

THE EXTRACURRICULAR PROFESSIONAL INTERNSHIP IN THE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAM IN THE VOCATIONAL FIELD OF HEALTHCARE

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Abstract

There are numerous internships to be completed within the diverse study program landscape of vocational teacher training in Germany. The prerequisite for a qualifying degree is practical professional experience within the vocational subject area, which is gained either through a completed vocational training of at least three years or an extracurricular internship in the professional field for at least one year. The latter is intended to familiarize students with the professional and working world of the trainees, who the students will train and teach in the future. While internships in schools are quite often subjects of research, there are gaps in the research of extracurricular internships, which gave rise to the author's doctoral thesis, which focuses on the vocational field of healthcare and nursing. In an explorative, qualitative research, based on the methodology of the grounded theory, a sequential trend study with semi-open interviews will be used to find out how students experience the internship, which professional socialization processes occur and what influence the internship has on the professional actions of teachers who completed the internship already. The contribution will present the theoretical foundations and outline initial empirical results, for example an overview of the structures of the extracurricular professional internship, based on a document analysis throughout Germany of similar teacher training courses in various universities and also first results of the interviews. In addition, an outlook on curricular development processes at the university in relation to the professional internship regulations will be given to empirically support and possibly adapt already existing documents about internship regulations.

Keywords: *Vocational training, internship, profession, healthcare, professionalising.*

1. Introduction and terminology

The term internship encompasses various forms and can be categorized in systematically varying ways. The spectrum of existing internships ranges from trial internships to orientation internships, from mandatory to optional internships, from short-term to long-term internships, from paid and unpaid internships, from company-based to home-based internships, depending on the criteria applied and areas of application (Popella, 2017).

In the university context, an internship is characterized from an etymological perspective as a “[...] variety of exercises for the [...] application of theoretical knowledge in certain disciplines of a university as well as [...] as a temporary activity of a student in a company for the acquisition of practical professional knowledge” (translated by author) Pfeifer (2005).

Accordingly, internships in all facets of teacher training are also an important pillar of teacher training courses and the focus of teacher trainees. Embedded in the respective study regulations and sometimes described in detail in internship regulations or handouts, internships with various practical phases offer elementary learning opportunities for the professional development and attitude of prospective teaching staff (Arnold, Gröschner, & Hascher, 2014).

Most of the internships integrated into teacher training courses are characterized by practical assignments at the school, therefore it is argued, that they should be summarized under the term “practical school studies” (Schüssler et al., 2017). The focus here is on the inclusion of academic preparation and follow-up work for students on the part of university support, which can be realized through mentoring programs and curricular embedding in the study regulations (Schüssler et. al., 2017).

While the practical school studies mainly take place at the school, there are also extracurricular internships, especially in the area of vocational teacher training. In contrast to practical school studies, such

extracurricular work placements have the special feature that their aim is not to immerse students in the professional field of the future teacher, but to open up the future professional world of the trainees. Accordingly, the term “vocational internships” or “vocational orientation internships” is often used, which are part of the higher education curriculum in the individual vocational disciplines and are regulated by regulations or handouts, and for example in Bavaria even by law (Bavarian State Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Science and the Arts 2017).

The planned research work will focus on the vocational fields of health and care. These occupational fields comprise more than 60 different professions. The practical phases of the extracurricular professional field internships are an opportunity for students in the professional fields of health and care to acquire implicit and explicit knowledge and to get to know previously unknown health professions (Gahlen-Hoops, 2019).

2. Relevance

Teacher training courses in vocational education have specific structural and organizational characteristics compared to general education teacher training courses, which can be attributed not least to the different vocational disciplines and the associated related sciences. This also results in different characteristics for the research subject of the extracurricular vocational field placement, which are more or less pronounced depending on the vocational subject area. For the occupational fields of health and care, the focus is on high-quality care for people by well-trained specialist staff, particularly due to the associated occupational field. The aim is to train specialists with professional teaching staff and to provide them with sufficient qualifications for their everyday work (Driesel-Lange, 2017). This also includes sensitizing student teachers to the professional field in which the future trainees will work in the form of an extracurricular professional internship.

During the internship, students should be able to gain a multi-perspective view of the field of activity and thereby complete a professional orientation process. On the one hand, the internship experience is placed in relation to the future teaching profession, which mainly takes place at the school as a place of learning. On the other hand, the experiences are considered in the context of the future trainees in order to better understand the job profile to be taught and, for example, to be able to better interpret, understand and convey patterns of action in the training profession. This aspect is also important in the context of the vocational specialization of health and nursing with regard to the double logic of action, as the “[...] teachers must reflexively work on the [health and] nursing situation as a learning object in addition to the teaching-learning situation” (translated by author) Ertl-Schmuck (2018).

In comparison, Darmann-Finck speaks of the phenomenon of dual socialization and its challenges, which students should counteract in their role as reflective practitioners (Darmann-Finck 2018).

Due to the structural variances and the organizationally differentiated structure of the professional field of health and nursing-related study programs, there are different requirements and conditions regarding the design of the professional field internships with divergent target orientations (Arens & Brinker-Meyendriesch, 2020).

These have not yet been evaluated or recorded in research projects.

As an example, the conditions for the TU Dresden and the vocational subject area of health and nursing will be briefly presented below in order to provide an initial starting point for a comparative, document-analytical part of the research.

According to the Saxon Teacher Examination Regulations, the professional internship is mandatory for all students who cannot provide proof of completed vocational training by the time they graduate. Therefore, the professional internship can be seen as a pillar of the degree program, which is binding for the completion of the first state examination and is equivalent to a completed vocational training in the professional field (Freistaat Sachsen, 2022).

Despite the high value of the extracurricular professional internship, the guidelines and framework conditions are only superficially described in §100 of the Saxon teacher examination regulations and in the KMK guidelines of 2007 (Freistaat Sachsen, 2022) and offer a broad design corridor that is used as the basis for the relevant internship regulations for all professional disciplines. If, in comparison to the internal guidelines for practical school studies, the objectives are clearly structured and checked by means of performance records, students on extracurricular work placements face the challenge of relying on their own individual responsibility. Although a 10-page work placement report with the character of a learning diary is required as a final achievement, reflection and specific feedback on the report and a review of whether the goals set by the students themselves have been achieved do not take place under academic-university supervision, as is usual in other work placements (Ertl-Schmuck, 2017).

The extracurricular professional internships are therefore completed without targeted mentoring or the supervision of corresponding practical instructors. At the same time, there are no courses in the study

regulations that accompany the professional internship in a university context (Technical University Dresden, 2018).

The linking of the experiences and impressions of the practical placements is not reflected from a university perspective and there is also no specific practical supervision, insofar as it is not carried out independently in other modules.

The choice of internship locations is also open, which can lead to problems with the recognition of the content and structure of professional internships (Ertl-Schmuck, 2017).

Furthermore, the free choice of internships and internship locations means that there are no official cooperation agreements with the university. The guarantee of a high-quality practical phase is therefore the sole responsibility of the institutions in which the internships are completed, while at the same time different understandings of the roles of the interns, mentors and internship supervisors can lead to conflicts of interest (Egloff, 2002).

Furthermore, there is a relevance of the perspective of the interns. On the one hand, the interns find themselves in the role of a prospective teacher, which places and embeds the internship experience in the context of the future teaching profession. On the other hand, the interns should get to know various professions in the professional field of the professional specialization they are studying. In addition, the focus is on opening up and raising awareness of the professional world in which the future trainees to be taught will operate.

3. Design of research

Due to the planned research steps, the research is to be written in the form of a qualitative design. Due to the division of the work described below, there are initially quantitative parts that can be embedded in the qualitative methodology. This procedure serves to initially make relevant characteristics of the research field visible in order to support the qualitative parts (Kelle, 2014).

As already indicated in the title of the research, the work is intended as an exploration, as the research subject of the extracurricular vocational field placement, as shown in the state of research, has not yet been empirically investigated and is now to be made accessible for the first time. In order to be able to explore and demonstrate the inner core of the extracurricular work placement, grounded theory is to serve as a methodological framework, through which new theories on the extracurricular work placement are to emerge.

Although “grounded theory [...] has become one of the most widely used methods of qualitative-interpretative social research [...]” (translated by author) Strübing (2004) and there is often the suspicion “[...] that people like to reach for the >grounded theory< seal of approval when they themselves do not really know how to arrive at results [...]” (translated by author) Strübing (2004) and which procedure to use for this. In the author's opinion, the research style of grounded theory is particularly suitable for the dissertation project, as it is not only about the pure description of the data obtained, but rather about an understanding of the phenomena recorded. (Wollny & Marx, 2009) Through the methodology of constant comparison and the associated multi-stage coding steps, the research process as such can be more systematized and improve the intersubjective validity of the results (Strübing, 2004).

In the basic structure, the extracurricular professional field placement in the context of vocational teacher training will be discussed first. Subsequently, the object of research of the extracurricular vocational internship in the vocational fields of health and care will be condensed in order to finally delve empirically into the field of research.

In the first part of the research, a basic introduction to the complex of topics and the object of research of the extracurricular professional internship is to take place in the first step and a classification of the associated, sensitizing concepts is to take place. These concepts “[...] do not have the character of firmly established hypotheses [...]” (translated by author) Alheit (1999), but allow conclusions to be drawn about suitable theoretical references through the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher (Alheit, 1999).

This step is highly relevant for an interpretation and discussion of the term as well as the genesis of a final definition that is consistent for the research.

The second step involves an intensive examination of the current state of research and current study results that are relevant to the subject of the research in order to identify overlaps and open up the broadest possible understanding of the extracurricular vocational field placement.

In the third step, a document-analytical review of exemplary professional field placement regulations and handouts from various teacher training courses in the vocational field of health and nursing will be carried out. These are quite heterogeneous in their structure and implementation instructions, although in principle they describe the same subject matter. For example, the regulations for work placements in Bavaria are regulated equally for all universities by law, while other universities rely on

specially developed handouts and work placement regulations (Bavarian State Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs, Science and the Arts 2017).

In the final step of the first part of the research, data is to be collected on the facilities and institutions in which the students carry out their extracurricular work placement. At the same time, the intentions behind the decision for or against certain practice locations or practice institutions should be determined. This analysis of the current state of the internship landscape can provide an empirical overview of how and for what reasons students organize their extracurricular internships.

The results described are intended to serve as a base and overview to better situate the results of the second part of the dissertation and to be able to quantitatively depict the entirety of the data in parts.

In the second, empirical part of the qualitative research, students who have not completed their professional training will be interviewed using the same survey instruments at different times, namely at the beginning and end of the extracurricular professional internship, as well as teachers who have completed the internship and are already working as teachers, using episodic interviews. The teachers will also be asked about the effects of the extracurricular internship on their current teaching activities. By selecting episodic interviews, the aim is to “[...] elicit and maintain longer narratives, initially without further intervention from the interviewer [...]” (translated by author) Rosenthal & Loch (2002) the principle of openness should be followed. In doing so, “[...] hypothesis-driven data collection is dispensed with and the focus is initially on the relevance of the interviewees and their everyday constructions.” (translated by author) Rosenthal & Loch (2002). This is intended to open up a perspective that is as consistent and comprehensive as possible in order to incorporate the experiences of the interviewees and to be able to gain subsequent, theory-developing insights.

Due to the time frame of the research, a panel study was not carried out, as the extracurricular internship is sometimes stretched over 5 years of the standard period of study, depending on the form of study.

The black box 'extracurricular professional internship in the field of health and nursing' is to be opened up to such an extent by the design described above that an insight is generated with the theories gained, with which the object of research is made comprehensible and in parts also representable.

The goal of the research should lead to a better interpretation and understanding of the subject matter of the extracurricular work placement and enable it to be placed in a university context. The results of the planned research can create a basis on which curricular efforts for the extracurricular work placement in the individual degree courses can build. The knowledge gained could be used to identify new perspectives on the curricular positioning of the extracurricular work placement from a higher education didactic perspective. This would also be accompanied by a possible reorientation of the existing internship guidelines and handouts, in which fundamental aspects of university supervision, the possibility of mentoring programs, decision-making in the crediting processes, but also the objective and subjective objectives and their forms of assessment could be taken into account.

4. Conclusion

The relevance made clear in the article is not only evident in organizational-administrative structures, but also in the didactic-reflective subject area. Situation-oriented teaching-learning arrangements with practical work-related situations in the sense of the learning field concept are indispensable for the design of lessons. The learning situations based on this require reflective, practical professional expertise, which could be acquired without having completed vocational training by experiencing practical activities in the relevant professional field. A profound understanding of the students' experiences and completed activity profiles also requires qualitative, exploratory research steps with regard to interprofessional competencies. Interviews with interns can be used to draw initial conclusions for the university curricular embedding of specialist internship activities and to describe the internship landscape in more detail. In the planned presentation, the first results of the document analysis and the interviews conducted will be presented and discussed.

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