Good Practice Examples and Blended Learning Concepts in Teachers´ CPD in Germany

Blended Learning in Teachers´ Professional Development - Developing a Blended Learning Course in Content Area Literacy for Secondary Teachers (BleTeach)

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This report has been prepared within the Erasmus+ project *Blended Learning in Teachers´ Professional Development - Developing a Blended Learning Course in Content Area Literacy for Secondary Teachers (BleTeach), project no. VG-SPS-NW-15-30-013892,* based upon a common methodology developed within the project.

Contents

I.   Introduction

Our research aimed *a)* at identifying the perceptions of continuous professional development (CPD) providers about *what counts as good practice in Blended Learning* and *b)* at *making recommendations with regard to the essential features of effective Blended Learning* in CPD, which will be transferred to the results of the Blended Learning in Teachers' Professional Development (BleTeach) project.
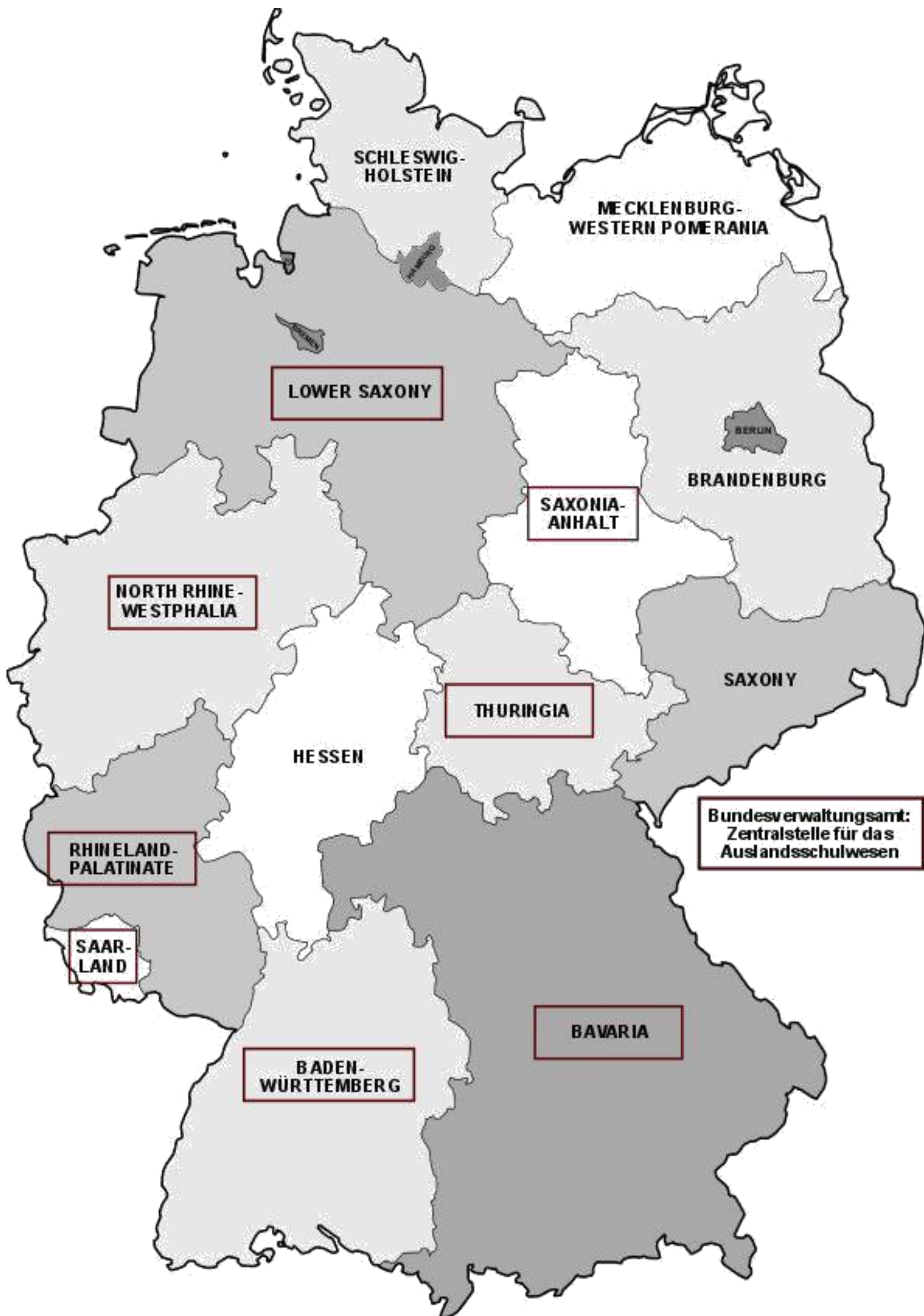
The basic question of our research, therefore, is "What is the CPD training providers' perception on good practice in Blended Learning?" and some more specific questions are:

- Which combinations of face-to-face and e-learning components can be highly effective
  within a CPD for learners' (i.e. teachers') motivation, interaction and learning outcomes?
- Which instructional design patterns (learning/teaching scenarios) are used in Blended
  Learning courses?
- What are the major factors of success in implementing Blended Learning within CPD?
- What are the major obstacles/ threats and ways of overcoming them in implementing
  Blended Learning within CPD?
- Which type of evaluation is used in good practice examples? (in terms of Blended Learning
  CPD)

II.   Methodology related information (description of how data was collected)

German teachers' CPD is managed by the federal states. Depending on the size of state, the budget, and the trainer's availability, each state decides if Blended Learning is a useful tool/method or not. To get information about using and producing Blended Learning courses in German teachers' CPD, we contacted the heads of 12 federal teacher training institutions and Blended Learning experts that are members of a mailing list dedicated to Blended Learning issues for interview requests.

The German BleTeach team conducted 9 interviews with Blended Learning experts from 8 federal states in Germany (marked with red line).

SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN

MECKLENBURG-WESTERN POMERANIA

LOWER SAXONY

BERLIN

BRANDENBURG

SAXONIA-ANHALT

NORTH RHINE-WESTPHALIA

SAXONY

THURINGIA

HESSEN

Bundesverwaltungsamt: Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen

RHINELAND-PALATINATE

SAAR-LAND

BAVARIA

BADEN-WÜRTTEMBERG

List of interviewed partners:

Expert/ Institution	Date of Interview, Interview by
IR **Johannes Böttcher**, M.A. Akademie für Lehrerfortbildung und Personalführung Dillingen	06.04.2016 Dr. Andreas Seidler
Dr. Ehlert Brüser-Sommer Bundesverwaltungsamt - Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen -	11.03.2016 Andrea Bürgin
Michael Gros Landesinstitut für Pädagogik und Medien (LPM)	02.05.2016 Dr. Andreas Seidler
Marcus Lauer Pädagogisches Landesinstitut Rheinland-Pfalz	15.03.2016 Andrea Bürgin
Heiko Nealon Niedersächsisches Landesinstitut für schulische Qualitätsentwicklung	13.04.2016 Andrea Bürgin
Katrin Nowaczyk Thüringer Institut für Lehrerfortbildung, Lehrplanentwicklung und Medien	05.04.2016 Andrea Bürgin

Henry Patz Landesinstitut für Schulqualität und Lehrerbildung	22.03.2016, Dr. Andreas Seidler
Christiane Spies Landesakademie für Fortbildung und Personalentwicklung an Schulen	08.04.2016 Dr. Malte Stein
Michael Walory Landesinstitut für Schule Nordrhein-Westfalen (QUA-LiS NRW)	18.04.2016 Dr. Malte Stein

We developed a guideline (see Annex V.1.) to get answers related to:

- Advantages of Blended Learning in CPD,
- Factors of success,
- Obstacles in Implementation,
- Evaluation.

The duration of every individual telephone interview was approximately 45 minutes. The interviews were recorded in order to be further analyzed and interpreted.

III. Findings

III.1. Advantages of Blended Learning in CPD

To get information about the advantages of Blended Learning in teachers' CPD in the interviews, we focused on the two most common forms of teacher training: face-to-face courses and e-learning courses.

The following paragraph provides a summary of the possible advantages mentioned by the interview partners.

III.1.1. Advantages over face-to-face courses

🟥 Increased time flexibility for the participants

There are different types of provided time-flexibility mentioned by the interview partners: Blended Learning courses offer a good alternative to after-work or weekend courses. Participants get the opportunity to engage themselves in course issues over a longer period of time. Furthermore, Blended Learning enables students to follow their own working flow and can reduce travel-time. Additionally, Blended Learning courses reduce time limits; the learners do not have to wait for a scheduled lesson – the training platform is open 24/7.

🟥 All course participants can be active during the online-phase

Whereas in face-to-face courses the active participation is limited to a specific number of participants, in the online phase, students have more space to be active and participate.

🟥 Saving face-to-face time for discussion, exchange of experience und reflection

If subject matter is outsourced to online-phases, the face to face time can be used for interaction between the course participants or the participants and their teachers. Discussions about the content,

exchange of experience by using course material or practical testing, as well as reflection on the course and the students' personal development during the course were considered attractive and useful in face-to-face sessions.

■ Opportunity for practical testing in the own classroom already during the online-phase

Blended Learning courses can offer a direct and supported connection between the content-specific lesson in theory and in practice, which means that new materials coming from face-to-face meetings or developed in the online-phase can be practically applied in the own classroom, discussed on the platform, evaluated or modified by the students directly during the course. This personal evaluation experience can be reused in the course as well.

■ Promotion of media literacy

Guided work with new media increases media skills. During their course lessons, participants learn about different kinds of new media and how to use it in their own classroom.

■ Reduction of travel costs

Blended Learning courses offer more local flexibility. Instead of weekly individual meetings, participants meet online and have the opportunity to work from home or school. This reduces both possible school costs (renting less seminar rooms) and personal costs (less travel expenses).

■ Increased coverage of course content

With reduced face-to-face meetings, Blended Learning courses can reach more teachers in distant parts of the country (Auslandsschulwesen: all over the world) particularly in the major territorial states of Germany like North Rhine-Westphalia, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, Baden-Württemberg or Bavaria.

III.1.2. Advantages of face-to-face over e-learning

■ Higher degree of motivation and social commitment through face-to-face contact

→ Higher sense of loyalty of the participants

Face-to-face exchanges of experience with other participants or live-discussions about the course were considered attractive and useful; social interaction can increase the motivation to finish the course.

■ Higher potential to tutor participants with low media literacy skills

E-learning entails high intrinsic motivation and advanced technical knowledge from the participant's side. In Blended Learning courses, these participants who are less experienced in ICT-skills can get more and better support by tutors. The learners can also benefit from each other, in particular if the tutor is not available; this means they can always find support, which will help them overcome possible problems and answer their questions, which is not always the case in e-learning.

III.2. Factors of success

Trying to use our interview partners' expertise in successful Blended Learning, we asked about organization requirements, chronological arrangement, content matters, and about requirements for tutors and participants.

III.2.1. Organizational requirements

Experts in Blended Learning teachers' training highlighted the importance of functional technics and the functionality of e.g. the learning platform and its applications, internet connection, passwords on hand etc. Additionaly, it was advised that the definition of assumed previous knowledge should be communicated to potential participants before the beginning of the course. Furthermore, there has to be a precise time schedule which will be announced at the beginning of a course. In addition to the time schedule, the continuous contact between trainees and tutors has to be ensured. Finally, it is also advised that a group of learners supervised by one tutor should not consist of more than 20 participants.

- Functional technics
- Functionality of the learning platform and applications
- Definition of assumed previous knowledge
- Precise time schedule
- Continuous contact to the tutor
- Max. 20 participants in one group.

III.2.2. Chronological arrangement

The chronological arrangement of the course is one of the main organizational concers in planning a course. Our experts advocate the opinion that distant learning phases should not be longer than 4 to 6 weeks and emphasized that immediate feedback to working results during distant learning is of great importance.

- Distant learning phases no longer than 4 to 6 weeks
- Prompt feedback to working results during distant learning

With regard to the chronological arrangement, the statements of our experts were mostly **inconsistent**. Some of them favor the beginning of a course with face-to-face learning; others believe that distant learning is preferable in the early stages. The minimum percentage of face-to-face learning in a course was quoted from 10% up to 50%.

Moreover, there was considerable variance in their answers conserning the assignment of knowledge transfer and practice to the different phases. Some stated that distant learning should be used for transfer of knowledge and face-to-face time should be used for practice, while others thent to think vice versa.

III.2.3. Content

An important factor of success contentwise is that the assignments of tasks are in harmony with the actual practice of teachers. In addition, the assignments of tasks should be comprehensible and corresponding to participants' previous knowledge. Finally, the used media should be appealing and presentable.

- Assignment of tasks in harmony with actual practice,

- Appealing use of media,

- Comprehensible assignment of tasks,

- Assignments of tasks corresponding to previous knowledge.

III.2.4. Requirements for tutors

The following requirements were mentioned by our experts with regard to the skills of tutors in successful courses:

- Technical skills

- Content-area expertise

- Familiarity with working conditions in schools

- Continuous addressability

- Competence in giving positive feedback during distance learning phases

III.2.5. Requirements for participants

Participants should express their interest in the course and the particular issue as well as be open to the use of new media. In the case of CPD, teacher participants should be flexible with regard to their school duties, so that they can sufficiently participate in the course. Additionally, it is advised that they also be equipped with working devices in order to be able to successfully participate in a Blended-Learning course.

- Particular interest in issue

- Openness towards new media

- Time flexibility for teachers

- Equipment with working devices

III.3. Obstacles in the implementation

In the interviews, our partners pointed out five main obstacles and problems that may occur during the implementation:

■ **The development of adequate course materials is time-consuming**

In the process of developing a Blended Learning course as an effective tool in teachers' CPD, there is a variety of materials (worksheets, videos, tutorials etc.) that must be prepared; these must be of high quality and should provide the participants with a variety of activities. Therefore, this process can be long and very time-consuming for the training team. Two of their major responsibilities, for instance, are to identify the need for in-service training and create interesting course themes which will aim at improving the relation between invested resources and performance.

■ **Teaching duties coincide with the course's time and the required work is overwhelming– both for teachers as well as for tutors**

In Germany, teachers' CPD is regulated by the federal states. Normally, teachers are given the time of approximately three full days to complete their in-service training. However, in Blended learning courses, it is common that this time is required only for face-to-face meetings. Hence, this can be a major problem for teacher trainers and teachers, who are not released from their school duties and have to deal with a great amount of additional work. A high level of flexibility and motivation is required both of the participants and the teacher trainers.

■ **Insufficient technical equipment**

Participants and tutors have to be well prepared in order to meet the challenges of the required technical equipment. It is common that computer systems face working difficulties or internet connections work slowly or fail to load. For these reasons, technical support should be offered regularly.

■ **Insufficient functionality of many e-learning platforms**

A major challenge for the tutors is the level of functionality the e-learning platforms appear to have. There are, for instance, e-learning platform, which are not well-usable or practical (e.g. Moodle).Hence, tutors face the challenge of creating a manageable and understandable course, as well as guide the students and support them adequately.

■ **Negative bias towards Blended Learning by many teachers**

Unfortunately, because of all the problems mentioned above, Blended Learning courses have not been meeting the teachers' requirements for the past years. Therefore, it is common that teachers show a clear preference towards face-to-face courses, in which they have the possibility to interact with others in a more active environment, and also save much of their –precious- time. Many Blended Learning courses take an unusually long period of time in order to be completed.

III.4. Evaluation

III.4.1. Methods

Based on the experiences of our interview partners, the evaluation of Blended Learning teachers' CPD courses has been mostly done with the use of online or paper-based questionnaires. Some institutions use standardized questionnaires (QUES) especially for the face-to-face meetings. Occasionally, the trainer team asked the participant to give individual feedback by e-mail or in online forums. Such questions referred to their personal experience or, for instance, to the average working time they spent per activity.

III.4.2. Suggestions based on reported evaluation results

Based on the reported results of evaluation, our interview partners made some suggestions:

- Grouping participants according to their level of previous knowledge can reduce the work required in some areas of tutoring such as differentiation.

- Working with a stable and feasible time management can make it easier for trainers to coordinate their work sessions for the participants.

- Learners benefit from interacting with their tutor (without over-protecting the learner).

- Technical help should always be available.

- Regular feedback on participants' current state of work is helpful and required.

- It is easier to work with comprehensible tasks; Work assignments should be clear written and understandable.

IV.   Recommendations: Seven rules in Blended Learning

Based on the interviews with the experts, we have listed seven basic rules for teacher trainers to create a successful Blended Learning course:

- Make sure that the technical equipment functions and is easy and practical for the participants.

- Make sure to take under consideration individual needs that participants may have, either by grouping them according to their level of previous knowledge or by tailoring tasks specifically to their needs.

- Make sure to include teacher-related topics to your course.

- Make sure that everyone has understood the assignment and is aware of the possible deadline.

- Make sure that the given time is sufficient for all the participants.

- Make sure to keep in touch with the participants, particularly during distance learning times.

- Make sure to keep their motivation up: having fun and enjoying the course is also a major factor of success.

V. Annexes

V.1. Interview Guideline

Persönlicher Erfahrungshintergrund in Bezug auf BleLearning-Kurse	Auf welche Weise sind Sie mit dem Thema BleLearning vertraut geworden? In welcher Weise sind oder waren Sie mit der Gestaltung und Durchführung von BleLearning-Kursen befasst?
Erinnerungen an einen besonders gut verlaufenen Kurs	Vermutlich gibt es BleLearning-Kurse, die Sie persönlich in besonders guter Erinnerung haben. Bitte erzählen Sie uns von einem solchen Kurs.
Merkmale gelungener BleLearning-Kurse in der Lehrerfortbildung	Was hat die besondere Qualität dieses Kurses ausgemacht?
Bedingungen (= Erfolgsfaktoren) für das Gelingen von BleLearning-Kursen in der Lehrerfortbildung	Was sind Ihres Erachtens die wichtigsten Erfolgsfaktoren für Blended Learning in der Lehrerfortbildung? o Welche organisatorischen Rahmenbedingungen müssen gegeben sein? o Welche Voraussetzungen auf Seiten der Teilnehmenden müssen gegeben sein? o Welche Voraussetzungen auf Seiten der Lehrenden müssen gegeben sein? o Welche quantitative Aufteilung zwischen E-Learning und Präsenzphasen hat sich als besonders effektiv erwiesen? (Im Hinblick auf Motivation und Lernerfolg der Teilnehmenden) o Welche Verteilung von Wissensvermittlung, Übung, Diskussion und Erfolgskontrolle auf die E-Learning bzw. Präsenzphasen hat sich als sinnvoll erwiesen? o Sonstige Erfolgsfaktoren?
Spezifische Vorteile des BleLearning-Formats gegenüber reinen Präsenz- bzw. E-Learning-kursen	Welche besonderen Chancen eröffnen sich mit der Einführung von Blended Learning-Formaten (in der Lehrerfortbildung)?
Formen der Evaluation	Unter welchen Aspekten und mit welchen Methoden (z.B. Teilnehmerfragebogen) wurden die Kurse evaluiert?
Wichtige Evaluationsergebnisse	Was waren die wichtigsten Ergebnisse der Evaluation (im Hinblick auf die Optimierung von Blended Learning Formaten)?
Erinnerungen an einen Kurs mit unbefriedigendem Verlauf	Möglicherweise haben Sie auch schon einmal einen BleLearning-Kurs erlebt, mit dessen Verlauf Sie nicht so zufrieden gewesen sind. Können Sie uns von einem solchen Kurse berichten?
Merkmale/Anzeichen für das Nicht-Gelingen eines BleLearning-Kurses	Was ist es demnach, das an solchen Kursen „schief" laufen kann?
Ursachen für das Nicht-Gelingen	Wo sind Ihres Erachtens die Ursachen zu suchen, wenn Kurse nicht „rund" laufen?
Spezifische Risiken des BleLearning-Formats	Könnte man somit sagen, dass BleLearning-Formate nicht etwa nur besondere Vorteile haben, sondern auch mit besonderen Risiken verbunden sind?
Herausforderungen bei der Implementierung von BleLearning-Kursen	Was sind die größten Herausforderungen bei der Einführung von Blended Learning (in der Lehrerfortbildung)?
Sonstiges	Gibt es weitere Punkte, die Ihnen im Zusammenhang mit dem Thema BleLearning als wichtig oder zumindest erwähnenswert erscheinen?

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Köln, den 1.3.2016

Bitte um ein Experten-Interview zu erfolgreichen Blended-Learning-Formaten in der Lehrerfortbildung (für das EU-Projekt *BleTeach*)

Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,

im Rahmen des von mir geleiteten EU-Forschungs- / und Entwicklungsprojektes „BleTeach – *Blended Learning in der Lehrerfortbildung*" (genauere Infos in der Anlage) möchten wir in sechs europäischen Ländern das dort vorhandene Erfahrungswissen zu Blended Learning-Formaten in der Lehrerfortbildung ermitteln und analysieren. Auf diese Weise sollen Gelingens-Bedingungen für Blended Learning Angebote in der Lehrerfortbildung identifiziert und Möglichkeiten zur systematischen Verankerung von Blended Learning in der Lehrerfortbildung untersucht werden. Ziel ist es, einen Blended Learning-Fortbildungskurs zu entwickeln, mit dem sich Lehrerinnen und Lehrer der Sekundarstufen zur Gestaltung eines sprachsensiblen Fachunterrichts qualifizieren können und diesen Kurs an 40 Lehrerfortbildungseinrichtungen der beteiligten Staaten zu verankern.

Wir würden uns freuen, wenn Sie als Expertinnen und Experten in Sachen Blended Learning zu einem **telefonischen Interview** bereit wären, in dem Sie auf Grundlage Ihrer Erfahrung berichten, welche besonderen Herausforderungen, Erfolgsfaktoren und Chancen bei der Planung und Durchführung von Lehrerfortbildungen im Blended Learning Format Sie sehen.

Das aus offenen Fragen bestehende Interview würde zu einem mit Ihnen zu vereinbarenden **Termin zwischen dem 09. und 24. März 2016** von Andrea Bürgin (Pädagogisches Landesinstitut Rheinland-Pfalz), Dr. Andreas Seidler (Uni Köln) oder Dr. Malte Stein (Uni Köln) durchgeführt und hätte eine Dauer von ca. 20 Minuten. Sofern Sie damit einverstanden sind, wird das Gespräch aufgezeichnet, weil dies die Auswertung erheblich erleichtert. Die Ergebnisse fließen in einen Bericht ein, in dem alle befragten Experten genannt, nicht aber unter Angabe des Namens zitiert werden. Diese Publikation würden wir Ihnen selbstverständlich zukommen lassen.

Bitte teilen Sie uns mit einer kurzen E-Mail an andrea.buergin@pl.rlp.de oder andreas.seidler@uni-koeln.de mit, ob Sie zu einem Gespräch bereit sind. In diesem Falle werden wir Ihnen konkrete Terminvorschläge machen und unsere Fragen vorab zukommen lassen. Wir würden uns freuen, bis 08. März eine Nachricht von Ihnen zu erhalten.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen und herzlichem Dank für Ihre Unterstützung

Prof'in Dr. Christine Garbe