ACTION RESEARCH-BASED INNOVATION IN TEACHERS’ PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AT KECSKEMÉT COLLEGE TEACHER TRAINING FACULTY

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Abstract
ISIT („Implementation Strategies for Innovations in Teachers’ Professional Development”) builds on a well-evaluated programme for teacher professional development (BaCuLit) with six training modules which all serve the literacy development in the subject area classrooms of secondary schools: Content Area Literacy (CAL). The acronym BaCuLit stands for „Basic Curriculum in Teachers’ In-Service Training in Content Area Literacy in Secondary Schools.” Within this program an instructional framework for professional development was developed in cooperation with renowned Content Area Literacy-experts and institutions of teacher professional development from the USA and 7 European countries. This framework consists of 6 modules, closely connecting theory and practice. This programme was translated into 6 national languages (German, Dutch, Portuguese, Romanian, Swedish, Hungarian), put to the test in 7 teacher training institutes (one of them is Kecskemét College Teacher Training Faculty) for the target group, evaluated (formatively) and eventually edited in an optimized final version.

ISIT aims at supporting the introduction of such training into the regular programmes of the participating institutions for in-service teacher training in three European countries: Germany, Hungary, Romania. At the same time ISIT aims at developing a research strategy to identify the key factors of success for an implementation of innovation into advanced teacher training. One project aim is a broad embedment of the programme in European teacher training institutes. The participants will be qualified as certified BaCuLit trainers through a 3-month blended-learning course and a 1-week international summer school licensing them to offer professional development programmes based on the BaCuLit materials. They commit themselves to document and reflect this “implementation process” of CAL-elements (or entire BaCuLit courses) in their institution by means of a semi-structured research logbook. An action-research approach will provide the methods to be followed.

Keywords:
Content Area Literacy, blended learning course, teacher professional development, action research approach

1. Introduction
The ISIT project addresses two of the crucial needs defined by the Education and Training Benchmarks for 2020 and by the High Level Group of Experts on Literacy (HLGEL 2012):

a) the problem of low literacy skills in many European countries
b) the unsatisfying status of teachers’ continuous professional development (CPD) in the EU.

Thus ISIT pursues two goals:

a) a specific goal: training 30 teacher educators from 3 European countries in content area literacy (CAL)
b) a general, comparative goal: analysing good examples of how to implement innovations into different national structures of CPD.

The innovative aspect of the project is to effectively combine these two goals.

The project follows a multiplier approach: by training teacher educators (narrow target group) it will reach out to secondary school teachers (second target group) which will have a positive impact on the long-term target group of students with low literacy skills (broadest target group).

ISIT builds upon the results of the Comenius project BaCuLit providing a comprehensive curriculum in CAL for CPD, including course materials and trainer handbooks. ISIT aims at implementing this concept into the CPD structure of Germany, Hungary and Romania, where a total of 30 teacher educators from 25 different training institutions will be made familiar with CAL instruction.

The project follows an action research approach, which means not to separate research from action. Therefore the trainers will analyse together with scientists the steps and obstacles in implementing CAL courses in their institutions. Thus, ISIT intends to explore the general opportunities and obstacles in implementing innovation into teachers CPD in these 3 countries.
A further objective is the dissemination of CAL into 5 other countries: partners from Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, and Portugal will participate gaining comparative insights and providing input from the perspective of their countries.

The ISIT participants:

1. **Coordinator:** University of Cologne (UCO), Prof. Dr. Christine Garbe, Dr. Andreas Seidler, M.A. Martin Gross

2. Core Partners (Germany, Hungary, Romania):
   - **Germany:** Experts for Continuous Professional Development of Teachers from the Federal State of Hessen
   - **Hungary:** Hungarian Institute for Educational Research and Development (HIERD), Budapest,
   - **Hungary:** Kecskemét College (KeCo), Kecskemét, Prof. Dr. János Steklács, Dr. Ilidkó Szabó, Dr. Veronika Szinger
   - **Romania:** „Alexandru Gavra“ Teacher Training Center, Arad (CCD Arad),
   - **Romania:** Filocalia Foundation (FiFo), Iasi,
   - **Romania:** Romanian Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Association (RWCT), Cluj-Napoca

3. Associate Partners:
   - **Belgium:** University of Liège (ULG),
   - **Cyprus:** Centre for the Advancement of Research & Development in Educational Technology (CARDET), Nicosia,
   - **Finland:** Jyväskylä University (JyU),
   - **Greece:** Aristotle University Thessaloniki (AUT),
   - **Portugal:** University of Minho (UMinho), Braga.

2. **Scientific background of the project**

BaCuLit has been designed as a reaction to the problem of low achievers in the EU. “Performance on reading literacy of young people deteriorated in the period to 2006. Most recent data for 2009 show a good improvement which is, however, not sufficient to meet the target for 2010”¹. [1] It means, more effective ways of schooling and instruction have to be developed. In some European countries only mother tongue education in elementary schools serves as reading instruction. On the contrary, the idea of content area reading (reading to learn) and ‘reading across the curriculum’ has to be fostered.

The other main problem is that the ‘selective principle’ within the educational philosophy of some European school systems is hindering the realization of effective support systems for all students. According to BaCuLit philosophy, the idea of the support principle combined with the use of formative assessment in instruction has to be fostered.

For improving instruction in the medium term, in-service teacher education is most necessary and the most effective practices of in-service teacher education need to be tried out. One-shot activities or short scale approaches have almost no sustainable effect on classroom practice. Teachers’ routines and beliefs are often stronger than new ideas and concepts. Therefore, there is a gap between what teachers know and what they do (knowledge-action-gap’).

For overcoming the knowledge-action-gap long-term approaches are needed that involve coaching teachers continually over a longer time period. Teachers try out in actual school contexts what they learned in the training and form professional learning communities which offer support and foster commitment and accountability. Blended-Learning approaches seem to be appropriate for teachers’ professional development because time and personal and financial resources are used in an optimal way.

3. **Methods and objectives**

European reports about the conditions of Teachers’ Professional Development (like TALIS or Eurydice 2011 and 2012) offer valuable data concerning teachers’ professional development in European countries on a general level, which form a reliable frame for orientation, but they do not provide advice for the central question of this project: Which strategies for the implementation of innovations are suitable for the respective educational systems? As to this question we need more specific qualitative data which can be obtained best by means of “action research”, which closely links theory and practice according to the principles of “learning by doing”: Action research is conducted in natural (e.g. educational) settings “in an ongoing cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting on change”. Central principles of action research are not to separate research from action (change, innovation) and likewise not to separate researches from actors. “Action research is examining one’s own practices through collaborative inquiry, reflection, and dialogue”². It has been known by many names including participatory research, collaborative inquiry, participatory research, action learning. In a nutshell it means that teachers thoroughly examine their everyday practice, pose problems and try to find solutions to those problems through collaboration, dialogues and reflection. “It is not just about

¹ www.alinet.eu

² Nugent et al. 2012, p. 4
hypothesizing and collecting data. It aims at changing situations; not just interpreting them. The project consortium will accompany 30 teacher educators from 25 training institutions (in 3 countries) while they integrate CAL courses (offers) into the existing CPD activities of their institutions. ISIT based on the assumption that experiences with implementing CAL are valid and helpful also for other kinds of innovation. Thus they can be used by all actors who want to implement new methods, materials or subject-related focuses into CPD.

Two work stages are planned (identical with Work Package 1 and 2):

- **Implementation: (Training of the trainers):** In every core partner country an Information Day was organized to address the decision makers within teachers’ CPD institutions. Measurable Indicator: The Info-days served the aim to invite teacher trainers to a training course in CAL. The Hungarian Info-day took place at HIERD on 23 January 2014, and was attended by highly qualified professionals from HIERD, higher education institutions, research centres, pedagogical institutes. The training of the trainers took place in a national blended-learning course consisting of 3 months E-learning and one common international summer school.

- **Exploitation:** Partly overlapping with this training course the 30 trainers started planning the integration of CAL elements into the regular programmes and services of their institutions. On the basis of a semi-structured report form they write an implementation logbook documenting the steps they take and the obstacles they face. These logbooks will be analysed and summarized by the national coordinators and discussed on national level (follow-up-meeting) and finally at an international meeting. The project aims at:
  - a specific (pedagogical) objective: the qualification of teacher educators in CAL (on the basis of the BaCuLit model curriculum)
  - a more general objective related to education policies: exploring and identifying successful strategies for implementing innovations within CPD.

**Specific objective: Establishing CAL in secondary school teachers’ professional development.** In Germany, Hungary and Romania a total of 30 trainers from ca. 25 different training institutions will be made familiar with the BaCuLit curriculum and its standards. This will enable the trainers to flexibly use CAL elements in their training of teachers in their region. It is supposed that by this multiplier effect about 500 teachers per year will be made familiar with CAL elements and will be encouraged to use them in classroom practice of all disciplines and all school ages. Baculit is to be understood as a model of a training programme for teachers; but we are well aware of the fact, that trainers have to adopt it to current requirements, programmes and time frames. Thus implementing a fixed training programme is not an aim, but to train the trainers in flexibly adopting its standards and materials.

General objective: A Comparative Study – based on case studies in different countries - of “Innovation Management” in CPD. The project accompanies 30 trainers and their institutions while they try to implement CAL elements into their regular training programs and services. The according steps and the obstacles will be analysed in order to come to conclusions about implementation strategies in CPD.

In the ISIT project these strategies are related to the implementation of CAL, but it is assumed that similar strategies could be applied in implementing other innovations. Thus these conclusions will be helpful for all actors in CPD. As a result a Comparative Study of the gained experiences will be presented, accompanied by suggestions for implementing innovation in teacher education processes in the participating countries (in 4 languages: English, German, Hungarian, Romanian, extent about 100 pages). Dissemination into 5 other countries will take place. Although the project focuses on three countries, partners from 5 other countries participate, in order to gain new and comparative insights and to give input and advice from the perspective of their countries. These “corresponding partners” are from Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, and Portugal. They are to attend two project meetings in teams of scientists and teachers.

4. **Workplan and Work Packages**

**Work Package 1, Month 1 – 6: Training of the Trainers**

- One-day Information Seminar – in each country 15-20 representatives from education authorities and training centres. Topics: (1) Report on the state of international research on reading with regard to CAL, (2) Discussion of implementation methods on the ground, (3) Invitation to the qualification of trainers.
- Training of Trainers via Online Platform (www.itslearning.com), for each (of the 3) country, 10 trainers shall be trained in a blended learning course. Months 3-6: materials and tasks to be provided via an online platform.
- Training of Trainers at an International Summer School: a 5 day international
summer school took place, for all teams, including the associate partners, in Germany.

- Outcome (total): about 30 trained teacher trainers in 3 countries.

Work Package 2, Month 10 – 12 / 5 - 10: Exploitation

- Month 5-10: Trainers work out a plan for implementing CAL in the general curriculum of their institutions. Deliverable: implementation logbooks (about 25 on a whole) in the national languages, being summarized by national project leader.

Questions for the Implementation Logbooks:
The central topics for the logbooks will be prepared in common report forms worked out by the coordinating team. They will consist of questions like:

- How, on the basis of the available resources, can CAL be integrated into the regular course programme and support services of my institution?
- How should the BaCuLit curriculum be adapted to the national / regional conditions of CPD in my institution?
- How can the teachers of the region be motivated to take part in the CAL training?
- How can additional funding for the CAL offers be secured?
- How can the support of the responsible authorities (if applicable: accreditation) be achieved?
- Each national project group leader writes a report about the implementation process in English
- The project leader writes an international comparative report (draft, about 100 pages) (month 10/11)

- Month 11: Meeting of the project partners to discuss the national reports and the draft of the international report
- Month 12: Finalising the report.

Work Package 3: Dissemination (Associate Partners, Multipliers)

Objects of dissemination are:
Firstly: CAL elements for CPD programmes (presented in the form of the model-curriculum BaCuLit).
Secondly: the results of “action research” in implementation strategies for CPD programmes.

The project focuses on the issue of dissemination options in European teacher training. Therefore dissemination activities have begun with the Info Days, attended by the heads of CPD institutions (15 persons in each country).

The training of trainers can also be understood as dissemination. It communicates skills and materials for CAL training to a clearly defined target group that consists of 30 trainers from three countries.

In a wider sense, dissemination is aimed at all CPD institutions and teacher trainers in 8 European countries (Germany, Hungary, Romania and 5 corresponding partners). This wider target group is approached in two ways: participation of corresponding partners and publications.

5. Conclusion

A final international workshop in month 11 will present the outcomes of the project to the international partners, incorporate their feedback and discuss their support for international dissemination. At the same time ISIT aims at developing a research strategy to identify the key factors of success for an implementation of innovation into in-service teacher training (action research).

References


