sheet is to provide a tool for supporting the competence development of students during their teaching practice by enabling a combination of external and internal assessment. It is designed to document and analyze the acquisition and development of students' competences during the teaching practice and provides a comprehensive list of all integral topics and competence areas related to teaching. The wording of the evaluation sheet was chosen to be as general as possible, thus making sure that this tool can be used for all subjects covered by the teaching practice. Its content is organized as follows:

- Teaching activities: lesson observation, preparation, classroom work (characterized by pertinent didactic expertise and learner orientation), assessment
- Contribution to school life: cooperation with colleagues, participation in school wide events

- Teacher personality: behaviour, reflexion as well as willingness to learn and improve

In combination with a concerted indicator handbook, the evaluation sheet for competence development aims to support reflection during mentoring sessions. The procedure stipulates interim and final evaluations. The comparison of self-image (students) and external perception (mentors) has to occur in the middle and at the end of the semester. Deviations of self-image and external perception, progress in the development of competences, strengths and weaknesses are discussed and reflected upon. A standard form is filled in for every student and every subject, documenting self-image and external perception. The document detailing the external perception is handed to the student at the end of the semester in order to support professional orientation. The accompanying seminar provides a follow-up to the experience with the evaluation sheet, thus covering the third level of the mentoring concept to promote the development of the professional personality as described by Niggli (2001). The use of the evaluation sheet in accordance with the stipulated procedure represents a contribution to quality assurance with regard to the mentoring of students.

Learning diary

As mentioned above, students have to attend an accompanying seminar in the semester of the teaching practice. In order to meet the course requirements students also have to keep a learning diary for the purpose of reflecting their learning process and performance by documenting their observations, experiences, thoughts and feelings with regard to the learning and teaching process (Winter, 2008). Several years of experience with using learning diaries and reflection reports in the virtual enterprise at the University of Graz show students encounter great difficulties when required to think about themselves in the context of their surroundings. Verbalizing these thoughts seems to pose a particular challenge (Stock, 2010). As learning diaries have already been successfully used in practical trainings in business as well as educational contexts (Frackmann & Tärre, 2009), this tool has been included in the redesign of the teaching practice in Graz.

The learning diary aims at developing and expanding students' competence for self-reflection, thus systematically increasing their insights with regard to professional orientation. Since summer semester 2011, a learning diary has to be kept continuously over the entire duration of the teaching practice. Students have to post at least six entries (phrased in full sentences, distributed over the entire semester) on the learning platform Moodle, which is protected by personal access data. The organization of content in the learning diary reflects the three stages of the teaching practice – observation, teaching sequences, independent teaching – as well as the structure of the evaluation sheet for competence development. The following topics with examples for pre-formulated sentence beginnings are designed to help students get started with their reflection process:

- Personal learning objectives and expectations (eg. what I want to learn…)
- First impressions at school (eg. my first experiences with group processes in school classes…)

- Individual lesson plans (eg. this is how I am going to activate my learners…)
- Individual teaching methodology (eg. these teaching methods will be used in this manner…)
- Experiences with performance assessment and everyday school life (eg. this is how I will assess performances…)
- Teacher personality (eg. I can / cannot envision myself as a teacher, because…)

Keeping a learning diary is obligatory for students of Business Education and Development. Quality and quantity of the entries however, do not affect their assessment in the accompanying seminar, which is made transparent from the start. Diary entries are anonymous – students cannot access entries of other students. What makes the use of the learning diary in Graz special is the ample and twofold support students receive. An external coach, who is not employed by the department for Business Education and Development but by the Academy for New Media and Knowledge Transfer of the Karl-Franzens-University Graz supports students by giving feedback on their reflection competence, questioning their argumentation or asking additional questions to trigger further reflection. The lecturer responsible for the seminar evaluates the anonymous entries and analyzes the results, the most significant of which are then discussed and reflected upon in the accompanying seminar.

ePortfolio

The master program Business Education and Development is the first curriculum at the Karl-Franzens-University Graz which features the support of students' competence development through the use of ePortfolios over the entire course of studies. By working on their personal competence development portfolios (a mixture of reflection and development portfolio), students are encouraged to become aware of their own learning processes and results, visualize the progress of their acquisition of competence throughout the course of their studies and reflect on their learning progress. Solidly anchored in the curriculum and thus designed for sustainable use, the ePortfolio aims at facilitating the transfer from university to professional life and promotes lifelong learning. For this purpose, three courses have been selected to create time and space for students to work on their portfolios. First, an external coach provided by the Academy for New Media and Knowledge Transfer introduces students to portfolio work. Then students pair up and discuss their individual competence development and finally, they devise their own ePortfolios, keep them up-to-date and expand the data. In this, they are supported by their coach who gives individual feedback and makes suggestions for improvement. Supervised portfolio work is done in three stages, each of which has a different focus. In the first semester, the focus is placed on social and self-competences, followed by professional and methodological competences in the third semester and finally reflexion and holistic competence development in the fifth semester (Stock & Riebenbauer, 2011).

In those designated portfolio sessions, the coach also provides preparation and post-processing with regard to the challenge of bridging the theory-practice-gap during the teaching practice. In the third semester, students are encouraged to clarify their objectives and expectations with regard to the teaching practice and introduced to the

use of a learning diary. In the fifth semester, they process the experience gained in their teaching practice, documented in their learning diaries, evaluate their competence development and transfer their results to their personal ePortfolio.

Conclusion

This paper showed how to organize business teacher education using the example of the master's program Business Education and Development at the University of Graz. In order to receive good business teachers, business teacher education has to focus both on teacher competences and teacher personality. The gap between theory and practical school life can be closed by a well-organized teaching practice with accompanying procedures, whereas the reflection on experiences and students' learning is very important for competence development and professional orientation. Several instruments used during the teaching practice were discussed. The evaluation sheet for competence development proved to be a good tool for feedback and reflection both for students and their mentors. Learning diary and ePortfolio also support and guide the student's learning process, competence development and occupational orientation. However, a central factor of success of this student teaching is the shared strategy and cooperation of the stakeholders involved: the individual student, teachers who act as mentors and their schools, the university, the regional school authority and the Ministry of Education. Even if they have different daily needs and problems, they pursue a common goal: developing good business teachers.

Concerning further research in this context, the following two projects can be mentioned as examples: Firstly an evaluation project of the overall master curriculum including an evaluation of the teaching practice in particular will be developed. This study will focus on the objectives, the use of the three instruments and the realization of the teaching practice at several schools including the coordination of all stakeholders involved. Secondly differences and similarities in student teaching will be analyzed by an international comparison among Austrian and German universities.

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