The Transformative Potential of School Adoptions in Teacher Education: The Case of Studierende machen Schule!

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1 Introduction¹

"In reality, reproduction always occurs with variations, sometimes begetting transformations—new ways of doing things in addition to, or instead of, the way we did things before. The cycles unfold in wandering, wayward spirals that sometimes spawn new ways of doing things, changed practices, new practices" (Kemmis 2019, p. 144).

A key challenge in teacher education is student teachers' development of vocational proficiency. One of its central problems is providing learning opportunities that closely approximate real professional challenges (Fraefel/Scheidig 2018, p. 357; Grosser-Clarkson/Neel 2020, p. 456) without neglecting the academic requirements of the first phase of teacher education. School adoptions offer new opportunities to address these challenges. Specifically, school adoptions take established forms of school internships in teacher education as a starting point, and radically expand their opportunities by enabling in-service teachers to leave their schools for a week of continuing professional development (CPD), whilst student teachers take over their roles and duties. We refer to this as an *adoption week*. Hence, compared to other forms of school internships, school adoptions more precisely address the real vocational challenges of the teaching profession and provide a more solid basis for student teacher reflection.

Based on practice theory, we identify the transformative potential of school adoptions in the first and third phases of teacher education in Germany and demonstrate how the aforementioned challenges can be addressed by changing practice architectures and practices, without interfering with the existing structural logic of teacher education in Germany. We first outline our theoretical starting point and the school adoption project *Studierende machen Schule!* at the University of Education in Weingarten (Pädagogische Hochschule Weingarten, Germany). Then we elaborate on trust as a premise of transferring concepts from one national teacher education setting to another, and as a premise of student teacher learning transfer. Next, we demonstrate that school adoptions create opportunities for expansive learning and transformative agency for student teachers and illustrate the impact of teachers and pupils as teacher educators. Finally, we present the transformative potential of, and formulate guidelines for, transfer projects in a variety of contexts.

¹ This article is the revised and extended version of the chapter "Transfer und Transformationspotentiale von Schulübernahmen für die Lehrerbildung am Beispiel des Projekts *Studierende machen Schule*" which was published in T. Diederich and A. Desoye (eds.) (2023): Transfer in Pädagogik und Erziehungswissenschaft - Zwischen Wissenschaft und Praxis. Weinheim and Basel: Beltz Juventa. All translated quotations and paraphrases from German-language texts are our own.

2 Transfer as an ecological practice

We understand transfer as an ecological practice, meaning that it operates within an interrelated and interdependent network of other practices and relationships, and therefore conclude that each of the transfer processes described below connects to other practices that already exist within a given field or site of practice and continues them in a meaningful way.

Using the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis/Grootenboeer 2008) and the theory of ecologies of practices (Kemmis et al. 2012) as conceptual resources emphasizing the situatedness of practices, we describe the relations and interdependencies among these practices. With the latter, the mutual dependencies of practices come into view, with the former, the physical, material, and relational constitution (Budde/Eckermann 2021, p. 26) of practices. Practices are socially established, cooperative, human activities interrelated and hanging together within a distinctive project and are composed of forms of utterances and understandings (sayings), modes and courses of action (doings), and the ways people relate to each other and to their environment (relatings). Practices are interwoven (enmeshed) with the site where and in which they exist. Sites simultaneously feature cultural-discursive, materialeconomic, and socio-political arrangements that together comprise their practice architecture. For teacher education and for the project we elaborate on in this article, e. g. the theoretical discussions in a seminar at the university or the conversational tone in a debriefing of a lesson visit in an internship are cultural-discursive arrangements. The number of possible lesson visits by university lectures or the training of school based-teachers as mentors in teacher education by the university are material-economic arrangements. The social-political arrangements are the dependencies and power structures that define roles and affect how student teachers, university lectures, teachers and pupils involved in the internship can relate to each other; e.g. that school teachers as mentors and university lecturers not only have to advise the student teachers during their internship, but also have to assess them.

Practice architectures prefigure practices in that they enable or restrict certain types of sayings, doings, and relatings. This means that what student teachers encounter in their internship school or class prefigures what they can or cannot think, say, and do, and how they can or cannot interact with teachers, pupils, and parents. The theory of ecologies of practices brings into focus the intermeshing, the mutual interdependencies and dependencies of transfer practices (cf. Kemmis 2022, pp. 132–137). During adoption week, student teachers continue the learning processes that started in the integrated term practicum (ITP; see below). This is, however, only possible because the teachers are attending one week of CPD training, which, in turn, continues practices of educational administration, of teacher professional development as well as school and lesson development. During this time, student teachers substitute for the teachers undergoing training. The practices of CPD and studying in the school adoption project's specific practice architecture are therefore mutually dependent ("ecologically interdependent", Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 44) in that they both "derive their essential properties and their existence from their relationships" (Kemmis 2022, p. 132) with each other. Thus, it is not only the mutual connection between the two practices that becomes visible in and through this reciprocal relationship but also their initial mutual conditionality.

3 The school adoption project

In the *Studierende machen Schule!* (*SmS*) project, student primary school teachers in the ITP voluntarily take responsibility for all lessons during adoption week, whilst school staff attend joint CPD elsewhere. As of the winter semester 2015/2016, with the approval of the education authorities and the school committee, adoption week takes place at two primary schools proposed by the education authority. The aim is to give student teachers a more complete picture of their future profession, its requirements and opportunities, as compared to that offered by other forms of internship.

During the 2-week introduction period of the ITP, student teachers attend school every day to observe and support the teachers. University lecturers are not involved in this phase. During the main phase, student teachers increasingly teach more than they did in the first phase and are at school daily, except on Thursdays when they take complementary, related seminars at the university. For each subject studied, there are at least two visits by a university lecturer to lessons planned and taught by the student teachers. Throughout the entire ITP, student teachers are advised by teachers (as mentors) and university lecturers (Fig. 1), who collectively decide whether or not the student teachers pass the lesson visits and the ITP as a whole. While school-based mentors consider the entire period of the ITP to assess student teachers' performance, university lectures assess student teachers' academic performance based on the two lesson visits as well as their pedagogical content knowledge in the written lesson planning documents submitted for these. Although neither teachers nor university lecturers are trained in the assessment of student teachers' performance, this way results (at least) in an assessment from and in the two perspectives of school and university.

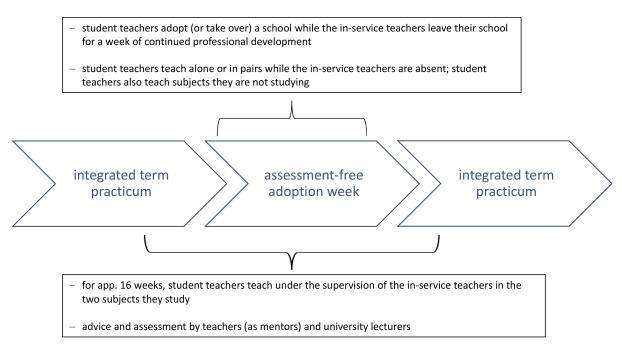


Figure 1 Project Course

Adoption week takes place at the end of this second phase. During this week, student teachers adopt (or take over) a class, either alone or in pairs. As is customary at primary schools in Baden-Württemberg, they also teach subjects they are not studying. Student teachers must prepare a planning

overview for submission to the school management, the teachers, the SmS project management², and representatives of the local education authority who visit the school at least once during adoption week and participate in the final project meeting. SmS project managers are always present at the school during adoption week, but they do not enter the staffroom, nor do they visit classrooms or the schoolyard unless the student teachers ask them to do so. At the end of each working day, student teachers and project management meet at the school for counselling and reflection.

4 Trust as a premise of transfer

The project builds on two pillars. We drew upon experiences from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology (cf. Ramberg/Haugaløkken 2019) and the University of Flensburg (Europa-Universität Flensburg, cf. Bach 2017) regarding school adoptions, as well as our partnership in an Erasmus+ project³ for the development, implementation, and evaluation of school adoptions.

From the Norwegian colleagues' perspective, it is a transfer of a specific form of student teacher internship to other institutions, namely "the application of tested problem solutions that were developed in a specific institutional and personal context for problems in areas that are structured in a similar way" (Euler 2004, p. 2). It is a transfer with limited scope because, due to the size of the partner schools, only 16 student teachers per adoption can participate. The development and finalization of our concept and the first project implementations were supported by colleagues from the universities mentioned above; be it in a more formal sense as a project consortium with its own schedule and funds, evaluation (Bandorski 2019) and project publication (Janssen/Wiedenhorn 2020a), or be it in a more informal sense in personal conversations and discussions.

As in the quote given at the beginning of the article (cf. Kemmis 2019, p. 144), development and the first implementations were emergent. Moreover, cross-institutional and trans-disciplinary (cf. Straub/Vilsmaier 2020 p.5 ff.) cooperation developed with the regional council and the local education authority, which also supported the transfer (cf. Hasselhorn et al. 2014, p. 13). On the one hand, this cooperation was about identifying and creating favorable conditions for the project as a whole, and on the other, it was about creating added value, especially for the school. This is why a central requirement for the implementation of the project was that it should take place at a school that could identify specific CPD needs from its evaluation data and then request customized CPD measures from the education authorities. Thus, both the individual and institutional fit and relevance of CPD were ensured, and legal aspects of teacher employment were taken into consideration (cf. Altrichter 2019, p. 31).

To avoid the imposition of project participation as an external measure, a vote on participation was held during the teachers' conference and the school conference⁴ prior to each adoption week, in order to ensure genuine self-determination and co-determination amongst teaching staff and parents. The fact that the parents have always agreed to participate may be due to an added value they recognized for the school in their community and for their children. The fact that the teachers always gave their consent may be due to their "intangible characteristics" (Rolff 2019, p. 50), their high aspirations for themselves and their profession as they have recognized added value in the 1-week CPD with respect

² We the authors as fully qualified teachers, university lectures and researchers are the project management.

³ School Adoption in Teacher Education (SATE). Project number 2016-1-DK01-KA203-022324.

⁴ The school conference is the joint body of a school. Among other things, its tasks include to promote cooperation of school management, teachers, parents and pupils, and to discuss and to decide matters of major importance to the school.

to themselves and their pupils (cf. Gräsel 2010, p. 10). This form of self- and co-determination democratizes teacher education (cf. Payne/Zeichner 2017, p. 1113; Zeichner/Payne/Brayko 2015, p. 131) and is a variation of a participative transfer strategy: While this is commonly characterized by the fact that the teachers themselves design the measures they are to implement in the course of innovation and are supported in this by researchers (cf. Gräsel 2010, S. 15 f.), cooperation in this kind of project creates the conditions for new possibilities, insofar as collective CPD time (cf. Darling-Hammond 2012, p. 26) is made available to work on current school and lesson development goals with the support of expert trainers. As with the Finnish approach of "teacher professional development support" (Sahlberg 2007, p. 155), the school's organizational development is thus linked with its teachers' professionalization (cf. Janssen 2016, p. 101-102).

Finally, the above explanations are oriented toward their underlying premise, trust, which is an emotion in the teleo-affective structure of practices. It "refers to the future actions of others, which are beyond one's own control and which are accompanied by a risk or threat to oneself" (Gräsel/Fußangel/Pröbstel 2006, p. 206-207). Whilst trust can be identified in retrospect as a condition of the project, it simultaneously had to emerge and be explicitly demonstrated in project development and initial implementations. Trust is, therefore, both a precondition and an outcome of this project. Instead of a prescriptive project description with detailed objectives and defined milestones, curiosity about the project and confidence in its success are emphasized. Regarding the participating student teachers in particular, it should have become clear that they are closely monitored during the ITP whilst they are entrusted with more responsibility than in other forms of internships (cf. Lund 2020, p. 18).

5 Changed arrangements as a premise of learning transfer, expansive learning, and transformative agency

During adoption week, the cultural-discursive and socio-political arrangements of the practice architectures, familiar to the student teachers from the ITP, change, which means that their practices also change. Below, these changes are used to illustrate the influence of teachers and pupils as teacher educators (cf. Husu/Clandinin 2017, p. 1178): Given the teachers' absence, the relationships between student teachers and pupils change because the teachers relinquish their authority over the pupils (cf. Kemmis et al. 2014, p. 98) and thus their support for the student teachers is withdrawn. For example, one of the reasons the pupils are inclined to follow the student teachers' instructions and regulations during the lessons in the ITP is because they know that their teacher is expecting them to do so and any infringements against such expectations will be sanctioned. The removal of this support enables learning for transfer or learning transfer. This is understood as the ability to use what has been learned in one context or situation variably and flexibly in as-yet unfamiliar situations and in relation to problems that have not yet been dealt with (cf. Anderson et al. 2014, p. 36-77). That is, student teachers make use of situationally-appropriate creative (cf. Combe/Pasela 2012, p. 99) extensions of previously established practices (cf. Oser 1997, p. 221).

Participating student teachers have described precisely such experiences. During the ITP, they enter and join established arrangements in schools and classrooms and take up organizational, regulatory, and instructional methods used by the teachers. During adoption week, student teachers first use and apply such organizational, regulatory, and instructional methods and note that the pupils are reacting differently, which prompts them to develop new approaches to establish new arrangements to reach

⁵ Doing so is a mandatory aspect of the university's assessment of the student teachers' performance.

their individual and collective goals. However, because *how differently* the pupils will (re)act cannot be determined in advance, the skills the student teachers have to be able to develop in order to (re)act appropriately can also not be defined in advance. Learning transfer therefore inevitably involves an openness and a positive kind of vagueness that hinder tendencies towards standardization in teacher education (cf. Ulvik/Smith 2019, p. 131). A practice-theoretical perspective is particularly applicable to and compatible with this. If learning transfer is necessarily open and vague, acting in such a situation cannot be oriented to the question of what is done why, but to how actors perform (transfer). For the logic of practice is not the logic of theory about practice.

Similar to the mutual conditionality described above, the student teachers reported that they want to teach differently than in the ITP. Their sense of agency grew as they engaged with the new context(s) of adoption week and made agentic choices. In interviews conducted a week after adoption week, student teachers reported that the changed socio-political arrangements during adoption week encouraged and enabled them to attempt to do so, for example, by applying other teaching methods, or using different media because they are no longer subject to mentors' and university lecturers' assessment. Hence, adoption week opens up opportunities for expansive learning and transformative agency (cf. Lund 2020, p. 18).

In internships with performance assessment (as in the ITP and other forms), student teachers demonstrate compliance with (assessment) standards and prioritize passing over learning; the assessment situation can even inhibit student teachers' learning (cf. Hascher 2014, p. 555; Meyer/Kiel 2014, p. 38). The assessment-free adoption week inhibits student teachers from pretending to have learning successes during the internship (Fraefel 2011, S. 31), because the possibilities of negative sanctioning (cf. Holzkamp 2004, p. 30) have been dropped. By eliminating this compulsion for positive self-presentation (cf. Brosziewski/Heid/Keller 2011, p. 22) or the compulsion to pose as competent (i.e., the competency to display competencies, Pfadenhauer 2010, p. 167) school adoption opens up the possibility of expansive learning, i.e. the expansion of self-determination and one's own possibilities and abilities to act (cf. Langemeyer 2012).

To emphasize this aspect more strongly, practice architectures such as the ITP and similar internships with performance assessments subject student teachers to assessment pressure manifested in requirements and criteria set by the school and the university regarding how student teachers should be teaching. In these kinds of practice architectures, student teachers primarily learn to adapt to these practices of studying, that is, learn to fulfil the given criteria in order to successfully pass the internship. Conversely, in practice architectures such as the school adoption project and similar internships without performance assessments, student teachers voluntarily subject themselves to a pressure to act, in which one's own understanding of one's role as a becoming teacher and one's own understanding of teaching are pivotal (cf. Keller-Schneider/Janssen/Wiedenhorn 2022, p. 300). Hence, within these and similar practice architectures, student teachers primarily learn to (co)develop and (co)design these practices of (learning) teaching. As an extension of such expansive learning, transformative agency is discussed in teacher education. It is:

"[...] a quality of expansive learning. Learning expansively requires breaking away from the given frame of action and taking the initiative to transform it. The new concepts and practices generated in an expansive learning process carry future-oriented visions loaded with initiative and commitment by the learners" (Sannino/Engeström/Lemos 2016, p. 4).

In this project, the framework has been altered as described and is therefore in itself part of the transformation process (cf. Lund/Vestøl 2020, p. 2). Student transformative agency is, firstly, student

teachers' will and ability to shape the scope of adoption week in a self-determined and intentional way and also, then, to act accordingly. Hence, transformative agency not only relates to student teachers' learning but also to their teaching and understanding of themselves as becoming professional teachers (cf. Biesta/Priestley/Robinson 2015, p. 627; Eteläpelto et al. 2013, p. 61). It thus has an expressive and a self-transformational dimension.

6 Transformational potential for teacher education

We have illustrated how practice architectures affect occasions and opportunities for in-service teacher continuing professional development and for student teachers' learning how to teach. But are school adoptions a desirable or an undesirable transformation of school internships in teacher education? Are they undesirable, because with them the study program is too strongly oriented toward the professions' vocational tasks in schools, thus counteracting the structural logic and academic demands of the first phase of teacher education in Germany (cf. Wenzl/Wernet/Kollmer 2018, p. 3)? Or are they promising because they enable learning and reflection processes that are conducive to certain goals in this first phase, such as reflecting on school and teaching, on the pupils, and on one's own career aspirations?

The modified arrangements of adoption week more closely approximate real professional challenges than other forms of internships that, in accordance with the structural logic of the three-phase teacher education system in Germany, outsource similar transfer functions to the preparatory service. In doing so, school adoptions create and offer an expanded and better-founded basis for reflection (cf. Janssen/Wiedenhorn 2020b, p. 68). If this is, for example, applied to reviewing the motives for choosing a teaching career as an objective of the first phase of teacher education, the influence of extended practical phases (i.e. longer internships) has been documented (cf. Römer/Rothland/Straub 2018, p. 268). With an intensive adoption week as part of a long-term internship, school adoptions increase this influence and the processes of reflection that emerge: Student teachers compare the experiences they gain during the long-term internship (here, the ITP) with those from adoption week and with their initial motives for their career choice. This not only supplements with the assessment of university lecturers and teachers (as mentors) but rather complements it as it draws a more cohesive and meaningful picture of the different ways in which student teachers engage with the standards of the teaching profession. For example, immediately after each adoption week, one or two student teachers dropped out of their studies; student teachers of who neither the university lecturers nor the teachers would have expected this.

Instead of debriefings and follow-up discussions after lesson visits and accompanying, weekly seminars at the university in the ITP, daily video-supported reflection and counselling sessions in the form of dialogue between SmS project management and student teachers take place at the school during adoption week (cf. Affolter et al. 2021). In contrast to the regular ITP, the context of reference and relevance of student teachers' experiences is thus preserved (cf. Alkemeyer/Buschmann/Michaeler 2015, p. 26-27), which allows for a "sensitization to implicit forms of knowledge and learning" (Neuweg 2000, p. 211) This, in turn, facilitates a situational and reciprocal "interpretation of the [student teachers'] experience" (Neuweg 2002, p. 18) with the project management. The preservation of the context

⁶ The preparatory service follows a successfully completed master's degree in teaching. During the preparatory service, student teachers are assigned to a Seminar for the Training and further Education of Teachers. This is often referred to as "the second phase of teacher education" before entering the profession as fully qualified teachers.

of reference and relevance also establishes the link between school adoptions and university schools in teacher education (cf. Janssen 2019; Toom/Husu 2019).

It should now be clear that the transformational potential of school adoptions in teacher education may be unlocked and utilized via modified practice architectures and practices without affecting the existing structures of the three-phase-teacher education system in Germany. In this sense, the project and the concept are compatible with the so-called core practices approach (cf. Grossman/Hammerness/McDonald 2009, p. 282-285), the aim of which is:

... to "derive significant points of reference and orientation on the way to becoming a professional teacher directly from the practical, vocational challenges and to continuously enrich the knowledge for the foundation of teachers' actions along these points" (Fraefel/Scheidig 2018, p. 356).

7 Guidelines for transfer projects

Finally, we will focus on a few aspects that we consider to be of central importance for transfer projects.

Regarding *societal relevance*, school adoptions enable teaching staff to participate in joint CPD linking school evaluation with teaching and school development as well as individual professionalization. Supported by the university, student teachers substitute for in-service teachers and have an incomparable opportunity to develop professional action and reflection skills. This way, school adoptions can substantially contribute to the improvement of the education system at all levels and therefore have societal relevance far beyond a study project or a single CPD training. Something similar seems possible to us regarding, for example, nursery schools and nursing wards (elementary and nursing pedagogy) or in other professional studies.

Professionalization cannot be reduced to the achievement of prescriptively defined objectives and their external assessment only, whether by teacher educators or others. Instead, an (at least partly) open and loosely-defined development process is necessary to make possible and to facilitate learning transfer and professionalization as creative means of dealing with unknown and unpredictable situations. School adoptions also provide a template for courses of study in areas other than the teaching profession, in which students should encounter similar situations for their professionalization.

Regarding *trust and mutually shared responsibility*, it appears that projects of this type are only possible if all institutions involved assume collective responsibility. Instead of separate structural responsibilities, standardized process descriptions, or similar, we have identified trust, confidence, and shared acceptance of responsibility as essential conditions of emergent transfer processes.

Regarding *democratization*, responsibility shared in a spirit of trust can only come about and be created through the actual self-determination and co-determination of all those involved, in our case primarily the student teachers and in-service teachers, as well as the parents whose children are part of the project as pupils. Including their perspectives and positions requires the university to open up to them, and to include them, which in turn may lead to better sustainability of projects via the acceptance of those included. Thus, the possibility opens up that transfer projects lead to transformations.

Achknowledgements

We are grateful to Dr. Peter Gray, educational consultant, for his invaluable help in discussing and translating the manuscript. As a driving force in school adoption and other projects, nobody could have been more helpful.

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