

Gifted Education in Switzerland: Teacher Education and Actual Research

This article gives insight into some relevant efforts and projects regarding provision for gifted students and talent development in Swiss teacher education and its partners in German-speaking central Europe and Swiss schools.

Teacher Education in National and International Cooperation (IBBF)

In Switzerland in 2003, the first international Master's study program in gifted education and talent development in German-speaking Europe was implemented at the University of Education Northwestern Switzerland (PH FHNW). This Master's program, IBBF (Integrative Begabungs- und Begabtenförderung (Integrated Promotion of Gifted and Talented), began in cooperation with the Neag Center at the University of Connecticut (UConn) with the intent to establish research, research-based teacher education, and school-development in Switzerland and to share experiences, knowledge, and expertise among the partners. Teacher students can take all their studies at PH FHNW in German and get a Master's degree from there, or they can pursue their studies at both universities and get a joint Master's degree, or they can get the degree from the University of Connecticut. Since 2004, 149 students have completed their studies in this program and earned the degree. Every year, a group of Swiss students takes part at Confratute, the annual summer conference at UConn, to network and to cultivate the knowledge exchange between our universities and



Students in the IBBF Master's program, studying at the University of Connecticut

national efforts in gifted education.

The study program is situated in the Swiss and European educational and cultural contexts to serve the needs of Swiss schools and school systems in German-speaking central Europe (Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, and Switzerland). Pedagogically, it is based on the concept of the Three-Ring Conception of Giftedness (Renzulli, 1978; Renzulli & Reis, 1997) and on the theories and concepts of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model (SEM) (Renzulli & Reis, 1985; 1997). Through our cooperation, we are seeking to bring together research results, educational theories, and best practices from both continents and to discuss international efforts and their impact on the development and lives of students who are prepared to create the future in a global village in respect to local contexts and ethnic situations (Müller-Oppliger, 2008).

This year, the program is broadening. Beginning in the fall of 2009, the studies in the Master's program at the University of Teacher Education Northwestern Switzerland will be offered in cooperation with the University of Teacher Edu-

cation Central Switzerland (PHZ) and the University of Education at Karlsruhe (Germany). Students will then be able to apply to three levels of final degrees for different functions and responsibilities within the schools: CAS (Certificate of Applied Studies for classroom and subject teachers), MAS (Master of Applied Studies for experts, tutors, and program leaders in gifted education and talent development in schools), and MA (Master of Arts as an academic Master's to qualify teachers for further functions, leadership,

and research).

Our close collaboration with the Austrian Research and Support Center for the Gifted and Talented (özbF) is another cooperative effort to share our intentions to make schools better places to encourage students to fulfill their interests, based on their abilities and passions, and to support schools that are working together with their students on their strength-based profiles.

For additional information, see: www.fhnw.ch/ph/iwb/kader/de/kader/begabungsforderung.

International Panel of Experts in Gifted Education: a new network of universities on the gifted and talented (IPEGE)

Following the conviction that collaboration in research and teacher education results in more critical reflection, additional impacts in each partner team, and higher excellence for all the partners, we created, together with özbF and PHZ, a network of universities on gifted and talented—the International Panel of Experts in Gifted Education (IPEGE). Currently, the panel has experts from Austria (özbF and Uni-

versity of Teacher Education Steiermark), from Germany (University Erfurt, University of Education Karlsruhe, University Rostock, University Trier), and from Switzerland (University of Teacher Education Central Switzerland and University of Teacher Education Northwestern Switzerland). This panel of experts from German-speaking nations has, based on its expertise, shaped international standards and concepts for teacher education focused on the field of gifted education. These new standards (iPEGE 2009) promote professional, higher teacher-education values and meet the quality requirements of the European Declaration of Bologna for higher education. The Bologna

Declaration is a key document signed by 29 European countries who have pledged to promote higher-education reform to enhance the employability and mobility of Europeans and to increase their international competitiveness.

eVOCATION – a European Project for Teacher Education

Another European project that is strongly connected to the theoretical frames of the Schoolwide Enrichment Model is eVOCATION, a multilateral Comenius-project within the European community. Participants include several universities from Germany, Switzerland, Austria, the Netherlands, France, the Slovak Republic, and Poland, as well as seven schools from these nations that have elaborated programs for gifted education and talent development and related experience. In this program, educational scientists are reflecting and analyzing best practices of schools involved in teamwork with experienced teachers of these model schools, looking for relevant conditions, aspects, and characteristics of a successful support of giftedness (Weigand, Schenz 2008). The goal of our international project is to develop study concepts, ma-

terials, and media for teacher education specifically to provide enrichment for gifted children and talent development. The project will combine knowledge, ex-

decides, more or less autonomously, its own school regulations. Within the past five years, most of the 26 Swiss cantons have worked out guidelines and programs

for the promotion of giftedness and gifted students. This has prepared the base for our programs of further education for teachers and also provided the scope for development in schools that are ready for innovations in this field.

Our Master's Program gives us the chance to initiate, support, and accompany school development within the schools of our teacher students all over Switzer-

land. Often, the Master's theses of these teacher students relate to theoretical and science-based school improvements, developmental processes, or the creation of new school programs to raise the giftedness of all students or to support individual capacities of high-end learners. These projects have to be school referred (vocational field) and application oriented and meet scientific standards. In this way, the Master's Program stands as a relevant germ cell and serves as a place for professionalized school and teaching innovations. The individual school projects of the teacher students are valuable sources for ongoing school development in the tradition of reflective practitioners (Schoen 1983), action researchers (Elliott 1981, 1991; Altrichter, Posch 1998), and sustainable school improvement (Fullan 1991; Teddlie, Reynolds 2000).

Swiss Award for Best Practices in Gifted Education (LISSA)

These three best practices from Swiss schools, as described above, providing giftedness and talent development, also are LISSA (Lernfreude in Schweizer Schulen anregen) prizewinners at the annual Swiss award for strength-orientated



Prizewinners at the annual Swiss award for strength-orientated teaching—LISSA

perience, and practice from schools with knowledge of the universities' research and teacher education expertise. The result of this project will be the creation of four modules for teacher education: basics, identification, individualization of learning arrangements, and support for learning processes (Weigand, Schenz, Hackl, Hascher, Müller-Oppliger, 2009). Online modules will be supplemented by a handbook containing corresponding video vignettes with case studies and examples.

Improvement of Teaching and Promotion of Giftedness and Talent in Swiss Schools

In Switzerland, each canton (similar to the states in the USA) is responsible for and in charge of its school system, curriculum, and educational policies. Even though the Swiss school is currently in a process called HARMOS—to harmonize the different school systems, identify meeting points within learning processes and at certain learning levels, establish learning standards, and create competence profiles—we still have the situation where each cantonal board of education

teaching. LISSA is an initiative from the Swiss Foundation for Gifted Children. The prizes are awarded in recognition of the implementation and integration of gifted and talent development concepts in the regular school program. Getting a prize from this organization is a quality label that often has a huge impact on the school, the public, and the town.

The criteria to apply for this prize are deeply connected to the theory and spirit of the SEM and the Triad Model. The main criteria are (a) close reference to the classroom learning, (b) open access, (c) revolving-door concept and self nomination, (d) consideration of all domains of giftedness and talents as different but of the same value, (e) incorporation of minorities and special population groups, (f) perspective of gifted education as an ongoing process of school development, (g) involvement and participation of all parties, namely, students, parents, teachers, experts, and school administration, (h) local networking with other schools, mentors, public authorities, companies, and media, (i) definition of quality standards and internal and external evaluations, and (j) impact as a multiplier for other schools and the public.

More information on best practices and efforts from Swiss schools can be found at www.lissa-preis.ch.

Swiss Gifted

In 2008, Swiss Gifted was started by students who graduated from IBBF or had taken courses with ECHA. This new Swiss Society for Gifted Education is providing development in gifted education and will network the efforts of professionals working in this field. In the meantime, the association has conducted three one-day seminars, every six months, and publishes the *Swiss Gifted Journal*. You can find more about Swiss Gifted at <http://www.swissgifted.ch>.

Swiss Conference: symposium.begabung.ch

In March 2009, the University of Teacher Education Central Switzerland (PHZ) held its annual symposium for gifted and talented in the city of Zug in a one-day symposium entitled "From interests to engagement and task commitment." The lead presentation focused on the individualization of students' profiles and on the fostering of self-regulation and self-motivated learning as central aspects of the gifted education. Successful entrepreneurs shared their experiences of motivation, task commitment, and success. The ten workshops offered opportunities for participants to deepen their knowledge on several key aspects of gifted education. For further information see www.isf.luzern.phz.ch/seiten/dokumente/Mailing_26_Flyer_Symposium_Begabung_09.pdf

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