



## What is Productive Learning – Short summary

### Origins

*Productive Learning* is a form of education which replaces traditional schooling during the last years of general school. This form of education started its development 20 years ago in Berlin in order to address mounting discrepancies and conflict between secondary school teaching and educational needs and interests of the pupils. From 1987 to 1991, Ingrid Böhm and Professor Jens Schneider established and tested, in co-operation with others, the basic principles of *Productive Learning* within the pilot project City-as-School Berlin. From 1991 to 1996, the concept of developing *Productive Learning* projects was drawn up and tested within the framework of an international *IPLE* project. This concept also includes a program of further study in conjunction with these projects. Nowadays *Productive Learning* is implemented in 84 schools in Germany, 400 teachers were qualified and around 80% of pupils in *Productive Learning* have reached regular school leaving certificates.

### Activity as the Basis of Learning

Underlying principle of the form of education *Productive Learning* is the participation of adolescents in social activities, particularly in professional life. The young people create individual curricula on the basis of experiences with activities within independently chosen real-life situations. For three months, they work three days per week at an independently chosen practice site, e.g. at a carpentry, in a vegetable shop, for a newspaper publisher, in a hospital, with Amnesty International, in broadcasting or in some other real-life situation.

### Culture and School Subjects as Tools

On the basis of individual curricula, pupils employ the traditional educational heritage, including school subjects, in their productive activities. They use all cultural traditions in order to better understand and in order to improve their activities. In this way, school is no longer reduced to the teaching of school subjects. Also, the lack of application of what has been learned within the educational process - something which defined general school in the industrial age - is addressed. Additionally, this form of education offers a highly personalized, practice-related and therefore very successful professional orientation.

### Educational Objectives and Curriculum

On the basis of German and European school legislation which defines pedagogical objectives in a similar fashion, the institute has formulated 15 Educational Objectives of *Productive Learning*. *Productive Learning* strives towards the best possible participation of the learning persons in their own educational processes. Through this participation, the learning persons change their status from being objects to that of being subjects of their own educational pro-



## What is Productive Learning – Short summary

cesses. The institute - in cooperation with educators from 12 Berlin school pilot projects and from three educational projects outside of school - developed a Framework Curriculum on the basis of these educational objectives. Within this framework, pupils study according to individual curricula and with the assistance of educators. *Productive Learning* enables pupils to obtain a school leaving certificate for secondary school.

### Educational Aspects (Curriculum Elements) and Methodology

Within the most substantial curriculum element - Learning at Practice Sites - the young people choose a placement in a firm or in social, cultural and political institutions three times per school year. There they participate 18 hours per week and, at the same time, explore, question and reflect on their own activities. For 5 hours per week, pupils are able to discuss their new experiences in the *Communication Group* where they also prepare further activities, observations and research, and where they also personally reflect on their activities and process their new experiences. All this takes place in the Learning Workshop which replaces the traditional class room. 8 hours per week are linked to a subject but even these are connected to the practical experiences: German (respectively the national language), English and Maths in *Productive Learning*, the learning areas *People and Culture*, *Society and Economy* and *Nature and Technology* which are dealt with on the basis of epochs, furthermore one optional subject. In addition to the curriculum, a differentiated methodology of *Productive Learning* was developed which includes methods of individual learning, educational counseling, group work and International Learning.

### Dissemination of *Productive Learning*

Since 1996, *Productive Learning* has replaced the standard education in school years 9 and 10 with school pilot projects in 16 secondary schools in Berlin. Beginning in school year 2002/03 seven secondary schools in Brandenburg and 21 secondary schools in Sachsen-Anhalt have introduced *Productive Learning*. Since 2005 27 secondary schools in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern have started *Productive Learning* programs and in 2006 six secondary schools have introduced *Productive Learning* in Thüringen. From 2009 seven schools in Sachsen introduced *Productive Learning* programs.

Internationally *IPLE* has done its best for spreading *Productive Learning*; several countries have started Productive Learning programs as Finland, France, Hungary, Russia and Spain and more countries are examining ways and chances of introducing *Productive Learning*, for example the Baltic countries, Bulgaria and Romania.



## What is Productive Learning – Short summary

### The Successes of *Productive Learning*

The successes of *Productive Learning* prove the appropriateness of this educational paradigm and of the methodology for increasingly rapid social changes. High completion rates on all German school levels - "Hauptschulabschluss", "Realschulabschluss"/"Mittlerer Schulabschluss" - and a high rate of school leavers successfully embarking on the transition towards vocational training and professional life - 70% to 80% respectively - show that *Productive Learning* is not only theoretically plausible but that it is also successful and workable, particularly when we take into account that we are talking about pupils whose failure in school seemed to be a forgone conclusion. A side-effect of this educational practice is that in many years of working in *Productive Learning* only little aggression seemed to surface, and no vandalism and xenophobia were observed. Because of the great successes of *Productive Learning* Berlin's parliament and Government have decided in 2004 to establish *Productive Learning* as a legal alternative program which can be introduced by each secondary school.

### Guidance Tasks of *IPLE*

The introduction of *Productive Learning* is only possible when the process of innovation is carried through, planned and evaluated by educators and by pupils themselves. The *IPLE* advises individual projects, supports regionally, nationally and internationally the development of *Productive Learning* and facilitates its networking. *Productive Learning* requires significant changes in the role of the educator and in the way educators see themselves professionally. This process is assisted via a program of further study at the *IPLE* in conjunction with the projects. The study program itself is a *Productive Learning* project. The innovative practice of the educators is the real-life situation within which the educators teach themselves on the basis of 12 Study Letters which present the principal topics of *Productive Learning* and which are linked to the practice. Educators also learn in seminars as their *Communication Group*.

*IPLE*, [www.iple.de](http://www.iple.de)