



ITLS INTERNATIONAL TEACHERS FOR TOMORROW'S SCHOOL

SYSTEM CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INTERCULTURAL
SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Community building and connection as an international teacher: examples from Bielefeld

Abstract:

Connection, sense-of-belonging and community building are considered as important factors for the motivation of international teachers during their professional trajectory. The following text gives an insight and inspiration by describing examples from Bielefeld University.

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Further offers of support – exchange and training

Networking and sharing experiences and knowledge can be a source of motivation and support for international teachers. For the inclusion of new international teachers in schools, the support and cooperation with mentors and other colleagues is of great importance. They support new teachers in dealing with the challenges of a foreign school system, often a new language, and in implementing new methods and didactics. In doing so, they can mediate in many directions and contribute to breaking down barriers and difficulties of understanding with pupils, parents, the teaching staff and other school stakeholders.

Conversely, the school and existing teachers can also benefit from the international experiences of immigrant teachers. Everyone brings with them their own experiences, habits, assumptions and ideas about ways of doing things and values of working in the school. This is precisely what creates space between colleagues to rethink perspectives and develop ideas. This different perspective, frictions and irritations can cause a productive rethinking in the exchange and contribute to the reflection and change of habits and ideas of normality. Mentors also have a considerable influence on how immigrant teachers are perceived at school and can promote their acceptance among students and staff. Collegial involvement and support in the teaching staff are important for the acceptance of international teachers also by students and parents and can influence the process of arrival in the school (Hachmeister, 2022, 37-39). The exchange and cooperation of international teachers and colleagues at schools could be promoted through additional offers in the training and further education of teachers, in which the reflection of ideas of normality and habits plays a central role.

Mutual learning processes, misunderstandings or lack of understanding can be both stressful and frustrating in everyday school life. Due to the change between educational systems and a repeated career entry in a new country, international teachers face challenges and experiences that are often not shared by their colleagues in the schools. Upon re-entering the profession, international teachers are required to find a new role as a teacher in a foreign environment, while at the same time they have already gained professional experience under different conditions of schooling: previous experiences and habits as trained teachers are juxtaposed with the new role as a learner in a foreign system with a different language and (school) culture. International teachers share similar experiences and, unlike other colleagues, are not anchored in the prevailing notions of normality and the resulting expectations for new teachers. Exclusive exchange formats among international teachers in the sense of a safe space, offer for mutual support and for the empowerment and strengthening of professionalism therefore seem desirable.

The Re-Qualification Programme Lehrkräfte Plus Bielefeld has therefore set itself the task of promoting this exchange between international teachers and strengthening important topics. The focus is on promoting professional exchange, while at the same time striving for a relaxed and informal atmosphere with space and time for private exchange and getting to know each other personally. The following ideas originate from the Bielefeld alumni work and are based on the ideas and wishes of the teachers.

Training activities and empowerment for international teachers

Workshops and lectures for international teachers focus exclusively on topics related to the professional re-entry of international teachers. These include information on formal matters, legal regulations, professional (further) qualifications and perspectives. Another focus is on empowerment and strength-oriented self-perception of international teachers. Exclusive workshop formats can also provide a safe space to address experiences of discrimination in the school environment. Furthermore, teachers can participate in the general in-service and further training for teachers offered by Bielefeld University. Excursions, for example to extracurricular places of learning, can also be organised.

International teachers as experts of professional re-entry in schools

In addition to the offers *for* international teachers, Lehrkräfte Plus Bielefeld also tries to promote cooperation *with* and formats *of* international teachers. In July 2022, the first Summer School of the National Network for Qualification Programmes for International Teachers (*Bundesweites Netzwerk für Qualifizierungsprogramme für Internationale Lehrkräfte*) was held, in which the offer was determined by workshops of international teachers themselves. In a bar camp, new topics could be dealt with and discussions deepened. Alumni of various nationwide qualification programmes had a platform here to speak for themselves; as experts for the professional re-entry of international teachers. At the same time, new networks between international teachers, from other qualification programmes, at other schools and locations could be established and contacts made.

In addition, the possibility of an inter-year exchange between participants and graduates of the programme is offered. If interested, contacts can be exchanged, for example, between teachers with a similar or the same school subject.

In the continuing education programme for teachers at Bielefeld University, [BiConnected](#), workshops are also offered in cooperation with international teachers as referees, in which they report on the experiences of the system change and their previous professional experiences.

In addition to these offers for exchange and networking within the framework of the alumni programme, self-developed exchange formats take place, for example, via social media.

Exchange spaces and information channels

A monthly meeting at the digital round table was created for regular exchange and mutual acquaintance between alumni of different years. The format of this meeting is open and thus offers the opportunity to exchange information about current events, discuss experiences and questions or plan further events. In the Alumni Programme, this meeting was initiated by programme staff.

A monthly newsletter informs about upcoming events with and for (international) teachers.

References

Hachmeister, S. (2022). *Zugewanderte Lehrkräfte in der Schule: Potenziale fördern und Herausforderungen begegnen. Eine Handreichung für Schulen*. Bielefeld: Univ. Bielefeld, Bielefeld School of Education (BiSEd). <https://doi.org/10.4119/unibi/2962407>