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Schlagworte: elementary school; teacher education; digitalization; reform pedagogy didactics

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## (Elementary) Teacher Education and Internationalization

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# (Elementary) Teacher Education and Internationalization

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## Abstract

The article deals with the topic of internationalization in (elementary) teacher education. In teacher education, the respective focus for school as well as for university is the national policy of education. In addition to this, cross-cutting issues in teacher education such as digital teaching and learning, dealing with heterogeneity, education for sustainable development and education for democracy are relevant topics in all educational systems and for teacher students in general. The claim of higher education for (elementary) teachers is based on the fact that students deal with the professional field of school academically, at a distance to practice, and that their own professional career does not directly go from school to school (again) but leads to a higher degree of professionalization through reflection, reviewing, and an academic examination in the educational field.

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## Outline

1. Higher Education and Elementary School Teacher Education
2. (Trans)national Perspectives for Teacher Education
3. National and International Elementary Education
4. Conclusion

## 1 Higher Education and Elementary School Teacher Education

On the one hand, there is a strong national focus in teacher training, on the other hand, there is a strong demand for global education theory and research in and for schools and for transnational teacher education. First of all, it is not given as a simple fact that teacher education takes place in institutions of higher education. This is particularly true for elementary school teacher education, as this is the youngest discipline within teacher education and in many countries outside Germany elementary school teacher education has not been considered as a (full) university discipline yet. Also, nationally and internationally, teacher education searches for the appropriate “theory-practice re-

relationship” in teacher education (cf. e. g. Cramer et al., 2020). Especially, internationalization in elementary teacher education touches the fundamental question of what an elementary school is or could be, whether it is an independent school for young children for a couple of years or a comprehensive school for young and older children. Even though international teacher education research and school research is based on international approaches such as those of Lee Shulman (1986) or Donald Schön (1983) especially elementary school pedagogy tends to be a specific school pedagogy with own (national) discourses and structures of elementary teacher education which is the case in Germany.

In Germany, there are already major distinctions between the courses of studies and the various ways of becoming an elementary school teacher in the different federal states. While the majority of elementary school teacher education in Germany takes place at universities, and in the federal state of Baden-Württemberg at colleges of education (Pädagogische Hochschulen), in many cases the program is still not considered as fully academic and does not prepare for a possible doctoral degree or academic career. Nevertheless, teacher education consists of three phases in all sixteen federal states: teacher education, teacher traineeship and professional activity (cf. e. g. Herzmann & König, 2015), which in international terms is rather the exception and not the standard case of teacher education. Whereas the basic three-phase structure is common in all federal states in Germany, other German-speaking countries have a fundamentally different structure of teacher education. In Switzerland, for example, there is a single-phase of teacher education program and no civil servant status for teachers as in Germany. Students here just receive a diploma, although the contents of the study are very similar to Germany. In other countries, teachers change their profession after seven to ten years, which rarely happens in Germany because of the civil service status. In Germany, even with the majority conversion from state examinations to Bachelor/Master degrees, the two-phase training structure will be retained. In Germany as well as in other European countries, there are also progressive approaches to combine elementary school teaching programs with other similar courses of study (like early childhood education, special needs education), especially to take account of multiprofessional cooperation at school focussing on inclusive education and all-day schooling. Thus, in some European countries there is also no separate training in teacher education for early childhood education and the school sector, but a joint teacher program for childhood education and elementary education, e. g. in Italy (Bolzano), Switzerland and Poland, and partly in Sweden (cf. Griebel et al., 2013).

A transnational perspective in teacher and on schools is challenging. Internationally, most other countries do not have a diploma (as in Switzerland) or state examination (as e. g. in the state of Hesse) in elementary teacher education, but Bachelor and Master programs. However, this is part of the problem of internationalization in teacher education, that structures differ, and recognitions of certifications and changes are therefore difficult or even impossible for teacher students and their mobility. Transnational (teacher) education as well as internationally educated teachers and school systems hence represent international desiderata (cf. Terhart, 2021).

## 2 (Trans)national Perspectives for Teacher Education

In Germany, as in other countries, there have been various calls since the beginning of the 21st century for teacher education to become more international (cf. DAAD, 2013). However, there is also criticism that there are unrealistic expectations of these (cf. Rotter, 2014) and that internationalization in teacher education is just beginning. In national and international scientific discourses, the high importance of exchange experiences of students abroad is pointed out for all students (cf. Leutwyler, 2014), especially regarding competence development through the mobility stay (cf. Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2013), above all here regarding intercultural competences (cf. Leutwyler & Meierhans, 2016; Shaftel et al., 2007; Wolff, 2017). Justifications for the aim of internationalization in teacher training are beyond that multiple. Modern societies are characterized as migration societies. Migration and re-migration take place in most countries worldwide for various reasons (labor migration or war and flight). On the one hand, teacher education is required to deal intensively with the topic of migration and migration-specific heterogeneity in the classroom. On the other hand, the topic of teacher education in the migration society has hardly been dealt with politically and scientifically (cf. Schmidt et al., 2023) for a long time, especially with a reference to internalization. In addition, there is little mobility of teachers with an own immigration history to and from Germany. In this specific field of teacher research, there is hardly any work available except e. g. for the work of Terhart (2021) focussing on “teachers in transition” with a “biographical perspective on transnational professionalization of internationally educated teachers in Germany”. Here, the focus is also particularly on the role of language and linguistic and multilingual competencies of teachers with their own migration history. Also, the focus is on the importance of transition programs for teachers who were educated abroad and do not have a very high level of proficiency in German as an educational language (cf. Schmidt et al., 2023). Terhart and Rosen (2022) show not only that there is a “diversification of the teaching profession in Europe and beyond”, but that these are “ambivalences of recognition in the context of migration”. Ambivalence characterizes this new field of teacher education. Besides the shortage of elementary school teachers in Germany, the recognition of other certificates and degrees from teachers from abroad remains difficult. The respective education system is exclusive for externally trained and external applicants and remains a complex system. In addition to the already trained teachers from abroad (e. g. as a teacher for German as a foreign language), the large group of students in professionalization processes is a second group. Normally, one only deals with his or her own education system and there is no knowledge about it in other countries. Related to this target group, international seminars in teacher education as collaborative courses can be seen as an important opportunity in the first phase of teacher education to familiarize oneself with relevant international topics and to successively promote intercultural and linguistic competencies of prospective teachers.

What is needed is a common idea of teacher education, joint curriculum development activities within an academic network as a connecting point for joint online semi-

nar concepts and starting points for practical studies abroad. At the same time, this implies a high innovation potential for teaching and the conceptual development of the individual study contents and modules in national teacher education. Online and blended learning programs, as well as shorter practice residencies, will provide additional opportunities for further longer residencies and research from an international and a comparative perspective. For example, in addition to the possibility of a whole semester abroad (e.g. via Erasmus mobility), there is the possibility of a couple of weeks of practical school studies abroad and writing an internship report or even a thesis referring to these student experiences. Individual initiatives at German universities and colleges, such as the program “Lehramt International”<sup>1</sup> (for project examples see Morbach et al., 2024, in this anthology; Nierste, 2024, in this anthology...), also offers an opportunity to obtain an additional certificate for German schools abroad.

Students from partner universities (such as within the EUPeace-network universities<sup>2</sup>), who are given the opportunity to gain practical experiences in partner countries, e.g. in joint online events and online school visits or as part of a short stay abroad, can reflect on the gained intercultural experience and can integrate it into the teaching programs in their home countries. Reflection, especially in the context of internationalization activities, needs a professional setting, needs didactic support from the university to become part of pedagogical professionalization processes.

### 3 National and International Elementary Education

#### 3.1 Clarification of terms: elementary school

The field of internationalization in elementary teacher education has been addressed in recent years by individual activities of scholars working together or alone on comparative issues or on issues that have relevance in other countries. Here, topics of transfer are of particular interest (c.f. Müller et al., 2019). A challenging question is whether internationalization in elementary teacher education needs to be related to elementary school and if so, in which ways. The German educational system is special, and the structure invites comparison to other systems. When we talk about elementary school on an international level, hence, the first thing is to clarify the term elementary school: What kind of (common, inclusive, comprehensive) school is meant? How long is this joint schooling period for all children – 4 years, 6 years, 8 years, or 9 years? In Germany, the term “Grundschule” is used in most federal states for grade one to grade four, two federal states (Berlin and Brandenburg) have two years more. Normally, the children are between five and twelve years old. After only four years (six years) of elementary school, Germany has a “structurally anchored, early sorting of children into educational paths with different levels of challenge and prospects” (Kramer et al., 2009). In

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1 <https://www.daad.de/en/information-services-for-higher-education-institutions/further-information-on-daad-programmes/lehramtinternational/>

2 <https://www.eupeace.eu/>

many other countries in Europe or abroad there is a longer period of joint schooling in elementary school.

In Germany, elementary school structurally occupies a sandwich position between kindergarten and secondary schools (cf. Deckert-Peaceman & Seifert, 2013). This also corresponds to the discourse and questions about a basic education in elementary school, an education that can apply equally to all children (cf. Deckert-Peaceman & Seifert, 2019). It refers also to the specific regulation and support of the transitions of elementary school. Also, there is a specific orientation and alignment to the idea of different levels of didactics: Didactics of the elementary level as didactics of kindergarten, didactics of the primary level (or elementary level in American English), didactics of the secondary level. We have a tiered structure in the German education system, with several pillars in the secondary level which is difficult for outsiders from other educational systems to understand. In Germany, fourteen federal states already have the separation and transfer from elementary school to the secondary level after only four years. In addition, elementary school it is not a clear English term. It depends on whether one wants to express it in American English or in British English, whether one speaks of the transition from elementary to primary level with reference to the British educational system or from kindergarten or pre-school to elementary school with the reference to the Anglo-American tradition. In the context of internationalization of elementary school teacher education, this also raises the didactic question of how the various training programs can be compared with one another and how the relationship between subject, subject didactics, and pedagogy and didactics of the primary level is structured in each national case.

The question of didactics in higher education is accompanied by the question of the connections of elementary school/pre-school to school and the connection of elementary level didactics to secondary level didactics. With the beginning of elementary school teacher training, pedagogy takes on an important role and is strongly oriented towards reform pedagogy. While in other countries there is not always a high proportion of educational science content, the elementary school teacher training program, Germany continues to have high proportions of pedagogy courses and didactics courses, rather than focusing only on subjects and teaching subjects in elementary school. Internationally, students often study a subject (such as e. g. maths) and didactics in addition, but not with a focus on elementary school pedagogy.

Even though there are some studies (such as e. g. Huf, 2013; Rademacher, 2009) on enrollment from a comparative perspective, it still remains a German issue with a special focus on German traditions such as the preparation of paper cone (Schultüte) filled with pens, gifts, and candy and celebrating the school start as a family event. Doing difference plays a role right from the beginning, in Germany, starting school means to invest in the first school day (cone, school bag, gifts, the family event). This stages the existing social inequality and shows the unequal starting opportunities. Huf (2013) has done some work on the comparisons between England and Germany, Rademacher (2009) on school enrollment from a German-American perspective, and the critical view of different forms of school enrollment by Deckert-Peaceman and Scholz

(2016) is also relevant for the German discourse. It is interesting from transnational perspectives to look at the transitions of elementary school, especially from a comparative perspective. What exactly happens when institutions change, when children start school?

When the topic of school entry and transition is dealt with internationally, a clarification of the corresponding terms and approaches, which are different in the countries, is needed. There are specific terms and theoretical references that are used to work e. g. on the topic of the transition from pre-school or kindergarten to school. Colloquially, the term “school readiness” is used, which ties in with an old tradition that goes back to the 16th century. There are also winners and losers/underachievers often in connection with German as a second language or foreign language and the perception of linguistic-cultural differences (within the German educational system right from the beginning of school (c. f. e.g. Seifert & Wiedenhorn, 2018)). In consequence, the issue of educational inequality preoccupies German elementary school pedagogy in theory and research as well as educational planning. School enrollment takes place differently in different countries: In Russia, children start school without gifts for children, instead the children bring a bouquet of flowers for the class teacher. In many countries, unlike in Germany, there are no special celebrations. In African countries, there is also a right to education, but in sub-Saharan Africa about 20% of children are not enrolled in school and have to work. In France, as another example, children attend the *école maternelle* from the age of 3/4 and then only transfer from pre-school to the “large” school, *la grande école*, without great celebration of this change.

### 3.2 Digitization and elementary education

In Germany, there is a very differentiated and critical debate especially about media education in elementary school and elementary school teaching, particularly in the field of elementary school pedagogy and elementary school didactics (cf. Irion & Knoblauch, 2021; Peschel & Irion, 2016).

Digitization in learning and teaching is currently one of the most important topics in schools and teacher education, both internationally and nationally. Elementary school pedagogy deals with the topic of digitization here on two different levels – firstly regarding the work in classrooms with children in the lower grades of the respective school system; and secondly, it relates to the work with students who want to become teachers and therefore university didactics in teacher education in higher education. Teaching and learning with digital media and the further development of concepts and content belong together referring to both levels. Education and digitization always mean more than just the use of technology in education and technologization. It is critically addressed in the international discourse, especially with regard to didactic work with children in early and middle childhood, that the (additive) use of technology does not generate didactic added value and that the topic of digital teaching and learning belongs to the debates of professionalism and professionalization of teachers (cf. e. g. Arndt et al., 2018).

### 3.3 Cross-cutting issues in elementary teacher education

The topic of starting elementary school is one example for relevant topics of the internationalization of elementary school pedagogy, especially for bilateral or multilateral cooperation in teacher education. Other topics that need an international perspective in elementary school pedagogy are e. g. democracy education, dealing with heterogeneity, inclusion, difference, diversity, discrimination or education for sustainable development (ESD). Here we find a direct link and reference to important UN conventions (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities) which have been signed by many states.

Human and children's rights education and the didactics of human and children's rights are a topic and of concern nationally and internationally for elementary schools (c. f. e.g. Seifert, 2023). In addition to property rights and funding rights, we have the large area of participation rights, which applies to all children beginning from early childhood in an inclusive manner. Hence, participation is nationally and internationally an important educational term which appears in curricula and in educational policy as well as scientific and practice-related publications.

Participation of children can be justified in different ways, referring to a legal point of view, a pedagogical point of view and a social point of view. The legal background of participation refers on an international level to UN conventions such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on Rights of Persons with disabilities. On a national level participation of children also refers to national laws, to school laws as well as to other laws as rights which regulate the participation and co-determination of children. The pedagogical background of participation of children is particularly important for an understanding of democratic participation which refers to an understanding of kindergarten and pre-school as children's spaces in an ethical and political way (cf. Moss & Petrie, 2002). From a pedagogical point of view, participation can be seen as a relevant part of everyday life in elementary school, because only through participation skills and competences can be acquired by the child him- or herself. The social dimension of the term participation refers to specific values of a (democratic) society and refers to social learning processes. Pre-school and school are hence regarded as a learning, living and socialization space for children and they are therefore the place where the foundation for social life takes place. Pre-school or school life socializes children and contributes to becoming a subject and a member of society.

In joint international seminars of teacher education, which mostly take place virtually, theoretical, and empirical work can be done on these global issues. What does participation in elementary schools mean in different educational systems? What understanding do we have in the different systems of inclusion/exclusion, of children's participation in school and teaching? Participation and democracy, participation and democratic learning therefore belong together. Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child has been signed by almost all the countries in the world, the understanding of how to implement children's rights to protection, promotion, and participation differs internationally. While in many curricula of schools and teacher education there



is a direct reference to the term participation, the term does not appear in other curricula both in school and in university (e. g. Uganda, Estonia, Russia).

In (elementary) teacher education it is interesting, especially in international digital teaching formats, to work with students from different countries of origin to not only take one perspective on a topic like rights of the child and participation in elementary school, but also to consider different and other perspectives. There are many different cross-cutting issues like the mentioned transition from pre-school to school, digital teaching and learning, dealing with heterogeneity, education for sustainable development (ESD) and education for democracy. Children's rights and children's rights' didactics are also part of the ESD. This thematically engages elementary schools and elementary teacher education worldwide.

Education in democracies and children's rights also raises different questions referring to the nature of school and schooling and raises the question how school works (e. g. referring to children's participation) and could work in democratic societies (cf. Riddle et al., 2022). Contents from the field of ESD, which can be dealt with in the individual subject didactics (e. g. social and natural sciences, arts education, religious education) in an interdisciplinary and interdisciplinarily manner, are here climate change, poverty, flight, migration, the peace order. As learning objectives for the 21st century, the 5 Cs (creativity, communication, citizenship, critical thinking, and collaboration) are considered from international politics to be relevant for the 21st century: These goals follow the UNESCO's goals for Education for Sustainable Development ESD as overall tasks of education in all countries (cf. e. g. UNESCO, 2023; see also Buddeberg, Henke & Hornberg 2024, in this anthology). Philosophizing with children in elementary school represents an important teaching principle and method that relates to children's participation and questioning in classrooms. Philosophizing with children e. g. in social science lessons is an important principle here, which refers to the children's questions and makes asking questions and thinking an important principle.

Michalik (2023) links the method of "philosophizing with children" to the idea of "learning to live with uncertainty as a condition of human life". Thus, philosophy with children is meant to strengthen the idea of critical thinking and an exchange of different perspectives. International work has also been done on philosophy with children with publications in English, German, Spanish and other languages (e. g. Cassidy, 2017; Cassidy et al., 2019; Rojas Chavez, 2017).

## 4 Conclusion

A main question, which is not easy to answer, is when and in which way elementary education is national elementary education or internationally oriented. Some universities have maintained intensive bilateral or multilateral cooperations with other universities for decades. Likewise, some researchers from the discipline of elementary education work intensively in international projects, networked with colleagues from abroad and present the results of joint research at international conferences such as EECERA

(European Early Childhood Research Association) or ECER (European Educational Research Association) or IPIC (International Council of Inquiry with Children). Besides the joint work on the level of research and teaching through joint seminar concepts such as the COIL concepts (for an example of a COIL seminar see Brück-Hübner, Müller, Joseph, et al., 2024, in this anthology), there are also low-threshold activities of internationalization such as an (online) visit of a conference at a foreign university or the translation of German research results and publication in an English-language journal in order to reach a larger target group (a step-by-step model for internationalization is presented in Kopp et al., 2024, in this anthology). Precisely because teacher education as well as educational and school policy, practice and theory are nationally oriented there is a strong demand for global education theory and research in and for (elementary) schools and also for transnational (elementary school) teacher training.

It still remains to be clarified for elementary school pedagogy in an international orientation: Is there primary school pedagogy related to a specific school form (“Grundschule”), related to the work with the specific age group (children between 5 and 12 years), related to transitions (from pre-school or kindergarten to school, from primary to secondary school), related to the idea of an inclusive and democratic school for all, etc.? The clarification of concepts and referring to different theoretical and empirical approaches is hence a co-constructive process in elementary education of the teachers and the learners and a field of didactics in higher education. In international (digital) course the experience can be made, how can new knowledge can be connected to old knowledge, how can the individual academic as well as my professional and biographical perspectives be broadened? The example of the topic of transitions makes it clear that internationalization in elementary school pedagogy means more and something different than an additional offer and a reference to international contacts of one’s own university or department of school education.

The relevant questions of didactics and university didactics about which contents should be dealt with in international courses of elementary education and how this should be done methodically need an examination of the whole concept of education and the question of the goal of education in contemporary society. The mentioned topics and tasks are not limited to one nation but are global and universal in their orientation and treatment. Internationalization of elementary school pedagogy can hence be seen as an ongoing changing process, also in terms of contents, concepts and professional relationships. It includes more than partially attending international events, including, or referring to English texts. It is also about the question of how and in which way international cooperation can take place on different levels of research and teaching and how references can be made to each other in a long-term and profound manner: Both by individual actors in teacher education, e.g. through student or teacher mobility, and through a conceptually based and long-term cooperation between institutions.

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