



Laborschule Bielefeld

Laborschule des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen  
an der Universität Bielefeld

Primarstufe und Sekundarstufe I

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LABORSCHULE BIELEFELD

Pedagogy and Research

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Pedagogy and Research



This brochure presents a school that has been given a special task by the Federal State government of North Rhine-Westphalia. This task is to use initiative in developing new forms of learning and living together in the school environment. Results of these developments should be made available to the wider educational community, and thus be useful in the educational development of all schools. Therefore, the school has the title of “state laboratory school.”

What can, and should schools be doing in order to prepare young people growing up today for the world and challenges of tomorrow? The Laborschule has developed many answers to this question and these shall be presented in this brochure. Chapter 1: A Brief Overview gives a summary of the school. Chapter 2: Living and Learning Together displays the school’s educational concept and its application in everyday school life. Finally, Chapter 3 outlines The Laborschule at Work, and highlights the role of the Research Unit in fulfilling the school’s task.

If you would like to obtain further information about the topics covered in this brochure, contact details can be found on the back cover.

The Laborschule was founded in 1974 by educator Hartmut von Hentig. His vision entails that the school should serve children and young people. Part of his idea was to “prepare them for the world, the way it is, without subjecting them to the world, the way it is”.

# LABORSCHULE BIELEFELD

Pedagogy and Research



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# CONTENTS

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## **1. A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

- 8 Facts and Figures
- 11 Educational Profile
- 14 The Four Key Stages

## **2. LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER**

- 20 Life in the School Community
- 25 Learning through and from Experience
- 34 Daily and Yearly Routines of School Life

## **3. THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK**

- 40 Autonomy
- 44 Educational Development Work
- 48 School and Research Unit
- 50 Advising and Evaluating
- 54 Public Relations



# 1.

# A BRIEF OVERVIEW

*What the school is, and which children attend it.*

*What the school wants and what its educational profile is.*

*How the school shapes its pupils learning experiences.*





# A BRIEF OVERVIEW

## Facts and Figures

The Laborschule is made up of both the **state laboratory school** of North Rhine-Westphalia, and the **Research Unit** belonging to the Faculty of Educational Science at the University of Bielefeld. School begins here in year zero and continues through to year ten. Around 700 pupils attend the school, which equates to roughly 63 pupils per year group.

The school is organised into four key stages: Key Stage I (years 0, 1 & 2), Key Stage II (years 3, 4 & 5), Key Stage III (years 5, 6 & 7), Key Stage IV (years 8, 9 & 10).

The Laborschule is **a school where parents have chosen to send their children**, i.e. the school does not only have to accept children within the catchment area of the school. This means that the school can accept pupils from most areas of Bielefeld, which is not normally the case. The idea behind this is to create a pupil body which is as representative of the city as possible. Therefore, the yearly intake of five-year olds is decided upon using a set of criteria which promote this. Having a sample of children which mirrors the diversity of society at large is beneficial to the generalisability of the research done at the school. Further criteria used when selecting new pupils, include: equal numbers of children of different gender, and distance between home and school.

The Laborschule takes in children with a wide range of educational prospects. Instead of dividing up the children based on their different learning abilities the school aims to support children individually in their learning.



The school is an **all-day school** (not necessarily typical in Germany). Children in key stage I (years 0, 1 & 2) arrive at school between 8:00 and 8:30 am (flexible school arrival), and compulsory all-day schooling lasts until 3:30 pm on Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday. If needed, it is possible for the children to stay under supervision till 4:30 pm. On Tuesday and Friday afternoons there are non-compulsory recreational activities on offer.

Pupils in year groups three to ten have the same flexible arrival at school, the first lesson begins at 8:30 am and on 2 to 4 days a week school goes on until 3 or 4 pm (the older the pupils, the more afternoon lessons). Tuesday afternoons are specifically designated for staff conferences (time for staff to meet and discuss, plan, or take part in educational training). During this time primary school pupils (key stages I and II) can take part in various recreational activities (such as arts and crafts activities).

As pupils progress through to the secondary school stage of the school (key stages III and IV), alongside the compulsory subjects (German and social sciences, English, mathematics, physical education, natural sciences, art, and music) their timetable allows for an ever-increasing amount of optional course choices. To this end, pupils are able to create their own **individual learning and qualification profile**.

Pupils also receive a highly individualised report (“learning progress report”) at the end of each school year, detailing their scholastic achievement and where and what they can improve. In addition to these reports, pupils receive graded reports (with marks) from the end of year nine onwards.





At the end of year ten (and in exceptional cases, at the end of year nine) the school awards the same qualifications as typical comprehensive schools (in North Rhine-Westphalia) do: “Hauptschulabschluss” (equivalent to secondary modern school qualification), “Fachoberschulreife” (equivalent to General Certificate of Secondary Education), and “Fachoberschulreife mit Qualifikationsvermerk” (qualification required to be allowed to begin with “Abitur” (Br: A-Levels, Am: high school diploma)).

The school is state-aided by the Federal State of North Rhine-Westphalia, and just like any other school must answer to the North Rhine-Westphalian Ministry of Schools. The Laborschule works closely together with its Research Unit to develop new ways of teaching and learning. This process is supervised by a Scientific Advisory Board, which oversees the evaluation of the scientific work done at the school. The “Gemeinsame Leitung” coordinates and guides the work done in the Laborschule and by the Research Unit.

The school has a leadership team of five people under the leadership of the head-teacher. The scientific director leads the Research Unit. Alongside their leadership roles within the two institutions, these people are also responsible for representing the school in the outside world.



An abstract graphic consisting of several thick, orange, hand-painted brushstrokes. These strokes form a jagged, mountain-like silhouette across the top of the page. One stroke extends downwards on the right side, resembling a vertical line or a steep cliff face.

# A BRIEF OVERVIEW Educational Profile

## School as a place to grow up in

The Laborschule focuses on being a place where children and young people can enjoy learning and living. As part of this, the school aims to allow pupils to gather important basic experiences that many may not otherwise have the opportunity to experience.

Living and learning should go hand in hand, wherever possible. Thus, the school's teaching philosophy follows the principle of learning from and through experience (and not primarily from instruction from a teacher or adult). The school is therefore equipped with learning facilities which better enable experience-based learning (phenomenon-based learning).

## Living with Differences

The school seeks to affirm and encourage differences between pupils, and views these as an enrichment for school life. As a result, attempts are made to individualise teaching and learning as much as possible. Especially taking into account that children work at different speeds, and that they have differing abilities and needs when it comes to learning.

Laborschule pupils live and learn together in groups of mixed abilities and partly also mixed ages.

This is an inclusive school which makes additional resources available for those with special needs, to allow all pupils to participate in activities regardless of ability or limitations. There is also no repeating of classes and no separation or segregation of children based on their ability. Individualisation of teaching and learning enables groups of pupils with mixed abilities to learn together.



# *“What does the school want and what is its educational profile?”*

## **School as an Embryonic Society**

The school considers itself as a community made up of people who accept and respect each other's differences.

Younger pupils should not only learn from examples set by adults and older pupils, but also learn and develop attributes which we expect from adults in our society: to respect others, to help others, to work together, to take on tasks and duties, to make decisions, to take on responsibilities, and to solve common problems sensibly and peacefully.

Such learning happens through giving children and young people increased responsibility and trust, as well as engaging them in group discussions. In this “embryonic society”, individuals learn to increasingly take responsibility for common duties, and also for their own learning.

## **The Key Stages**

School should be seen as a bridge between family life as a small child through to life as an adult in a very complex society. This entails a process which takes place in stages. Pupils at the Laborschule therefore progress through four key stages in their journey through the school, which does not resemble a conveyor belt, but rather a stairway. At each key stage, they encounter new challenges and a continuously increasing amount of responsibility.

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# A BRIEF OVERVIEW

## The Four Key Stages

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Key Stage  
Years 0, 1, 2

### **Integrated pre-school year**

Beginning school at the age of five (instead of the normal age of six in Germany) enables children to have a smoother transition from family and kindergarten life to living and learning at school.

### **Individualised learning in mixed-age groups**

In the first three years, the five to eight-year olds live and learn together in mixed-age groups. As part of this concept, the younger ones learn not only from adults, but also from their older classmates. Every child learns at her or his own speed without time pressure, pressure to perform or achieve certain grades.

### **Integrated living and learning throughout the day**

There is no fixed timetable for children at this key stage, lessons are also not separated into the single subjects, but rather taught in an integrated way. The day follows a rhythm which suits children's general needs. Play and time spent outside is given as much time and value as classical learning. There is a balance between rest and action, concentration and relaxation.

### **Playful learning of the first foreign language**

From the very beginning, all children learn English in an age-appropriate way: playfully, theatrically, and communicatively. Alongside input from native speakers, or English teachers attempts are made to include English and English words into everyday situations.



### **Individualised learning in mixed-age groups**

Throughout learning and practicing basic skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, children are given support and opportunities for learning which correspond to their individual abilities, needs, and interests.



## **Key Stage** Years 3, 4, 5

### **Projects**

Practical learning in the form of class and year group (often inter-subject) projects form a large part of school life. Products of these projects are often presented to other pupils and/or parents. Presentation of work is an important part of learning at the Laborschule, and pupils have many opportunities to gain experience of presenting in front of a group.

Examples of projects: circus performances, public reading of self-written fairy tales and stories, theatre shows etc.

### **Connection between primary and secondary key stages**

Pupils in year five take part in compulsory lessons (German, English, mathematics, physical education, art, and music) within their key stage II groups. Alongside this, they also take part in introductory optional courses with the following key stage. Pupils can choose whether they want to learn a new foreign language (French, Latin) and/or if they want to take part in a course which emphasises more practical skills.





## Key Stage Years 5, 6, 7

### Learning in “fields of learning”

In key stage III lessons are not yet completely organised into single subjects, but rather in larger units of related subjects called “fields of learning” (e.g. perception and creation which encompasses the subjects; music, art, and theatre), which are only later in school life split into their component subjects.

### Differentiation of learning opportunities

In key stage III, pupils choose two introductory optional courses each year, which allow them to differentiate their learning and tailor it to suit their abilities or interests. Course options include the opportunity to learn a second foreign language (French or Latin) and also more practical-based skills (e.g. home economics, textiles, gardening, information technology, design technology etc.). Pupils of years 5, 6 and 7 take these introductory optional courses together in mixed-aged groups. Only the language courses are not mixed-aged courses.

### Projects and class trips

Learning at this stage is often organised into inter-subject projects over the course of many weeks, for which teachers of the different subjects work closely together. In year seven, all pupils do a work experience placement in a kindergarten, as well as a two-week-long sport-based class trip. During the sports class trip, they put their newly-learnt skills acquired through completion of the housekeeping curriculum into practice, as they have to cook and clean for themselves throughout the two weeks.



# IV

## Key Stage Years 8, 9, 10

### **Individualised qualification profile**

Through the various regular and advanced optional courses pupils are able to individualise their education and to place a focus on certain fields of learning based on their individual abilities, interests and needs.

### **Annual individual projects**

Pupils in key stage IV complete a large independent project each year, which can be of a theoretical or practical nature. The choice of topic is completely open for the pupils, though it should be connected to a school subject in some way. The pupils choose an adult to supervise their project, but they are expected to work as independently as possible.

### **Insights into the working world and economic structure**

Key stage IV pupils spend two to three weeks per year on self-chosen work experience placements. Placements are supervised throughout, and pupils are given advice regarding their future career choices and life planning.

### **Learning for Europe**

In year eight, pupils take part in a school exchange with pupils from a school in another European country. English is the common language for communication between the exchange partners. In year nine, the pupils' exchange partners come to Bielefeld for the return visit.

### **Preparation for further schooling**

Pupils wishing to continue with schooling after year ten are supported in many ways. Alongside getting advice and specific support from class and subject teachers, it is also possible for pupils to spend some time (normally a week) at potential future schools to see if they are right for them.

# LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

*How the groups organise their school life*

*How children and young adults learn to take responsibility for themselves*

*How the building is designed*

*How the parents contribute to school life*

*What you can do in the break times*

*How different gender get along with each other*

*How the school is connected with the “wider world”*

*How it is possible to connect learning with experience*

*How the school organises every day life and the school year, and how it celebrates*



An abstract graphic consisting of several thick, orange brushstrokes. One large stroke starts from the left, goes up and right, then down and right, then up and right, and finally down and right, ending near the top right. Another vertical stroke is on the far right. A horizontal line is positioned below the first stroke, and another horizontal line is below the title.

# LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

## Life in the School Community

Laborschule pupils grow up in different forms of community. The smallest of these is called the core group. This is the group in which pupils have all their compulsory subjects. These groups change, every year due to pupils leaving and joining the group in key stages I and II. As from year 6 the group members stay together till the end of year 10. Twice in each pupil's Laborschul-life, she or he changes groups, once between key stage I and II, and finally at the end of key stage II. After that, these mixed-ability groups stay the same until pupils leave the school. Alongside the core group further forms of community include: the year groups, the key stages, the whole school and, for those in key stages III and IV, the optional course groups.

**Maturity and responsibility** are not seen as lofty goals for the future, but rather integral elements of daily learning routines. Mutual resolution of common issues is a key part of daily life at the Laborschule. This takes place most often in the **assembly** which normally occurs daily with the core group. This takes place in a small square made up of wooden benches (as pictured on page 21) which is a part of every group area. "Assembly" is most typical in the core group but it can also involve the entire year group, key stage, or whole school, which of course requires a little bit more space.





The assembly serves as a place of social interaction where news and information are shared, conversations are held, and conflicts are resolved. Pupils should see first-hand how and that it is possible to resolve issues with each other peacefully and through reasonable communication. Furthermore, pupils should also learn to express and develop their own opinions, to listen and take notice of others, to be solution-oriented and to defend their ideas from criticism.

From the beginning onwards, the youngest pupils are taught to take on responsibility for communal tasks. Likewise, it is a key principle that not all pupils complete the same tasks; individuals or small groups can work on different tasks with the same common goals. Pupils are expected (as much as possible) to take their learning into their own hands, and to learn how to co-operate well with others. The pupils of key stages I and II represent and discuss their matters within their own parliaments (smaller school councils). Additionally, there is also a school council for stage III and IV, which discusses the interests and issues deemed important by the pupils.



The **school building** and grounds allow many opportunities for creative design. This is seen in the **open plan** layout of the school building, in which each group has its own fixed area, and due to there being no walls between, is able to interact with and be aware of the presence of neighbouring groups. Through this form of architecture, the school building becomes a space for community in everyday school life.

All parties should learn to be considerate of others and to behave in a way which promotes this sense of community. Through the minimalistic design, those using the space have the freedom to decorate and arrange the building to suit their needs. Alongside this increased freedom, creating a space where adults and young people can co-exist and work harmoniously poses certain challenges: for instance, coming to an understanding over the way the space is to be arranged, as well as common rules and rituals requires communication with each other.



Working areas for teachers are incorporated into the open-plan design of the school and are situated within the group areas. Further, instead of a “normal” staff room at the Laborschule, there is an open-plan café which serves as a communication centre among the staff and between staff and pupils. Teacher conferences often take place in an open-plan setting.

Core group areas are designed and arranged mainly according to the pupil’s needs. There are wooden benches (for the “Versammlung”), working tables and chairs, shelves, and lockers, and depending on the age of the children, also books and games.

Alongside the usual rights and customary forms of co-operation, **parents** of Laborschule pupils have further opportunities to participate in school life. Parent’s evenings take place on a regular basis, but so do parent-child-afternoons, which give parents the opportunity to experience how and what their children have been working on in school and to get to know each other (better). Parents can also (of course on a voluntary basis) visit the school during normal lessons and involve themselves either as an expert (e.g. as



part of career orientation), or as part of a project (e.g. on building projects or other technical or artistic projects). Parents are also involved in preparation for class trips, in the organisation of school celebrations, and as contact people in businesses, local authorities or other institutions within the city.

There are **many different options for pupils during the break times** that match the needs and interests of young people, such as: sporting activities, playing musical instruments, working in the workshop, going to the school disco, reading in quiet in the library or spending their free-time with animals in the small zoo. They can also stay in their core group areas, play outside, or (as from year 6) go to the university cafeteria to get something to eat.

**Children of different gender** grow up alongside each other in the Laborschule as they would in their own families. The school aims to support and supervise the socialisation of its pupils through gender-aware education. To this end, the school has developed many ways in which to support children of different gender both separately and together. Such as mixed-gender physical education with occasional separate courses, a compulsory housekeeping curriculum for all, alternative lesson contents e.g. in German and social sciences, and conferences, where specific issues relating to the individual gender groups are discussed, and a gender sensitive sexual education.

The Laborschule does not see itself as a closed community, but rather as a **part of the local community**. Therefore, it is important to incorporate the local surroundings, nature, and the city as places for learning and living. Thus, the school aims to promote the growth of its pupils not just in school, but also



within society in a wider sense, in a responsible way. From the beginning onwards, children experience how the Laborschule acts as **a school within our one and only world** and learn to take care and manage resources to tend to our planet and our fellow human beings. The school has partner schools in Nicaragua and many contacts to schools in other European countries. It is a **UNESCO project school** and engages actively in support of the organisation's aims. The Laborschule also belongs to the association of schools under the motto of **“School without racism – School with courage”**



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# LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

## Learning through and from Experience

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The Laborschule has many **places of learning** that are available to the pupils during the break times as well as during lessons. It has a wood and metal workshop, a school kitchen, natural sciences laboratories, a large school garden with a house for small animals, a library open all day where children can read and borrow books, three sports halls, a gymnastics room, a disco, a project area for art lessons, a music room, and several practice rooms for music. On the school grounds there is a play area for children in key stage I, a building play area (where materials such as wood and tools are available and free to use) and a play area with various apparatus, such as swings and a roundabout. Some of the sport facilities at the neighbouring university can also be used by pupils e.g. the indoor swimming pool.

**Inter-subject holistically-planned lessons** at the primary school stage of the school provide an age-appropriate form of teaching which allow a combination of children experiencing for themselves and being taught by a teacher. Key aspects are the daily morning circle time, the working phases in which free writing plays a large role; the daily assembly, the shared mealtimes, the many opportunities to be active and move around (to go to the nearby forest, roller-skating, cycling, swimming etc.), countless group activities and projects (play theatre, exploring the environment, class trips...). Education of and in nature also plays an especially significant role at this stage.



The **‘subject-areas’** are a way of grouping traditional subjects together with related subjects to aid lesson planning and to allow teachers of related subjects to meet and plan mixed-subject lessons or projects. Such organisation can be seen mostly in the secondary school stages (i.e. key stages III and IV). Subject-areas have the denotation “in dealing with...,” through which the connection made between learning and practical action is expressed. Subject-areas correspond to subject groups within which individual subjects are recognisable, yet emphasis is also placed on connections between the individual subjects. Subject area names are shortened for use in everyday school life.

In regular subject teaching, hands-on experience should take the place of instruction through a teacher, wherever possible. In subjects involving a large amount of cognitive-based learning, as well as instruction from a teacher, hands-on experience can still be gained by using intuition to analyse the matter at hand. Inter-subject learning is common at the Laborschule. Traditional subjects such as mathematics and German, are integrated into other topics, wherever possible and practical.

**Foreign language** learning begins early at the Laborschule, with English compulsory from year zero onwards and French and Latin offered as optional courses from year five onwards. Beginning early with language learning enables a playful and age-appropriate entry point for learning. Later on in school life, pupils have the opportunity to use the knowledge and language skills acquired in real situations through visits to foreign countries.

## Traditional subjects

History, politics, geography, religious education,  
philosophy, psychology, sociology...

Biology, physics, chemistry, ecology...

Art, music, theatre, textiles, design...

Physical education, gymnastics, dance, hygiene,  
body care, self-defence...

Languages, literature, foreign languages,  
mathematics...

# Subject-areas

**In dealing as humans with humans**  
(social sciences)

**In dealing with things: observing, measuring,  
and experimenting** (natural sciences)

**In dealing with things: inventing, creating,  
and playing** (perception and creation)

**In dealing with one's own body**  
(physical education, sport, and play)

**In dealing with thoughts, speech, and writings**  
(languages and mathematics)

Through the wide range of **optional courses**, it is possible for the pupils to vary their learning experiences at school, and to tailor their education to suit their individual interests and abilities. **Introductory optional courses** in key stage III offer an opportunity for pupils to specialise their education. In key stage IV (years 8, 9 & 10) the optional course offers are further broadened to include **regular optional courses** and **advanced optional courses**.

Advanced optional courses enable pupils to put a focus on a particular subject. They are offered in the classical subjects such as English, German and mathematics, or it is possible to take a course which takes a more specialised look at an area within a 'subject-area', for example theatre (perception and creation) or ecology (natural sciences). Over the three years (in key stage IV), one of the advanced courses must be attended for at least two years. At the end of school, the grade achieved in the advanced optional course is equal to that of those in the main subjects (English, German, mathematics) and thus gives the pupils the opportunity to show where their strengths or special interests lie.

The principle of **mixed-aged learning** from key stages I and II is continued in the optional courses in key stages III and IV. This brings a changed role for the teachers, as well as a high level of individual learning and skills in teaching others from the pupils: younger ones learn from the older ones, and the older pupils strengthen their knowledge through the process of explaining what they already know to their younger course mates. As part of the regular and advanced







optional courses, it is possible for older pupils to take an active role in the independent supervision of a group of younger peers.

A further tradition entails that from time to time regularly planned lessons are set aside for **project-based learning**. In key stage I, such projects are based on activities in school life, which the children especially like to do and/or work most intensively on. In key stage II, project-based learning is a key method employed in learning, alongside learning to read, write and mathematics. In key stages III and IV, project-based learning is also commonly based within subjects and across a range of subjects in interdisciplinary projects. Furthermore, a **school project week** takes place at least every two years, with a common theme for the whole school. The theme of the project week is often aligned with UNESCO goals and can cover topics such as human rights, renewable energy, or how the school can meaningfully support its partner schools in Nicaragua.



# *“How can learning be connected with experience?”*

Pupils in key stage IV (years 8, 9 & 10) take part in **work experience placements**. In year nine, they complete two work experience placements in self-chosen companies and work areas, for two weeks, respectively. Work experience placements are among some of the most important learning experiences, whilst at the Laborschule. Additionally, pupils in year ten have the chance to spend a week in their potential future schools, to sit in on lessons and see if the school is right for them.

Pupils go on annual **class trips**, which together form a travel curriculum. Key stage I children leave their familiar surroundings for two to three days. In key stage II, the time spent away increases up to a week, and as part of their time away, they complete work for a project which

they will have been working on in the weeks leading up to the journey, e.g. life at the sea. In key stage III, in combination with a compulsory housekeeping curriculum, the pupils spend time further away from home, where they must learn to be self-sufficient in cooking and taking care of themselves. In year seven they have a two-week long sports-based class trip to ski huts on the border between Austria and Germany. This class trip involves preparations, including investigating the local area, its climate and weather, as well as problems arising through tourism, especially the ecological impact. In key stage IV pupils take part in a school exchange with pupils from another European country (usually in Scandinavia or Poland), in which English is the common language for communication






between the exchange partners. Part of the exchange naturally involves the return visit of the exchange partners, normally in the following school year. The main goal of the graduation class trip, completed at the beginning of the tenth school year, is to visit and get to know another country, in which the language is new for all. Alongside these planned class trips with the pupils' core group there are also other outings which are completed as part of the many optional courses.



**Annual individual projects** are part of the specialisation of the pupils' learning experience in years eight, nine and ten. These projects are of theoretical or practical nature; the choice of the topic as well as a competent supervising person are left up to the pupils themselves. The objective is for the pupils to learn how to structure their work, to use reason in planning their work, to use and reference resources independently, and finally to present their finished projects in public.



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# LIVING AND LEARNING TOGETHER

## Daily and Yearly Routines of School Life

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The **daily routine of school life** should align with the needs of the pupils across all ages, year groups and key stages. Rest and activity, concentration and relaxation should all find balance.

In key stage 1 the phases of the day are constructed to reflect this balance. The school day begins flexibly as the children arrive between 8 and 8:30am, then there is the morning assembly, learning time, breakfast break (with chance to get some fresh air and move around outside), assembly, second learning time, a longer lunch break with lunch provided, where time can be spent outside or those that wish can take part in quieter indoor activities. On three afternoons per week, there is also a third learning time in the afternoon.



In key stage II (years 3, 4 & 5), the school day is often organised into open lessons with free learning time where the pupils have the opportunity to work on what they want either alone or in small groups. Alongside this, pupils are taught the basics in reading, writing and maths, and work together on class projects. The assembly (where learning goals are spoken about) is a key part of the school day, besides the shared mealtimes.

In key stages III and IV, the organisation of lessons (compulsory lessons, optional courses, cognitive and practical-based lessons) should also meet the needs of the pupils, just as much as the many free-time activities that are available to pupils during the break times (breakfast break: 30 minutes, lunchbreak: 60 minutes).

For all pupils from year three to ten, there is a stable daily structure. School begins at 8:30 am. Lessons last 60 minutes and are organised into three blocks separated by the two break times. After the first two lessons there is the breakfast break (10:30–11:00 am), after the third and fourth lessons the pupils



have their lunch break (1–2 pm), the third and final block ends at 4 pm at the latest.

Annual events are organised alongside the newly occurring elements of the school year in the **annual programme**. This contains alongside the set school and national holidays, also the dates on which normal school lessons for all or for some of the pupils are set aside for other activities, such as: school celebrations, class trips and outings, work experience placements, intensive work periods (e.g. for the advanced optional courses), project weeks, school exchange trips, parent conference days (similar to a parent's evening but for a whole day), or handing out school reports. Attempts are made to spread these important elements across the school year, in order to achieve a balance between normally scheduled lessons and other activities.

School celebrations belong to the regularly recurring activities within the school year: the enrolment celebration for the new Laborschule pupils (year zero), the transition celebration where the children in year three make the move across from house one to house two to begin key stage II, the Christmas bazaar (where money is raised for different causes), the sports and play day, the leavers celebration for the year ten pupils, the opening and closing celebrations of the project week, the events to support and raise money for the school partnership in Nicaragua. Among the celebrations for the whole school, there are also many events within the individual year groups (e.g. project presentations and parent-child afternoons), as well as for the adults who work at the





school: the yearly staff excursion, celebrating “round” birthdays together, farewell celebrations for colleagues leaving the school and many more.

There are two planned **intensive phases** in each school year. Firstly, the project week which involves the whole school, the second being the travel time. Alongside these two time periods, there is also always the opportunity for year groups to spend time working intensively on a topic or project together, during which the regularly planned lessons are set aside. An example of this is in the year eight, where pupils spend a period of time outside of school, and work either individually or in small groups together on a project. These projects represent a special challenge and individual learning opportunity for the pupils. Further traditional school events that happen at different times throughout the school year include: presentation of school work and the yearly individual projects, (dance, theatre, and music) performances, open days for interested parents, conferences and visiting parties as well as the yearly visit of the Scientific Advisory Board which is composed of researchers of different universities.



# THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK

*Why the school has a dual task*

*How it deals with its autonomy*

*How its scientific work is organised and lead*

*How it does educational development work and what science has to do with it*

*Why it has a scientific director and a scientific advisory board*





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# THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK

## Autonomy

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The Laborschule as state laboratory school has the assignment over an indefinite time period to develop new forms of living together, teaching and learning in schools. The underlying hypothesis behind this is that a school with a representative population and as much freedom of design as possible – with a highest degree of transparency possible in its actions and accountability – can allow all educational problems in schools to be brought to light. These problems can be detected early, just like on a seismograph, and be worked on in an exemplary way. The school considers itself to be an institution which is constantly learning and, as part of its experimental assignment it needs to be skilled in self-reflection and work continuously on improving itself.

In order to fulfil this assignment, the school has been granted a great deal of **autonomy**. Making educational developments through observation and reflection, mutual discussion and criticism is conditional of making and learning from mistakes. Many positive results and developments have manifested themselves through learning from mistakes.



The leadership team of the Laborschule consists of five people whose understanding of their leadership role is in accordance with the school's special assignment. They work under the premise that they are fallible, meaning that they refrain from enforcing their individual ideas and visions on staff, if the staff group at large does not agree with them. In case of disagreement, the issues at hand are discussed among a smaller task group and/or with the whole staff group, before solutions are mutually decided upon. At the Laborschule decisions have their basis in convincing the staff group at large, rather than simply handing down orders from above. Traditional power structures would be counter-productive in such a school which values educational autonomy and personal responsibility in its teachers.

The school leaders, as an "educational leadership team" must establish an environment in which innovative ideas and impulses do not fall victim to constraints within the school system.

They are as such, guardians of the educational and scientific assignment of the school. The leadership team members are approachable, their office doors are nearly always open, their work is transparent, and they are also involved in most of the project teams.

The autonomy of the school can be seen in the high level of **self-administration** in questions of school and lesson planning. Conferences are the most important forum for collaboration, in planning and development, for discussion and criticism as well as, most importantly, for making decisions. Alongside the legally required conferences which each school in North Rhine-Westphalia holds (school conference, teachers conference), there are many other forms at the Laborschule, for example year group conferences, key stage conferences, subject-area conferences (which replace single-subject conferences that take place at other schools) and an educational co-ordination conference. Tuesday afternoons are set aside for conferences, which take place regularly according to a schedule which is set at the beginning of each school year. Conferences are an important part of the development process: innovative ideas are presented, and plans are made to put these into practice. The overall conference is the most important in terms of educational development, since this is the place where ideas are presented in front of all educational staff at the school and further impulses and feedback can be gained. Smaller, more specific conferences are nevertheless as autonomous as possible from the overall conference, in the decisions they make, over the area of the school for which they are responsible.







Furthermore, the development work of the school is divided amongst **project teams**. Some of which are only temporary and formed to deal with certain issues which arises spontaneously, whereas there are those which are long-standing project teams which meet regularly. One of these teams is the UNESCO group, which meets to discuss the development of the school and how it aligns with UNESCO goals. Another is the Nicaragua group, which takes care of the school partnership with schools in the city of Estelí. The school building group meets and discusses the design and organisation of the school building and the school grounds; their ideas are presented and decided upon at the overall conference. In addition, there is also a health group which concerns itself with the health and well-being of the staff.

An abstract graphic consisting of several thick, orange, hand-painted brushstrokes. These strokes form a jagged, mountain-like silhouette across the top of the page. Below this graphic, the title is centered. The first line of the title, 'THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK', is in a red-orange color. The second line, 'Educational Development Work', is in a dark grey color. Two thin horizontal lines are positioned on either side of the title, one above and one below.

# THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK

## Educational Development Work

The Laborschule has the assignment to develop “new forms of teaching, learning and living together in the school environment” and to present the results of these developments in an appropriate way to the wider public.

Central to this task is **working to find solutions to educational problems**. Solutions result from education in practice. Teachers identify problems, investigate them, and then develop and test solutions for them. The special conditions at the Laborschule (representative pupil population, openness, freedom of educational design and resources for development) facilitate this work process. Many results of the developmental work at the Laborschule have radiated through the school system and can be seen in the development of other schools.



Further results of the school's experimental work have become stable parts of the school's educational profile: individualised lessons in each key stage, learning in mixed-aged groups, inclusion of differing skills and abilities including exercises which all pupils can work on, project-based methods of learning, inter-subject learning, developments in possibilities for practical and phenomenon-based learning, as well as differentiation in choice of optional courses, a system for individualised school performance feedback, possibilities to bring about a more gender-aware education and many more.

The topic of inclusion, in all possible forms i.e. over and above the topic of handicap and disability, is something that the Laborschule has busied itself with for a considerable time. Some of the aspects that come under the term of inclusion are: seeing school performance in terms of partial learning success and including this in the assessment and diagnosis of pupils, developing principles of teaching (e.g. exercise differentiation) for mixed-ability classes and also the organisation of the school to accommodate and enable the work of interdisciplinary teams (teachers, special educators, social workers, social educators etc.) within the daily rhythm of an all-day school.

Working to solve such educational problems is closely connected to the curriculum development work of the school, which is seen as a **curriculum workshop**. The results of this are seen partially in finalised curricula (e.g. beginning early with English, French and Latin learning), partially in prepared teaching units and curriculum elements (e.g. the integration of mathematics in other subject lessons, for integrated natural science lessons







(normally split into biology, chemistry and physics in other German schools) and theatre-based foreign language learning) partially in documented projects, and also in practice and learning materials.

Curriculum development work is co-ordinated and organised through the ‘subject-areas’ conferences which meet up on a regular basis. Furthermore, the lower level educational development takes place at year group or key stage level.

In each school year, a **focus topic** is chosen for the whole school (examples: independent learning, democracy, a healthy school, a broader proficiency concept and corresponding proficiency assessment system). Work on the focus topic is based on a process of discussion and reflection among and between the different individual conference configurations as well as the collective staff group. Ideas for further projects within the framework of the research and development plan often spring from the work on the focus topics.



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# THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK

## School and Research Unit

Characteristic of the Laborschule is the connection and reciprocal relationship between practical and scientific work. This is represented through the co-operation between the two institutions which make up the Laborschule. The Laborschule itself, and **the Research Unit of the Laborschule** which belongs to the Faculty of Educational Science at Bielefeld University. It has control over its own staff (three scientific associates) and funds – e.g. for student associates.

The Research Unit is led by the **Scientific Director**. This person is elected from the group of professors which work in the Faculty of Educational Science and remains in this position for five years. The first scientific director was founder Hartmut von Hentig.

The tasks and characteristics of the Research Unit are defined in the founding order from 1992. Contents and the procedures of the scientific work are organised into the **research and development plan** which is set out every two years, and outlines what the work of the Research Unit and its co-operation with the school will be over that time period. Applications for projects can be put forward within the timeline and framework of the research and development plan, which orientates on the following central questions:

- Which developmental processes are already so advanced that they can be recorded, and the evaluation begun with?
- Which developmental processes require certain resources and why?
- Which developmental processes require a scientific evaluation?
- Which problems have shown themselves in practice to be relevant and/or complex enough that they require the analysis of the Research Unit?

The ways and means of co-operation are also set out by the founding order. Teacher participation in research projects is possible through “research hours” through which they are relieved of their teaching duties for a certain number of hours a week in order to take part in the research and development projects.



The projects must be justified and are accountable to the University and the Scientific Advisory Board of the Laborschule.

The **“Gemeinsame Leitung”** is a committee which co-ordinates the work done by both institutions (Laborschule and its Research Unit). Its tasks include decisions on the research and development plan and the continual supervision and consultation of the research projects.

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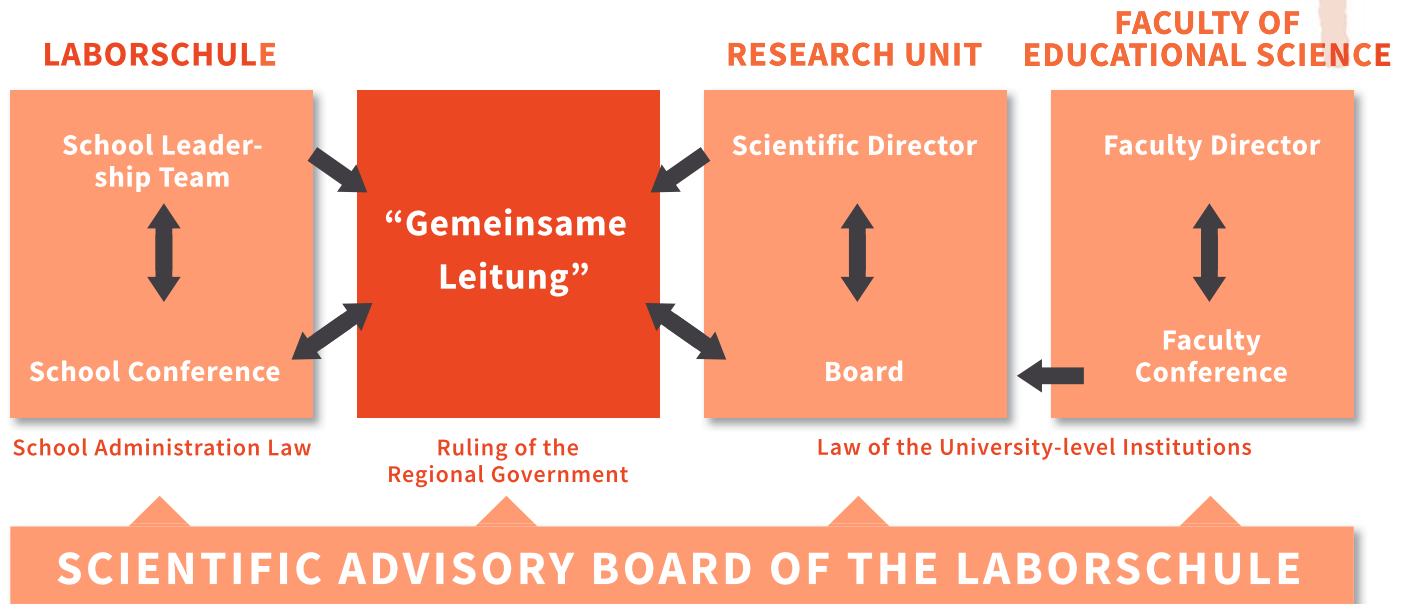
# THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK

## Advising and Evaluating

The evaluation of the developmental processes is an integral part of the work done by the Laborschule and Research Unit.

An example of the evaluation process is the **graduates survey**, which is continuously carried out by the Research Unit. Since 1985, pupils who have left the school have been and are being surveyed. Focal in this evaluation are the future career paths of Laborschule pupils, as well as their retrospective opinion of their time at the school.





The organisational framework of the Laborschule



# *„Why does the Laborschule need a Scientific Director and a Scientific Advisory Board?“*

As part of its educational and curricular work the school has developed many ways to conduct **self-evaluation**. Development and evaluation of curricula is partially supported, using resources from the Research Unit. Regardless, a large part of this work is done by the teachers. The same is true for the evaluation process, either of partial results or hypotheses. New methods developed by individuals or small groups are often repeatedly tested internally, before they are deemed “ripe” for a research and development project or recording the results.

The **Scientific Advisory Board** serves as the external evaluation committee of the school and its Research Unit. This committee is made up of three external educational scientists and two members of the Faculty of Educational Science at the University in Bielefeld, as well as a representative of

the “QUA-LiS”, which is the North Rhine-Westphalian Institute for school quality and school development. The North Rhine-Westphalian Schools Ministry and the regional government (based in Detmold) are also represented by one or more people. Ariane Garlichs, Wolfgang Klafki and Hilbert Meyer belong to the group of founding and longstanding members of the Scientific Advisory Board.

The Scientific Advisory Board meets once a year for a two-day conference in the Laborschule. It listens to reports from all of the research projects currently being carried out, advises them on their scientific work and gives its opinion based on the results presented. The Board and the Ministry of Educational and Cultural Affairs are given a detailed report on the status of the development of the school by the head-teacher and scientific director, as part of this yearly conference.

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# THE LABORSCHULE AT WORK

## Public Relations

The work done at the Laborschule should be made public, to this end, various forms of presentation have been developed:

- An own series of publications (“Impuls Laborschule”) published by Klinkhardt Verlag
- A range of “workshop books” which document practical teaching processes and their results
- Various other publications, amongst others; newspaper articles, as well as curricula that have been adapted and used in published school exercise books
- Films made in co-operation with Bielefeld University



The workshop books and films can be obtained from the Laborschule directly.

The role of the Laborschule in the public dialogue is displayed through the participation of its staff members in working together with other institutions. For example, teachers at the Laborschule are often involved as delegates in **teacher training courses** at other schools. At Bielefeld University, teachers are further involved in the teacher training process in the form of **teaching assignments and lecture-ships**. Contact with other university-level institutions is also generated through the work of the Scientific Institute. **Partnerships** and forms of collaboration with other schools connect the Laborschule with European countries and Nicaragua. Especially close relationships exist between the Laborschule and certain comprehensive schools and other progressive teaching schools.

The school considers playing an active and constructive role in making **contributions to teacher training** as a priority. Those currently in teacher training have many opportunities to experience what goes on at the school: through work experience placements, and through days spent sitting in on classes here. Countless young adults also complete their probationary year at the Laborschule, an important step for those completing their education in several key careers: youth/child care workers, social education workers, social workers. These members of staff are normally planned into one of the year groups or groups in key stage I and II, and are additionally responsible for the break and free time activities.

Many **visitors** come to the Laborschule each year, to take a closer look at the work done here. Dissemination of the work done at Laborschule to other public schools occurs through such contacts. Visitors therefore present an opportunity for the enrichment of the school and its assignment, however thus also creating a certain strain on normal school life. Visitors are often shown around the school by pupils of one of the regular optional courses “public relations”, which allows visitors to gain an authentic impression of school life.

The **costs** associated with running a school like this are higher than those of other schools. This is in large part due to the scientific assignment of the Laborschule and the resources required for this. Teachers at the Laborschule have the same teaching load as teachers in other schools.

Nevertheless, the Laborschule must justify its work and the costs involved to the regional State Government. Its job is to





show them that the continuous education development work done here is worth the expense. Also, that it is important and necessary to search for solutions to newly arising **educational** problems faced in schools. At the end of the day, the solutions – recorded scientifically – are for the good of the school system at large.





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