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A look at the German Vorbereitungsdienst program may be instructive for American internship plans for new teachers.

American Teaching Internships and the German Vorbereitungsdienst

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Following their completion of a teacher education program and the awarding of a provisional certificate, new teachers should complete an induction period or internship of at least a year's duration for which compensation is provided. A Call for Change in Teacher Education (1985)

The second year of the program would consist of residency in a school, with the candidate assuming substantial teaching responsibilities under the supervision of Lead Teachers. A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century (1986)

In response to a national call for improving teacher education, many universities will soon implement one-year teaching internships. A teaching internship may be the most significant reform in improving teacher education. However, only a few universities have experience with year-long teaching internships. Even though numerous educational publications recommend a year-long teaching internship, none of those deal with the practical problems of implementing one. Consequently, American universities implementing a teaching internship might profit from an even broader perspective of experience than just American programs.

The Germans have had a teaching internship program, called a Vorbereitungsdienst, since at least 1913. Because of a travel grant from Northeast Missouri State University for summer 1987, I was able to consult with representatives in six German states from every aspect of the German Vorbereitungsdienst: teaching interns, university education professors, general internship directors, content area internship directors, a cooperating teacher, school superintendents, a principal, an education union official, and government officials. This report examines the operation and philosophy of the German Vorbereitungsdienst as it might benefit American teaching internships.

How Does the German Vorbereitungsdienst Operate?

German teacher candidates complete university course work in two teaching subjects and in education equivalent in time and content to at least a Master of Arts degree in America. In a few German states, teacher candidates serve two four-week practica as part of the university program in public schools, where they observe and possibly teach.

After German teacher candidates have completed their university requirements, they take a comprehensive test called the Erste Staatsprüfung (First State Exam), officially administered by their resident state, not the university. The test includes a thesis, written examinations in each subject area, and oral examinations in each subject area and in education. The test is evaluated by a panel consisting of a university professor and two representatives from the public school system.

The Erste Staatsprüfung qualifies German teacher candidates to enter the teaching profession as Referendars (teaching interns) for one and a half to two years of practical teacher training, depending on the state. Unlike American teaching internship programs, German universities do not participate in the Vorbereitungsdienst. Instead, the Schulverwaltung (state public school administration) is entirely responsible for the internship experience. The Schulverwaltung conducts its teacher training program within Studiensemains (teaching internship learning communities), frequently housed in a functioning school. Studiensemains place and supervise Referendars in the public schools and provide concurrent in-service seminars.

Studiensemains are managed by Seminarleiters (learning community directors), who are generally former principals or experienced content-area specialists. The Seminarleiters supervise about 50 Referendars and 16 content-area directors from about 10 schools. Their duties include consulting with the mentor teachers and content-area directors and observing and evaluating their Referendars' teaching. Some Seminarleiters also teach a course in didactics at the university. Seminarleiters are supposed to provide a global perspective and balance theory and practice for the teaching internship experience.

The other supervisors in the Studiensemains are Fachleiters, content area specialists, who provide the Referendars with training and supervision in their two content areas. Fachleiters are practicing teachers with a reduction in their teaching load so that they have time to instruct and guide Referendars and keep academically and pedagogically current in their fields. Fachleiters are selected by the school district for their experience and expertise in their academic discipline. Fachleiters supervise about 15 Referendars. Each Referendar has two Fachleiters, one for each teaching subject.

Referendars spend about half of their time teaching and the other half, studying. Within at least two public schools during the Vorbereitungsdienst, Referendars teach classes in both their teaching areas, about a half-load or 12 class hours each week. Most of these hours are under the supervision of Mentors (cooperating teachers). However, after the first semester, Referendars in most states also have one class of their own in which they can experiment and develop their own teaching style. Referendars are paid for their teaching services by the schools as half-time teachers. To augment and direct the Referendars' practical teaching experience, Studiensemains provide concurrent in-

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the real experience of a portfolio of lesson plans, and...
way the student would have occasion to work closely with more experienced teachers skilled in different methods of instruction.

An additional activity for the fifth year of teacher education would be a series of one-day Common Learning Seminars in which students would meet outstanding arts and science scholars-teachers who would relate the knowledge of their fields to a contemporary political or social theme. The goal would be to help prospective teachers move across the disciplines, and better prepare themselves to teach the core of common learning to students in the schools. Ernest L. Boyer, High School, (1983)

The feasibility and desirability of teaching internship learning communities in America have already been established by the university supervisors in the Language and Literature Division at Northeast Missouri State University. With a grant from Union Electric, teaching internship learning communities have been organized in Hannibal, Unionville, Maccon, Chillicothe, and Kirksville, Missouri. The results are impressive. Together with the university supervisors, the public schools in these cities have organized in-service seminars providing practical solutions to teaching problems. The students, cooperating teachers, and school administrators have valued these in-service seminars much more than the traditional sporadic classroom observations from university supervisors.

Besides serving teaching interns, schools and school districts might discover that a teaching internship learning community could also serve regular teachers. Some states presently require in-service training for beginning teachers. Ultimately, a teaching internship learning community should evolve into a teaching seminar for all teachers. Teacher training should be ongoing and continuous. A teaching internship learning community would serve this end and thereby dramatically improve teacher education in America.

Teaching Internship Learning Community: Comparative Operational Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventional Student-Teaching Program</th>
<th>Proposed Teaching Internship Learning Community</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>one cooperating teacher</td>
<td>school district administrators parent officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>student teacher</td>
<td>professional representatives educational consultants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one university supervisor</td>
<td>10-15 student teachers in an in-service, on-site seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>state educational officials university consultants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>master teachers from school &amp; district</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Teaching interns receive formal guidance and instruction from representatives and experts in every area of public education on a weekly basis.

Notes


4. For a history of the German teaching internship, see Hartmut W Frech, Studies und Berichte: Empirische Untersuchungen zur Ausbildung von Studienreferendaren, vol. 34a (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett, 1978), 26–33.

5. This is a general summary of the German teacher education system, especially indicative of the Gymnasium. It does not reflect the variations from state to state nor among the different school systems.

References


