

COLLEGIALITY:

The productivity of cooperation

It is just after 2 p.m. In some classes work is still being done, but most rooms are empty, with the chairs already placed neatly on the desks. In a classroom on the first floor, a group of teachers is involved in discussion. Clara S., German teacher at this secondary school, has proposed the topic of this meeting as she has just taken over a 5th form and noticed big differences among her pupils in her subject. Now she would like to get some help and ideas from this group of colleagues on how to deal with this situation professionally. For two whole hours they exchange different opinions, and think of various courses of action. One colleague offers to sit in on one of the following German lessons and observe the class. Another meeting is then scheduled to discuss the results of this measure. Clara S is happy with this outcome. Her colleagues make her feel she is a valuable member of their group, and they have provided some solutions to her problem.

Similar examples of *collegiality* do occur in the teaching profession – spontaneously and informally, however. This form of dialogue must still be anchored in many places as an integral and self-evident professional activity – namely in teachers' individual awareness as well as professional awareness. The new demands (e.g. opening up of schools) and also the new organisational school forms (school development) have made this type of collegiality an essential aspect of "job satisfaction". While traditionally isolation and "lone rangers" were afforded by the structures, which to some degree even fostered such a stance, the ever-changing demands of the "new school" render "going solo" unproductive. Collegiality, therefore, is for some colleagues no longer merely a question of courtesy or optional virtue – it is a question of (professional) survival. Such collegiality requires a new form of community-building from all colleagues.

We envision as a place of *dialogue* a group of professionals who have joined forces as a learning community of experts with specific characteristics. The members of this learning community enter into a kind of working agreement, and thus become part of this community. They are willing to reveal their own questions and insecurities and become critical partners for their colleagues. Together they orient their analyses, drafts, justifications and advising to the current knowledge and theory of their profession. This community, whose members learn with and from each other, becomes a group of experts who are not only able to solve pressing problems but also to discuss current issues in teaching and develop new, solution-based knowledge. It might even be possible to sometimes pursue questions such as: How is communication working within our group? How do we treat one another? What patterns do we produce? What roles do we assign or accept?

In order to maintain such a *culture of openness*, however, the community needs space and time, must attend to sufficient accountability and continuity and thereby institutionalise its existence.

At best, contemplating professional issues that are currently relevant to individual members at times become self-reflection of the entire community and increasingly foster the ability and readiness to *distance oneself*, which enables those involved to step out of

the immediate intensity of a situation and to observe and understand it (and thus themselves) from a neutral standpoint.

Masthead:

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