

# Research Programme

## Teachers' Biography and Professionalization of Teachers

### Detailed description of the Research Programme

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## 1 Introduction

The ranges of requirements in the teaching profession are diverse. In addition to the core business of teaching, they include further responsibilities in school and quality development, in personal and professional development, and in cooperation with the school management, the colleagues, other specialists and with the parents. In view of these diverse, complex and sometimes contradictory requirements, teachers are challenged to justify their actions to critical stakeholders: scientific ethos, scientific knowledge and scientific method are indispensable for professionalism (Ambühl & Stadelmann 2010, p. 14).

The Bern University of Education views professionalism as a multi-phase development process that extends across phases of study and employment (Bern University of Teacher Education 2012, p. 12). According to this, professionalism within the teaching profession is developed during one's studies, and further developed through further education and professional experience. This understanding of professionalism brings with it a perspective of lifelong learning, as well as a view of the entire career. In the course of professional employment, teachers are constantly confronted with new tasks, the processing of which requires purposeful reflection, that has to be at build up, trained and encouraged in the stage of study. This practical reflective skill promotes professional development of aspiring and practicing teaching personal.

This understanding of professionalism is central. Only in this way can complexities, uncertainties and paradoxes in the teaching profession be processed competently. In line with this understanding, the focal point of the Research Program "Teachers' Biography and Professionalization of Teachers" is directed towards the professional development of teachers from their studies up to retirement.

## 2 Professionalism

The professional development of teachers is closely linked to the question of what is meant by professionalism in the teaching profession. This question is tackled within educational science by the theoretical structural, the competence-based approaches and the teachers-biographical approach. These approaches stand in relationship to one another that are in part non-contact, in part directly confrontational, and in part overlapping. What they have in common is that they assume that professionalism is guided by observable processes of change at the level of the teaching profession, without ignoring the need for conceptual clarification and differentiation (Terhart 2011, p. 210).

Without looking at these approaches in greater detail, it cannot be disputed that teachers can hardly fulfil their comprehensive educational mission at school using their knowledge alone. In addition to the various fields of knowledge (general and didactic knowledge, diagnostic and pedagogical knowledge, leadership and social knowledge), operative routines and ethical orientations form the core of what the Bern University of Teacher Education (Bern University of Teacher Education 2012, p. 5) understands to be professionalism within the teaching profession. Therefore the entire teachers biography is brought into focus (ebd, p. 3).

Following this understanding, the Research Program "Teachers' Biography and Professionalization of Teachers" is based on the Teacher's Biographical research approach.

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### **3 The Teacher's Biographical research approach**

The Teacher's Biographical approach views professionalism as a dynamic learning process which continues throughout the career of the teacher, starting with initial teacher training during the career entry phase to professional practice in the later stages of employment.

The perspective of lifelong learning is particularly fruitful for teacher education, because it assumes that pedagogical professionalism develops throughout the entire career, in interplay between experiential and theory-led learning. The acquisition and development of practical reflectivity using scientific reference theories forms the core of a professional understanding that evolves during the constant exchange with a changing professional world. Practical reflectivity is therefore understood as an essential part of pedagogical professionalism. Aspiring teachers acquire these reflective skills by combining their knowledge from the university with their practical experience during teacher training internships. According to this, "the phase [at the university for] the development of a basis of knowledge and ability to reflect is crucial" (Terhart 2002, p. 21). An ability to reflect means the ability to analyse, structure and modify one's own thinking and actions (Freisler-Mühlemann & Paskoski 2018; Frey & Jung 2011; Schön 1991). Reflective skills acquired during the course of studies should be practised and further developed in the career entry phase as well as in later phases of one's career through learning opportunities, in the form of further education courses and accompanying offers in schools (Freisler-Mühlemann & Schafer 2019). In the actual discussion over teacher's Professionalization the ability to reflection becomes a high priority (Pilypaityté & Rosenberg 2018). Therefore, demands for reflexive teacher training are clear.

The current research on teacher's biographies shows promising results of early career phases. These address different aspects of the development of skills of teachers as well as their career choices (Rothland 2014). Significantly fewer results are available for teachers in the mid and later phases of the career, with regard to their understanding of the profession as well as questions of occupational retention and mobility (Herzog 2014). So far, the influence of learning opportunities on careers has not been well investigated. Although research reveals that the professional and the private biography are not easy to separate within a teacher's career, there is little clarity in linking their personal life and career path (Brüsemeister 2004).

### **4 Perspectives of the Research Program**

The Research Program "Teachers' Biography and Professionalization of Teachers" is dedicated to these different desiderata. The Research Program deals with professionalization processes in different career phases, with educational decisions, and with the training and further education experiences of teachers. Just as much of a topic is the cooperative collaboration of teachers with various social actors such as, for example, the school management, the colleagues and other professionals or parents.

Ongoing research projects focus on questions which arise along the three phases of the careers of teachers (see [www.phbern.ch/fe/lpp](http://www.phbern.ch/fe/lpp)). In terms of methodology, the Research Programme applies both quantitative and qualitative methods, as well as mixed methods.

In order to train and educate teachers successfully, it is important for teacher training institutions to be aware of how the careers of their students and their graduates progress, what kind of professional understanding teachers develop, and the areas in which training and further education can contribute to professional teaching. The generated findings are of key importance to teacher education and practice in the schools.

## 5. Literature

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