

# Inquiry-based Learning in Inclusive English Didactic

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**Zusammenfassung:** Im vorliegenden Beitrag werden auf Grundlage Deweys Überlegungen zum Forschenden Lernen (inquiry-based learning) in der Englischdidaktik dargelegt. Dabei wird die Wichtigkeit der Vorbereitung auf eine inklusive und demokratische Schulkultur hervorgehoben. Angehende Lehrende sollen darüber hinaus dazu befähigt werden, sprach- und inklusionssensiblen Fachunterricht in der Praxis umzusetzen. Mithilfe der erarbeiteten Methoden in der inklusiven Englischdidaktik sind angehende Lehrende in der Lage, ihre Unterrichtshandlungen zu reflektieren und – aufgrund von Feedbackprozessen – zu optimieren. Fremdsprachenunterricht kann besonderes Potenzial für inklusiven Unterricht zugeschrieben werden, da der Erwerb einer Fremdsprache kulturelle Offenheit fördert und so indirekt inklusives Denken angeregt werden kann. Forschendes Lernen ist als (Selbst-)Kontrollinstrument für inklusiven Englischunterricht zu sehen und leistet einen großen Beitrag zum Professionalisierungsprozess.

**Schlagwörter:** inquiry-based learning, inklusive Englischdidaktik, Fremdsprache, Forschendes Lernen, Praxissemester, Reflexion



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## 1 How does empirical knowledge arise in English Didactic?

In the subject English, empirical knowledge is achieved through the predominantly empirically oriented qualification work of young scientists and within the scope of scientific accompanying research. During the scientific inquiry process, English student teachers have applied, apart from a wide application of qualitative research methods (case-study, qualitative interviews and group discussions, analysis of observations in teachers' classrooms), also a number of quantitative methods (quantitative observations, questionnaires for the students, systematic analysis of survey data).

## 2 Theoretical foundation of inquiry-based learning in inclusive English Didactic?

For Dewey (1938), inquiry is the basis both of discovery and learning. He defines it as "the controlled or directed transformation of an indeterminate situation into one that is as determinate in its constituent distinctions and relations as to convert the elements of the original situation into a unified whole" (p. 108). Here a situation is conceived as the set of interactions between an organism, an individual and its environment, and inquiry as a general process not reserved to scientific activity. He put more emphasis on the necessity to organize school activities around real-life situations and through these to link school and out-of-school activities. Such links are expected to increase students' motivation and to allow them to put their out-of-school experience and knowledge at the service of school experiences and inquiries.

They have also another essential purpose: the ambition of having education serving the cause of democracy, well explained in Dewey (1916). Lessons can become more democratic with the help of inquiry-based learning, by getting feedback from the students. Those feedbacks can help the teacher to attain a deeper understanding of teaching-learning-processes. This can favour a change of school and lessons, and teachers only investigate what they feel as important for their own lessons (Barbara Koch-Priewe: "Lehrerinnenfortbildung durch Forschendes Lernen"). This marks the importance of enabling the students to play an important role in deciding the teaching of teachers and the way they are educated, which will contribute to a more inclusive and democratic school culture. This resonates well with the basic philosophy of inclusive English Didactic. English is recognized as an essential part of the general education and no group of students will be excluded from receiving English education, as part of their rights to access good general education (Springob, 2017). Moreover, to have access to English classes from the school means that all students have the same chances to successfully accomplish their secondary school and potentially to reach a higher level of education (Stahl-Morabito, 2016). Moreover, learning a foreign language helps to open the mind and heart of people and enable them to accept differences and appreciate diversity, which all contribute to a more inclusive society (Terry Davis, 2004). It is this basically-shared ideology to create a democratic and inclusive school culture as well as a democratic and inclusive society that serves as the very foundation of our WM 9 project that targets at preparing English student teachers ready for inclusive English Didactic through the method of inquiry-based learning (*Forschendes Lernen*). This WM 9 project is a long-going strategic cooperation between Professor Bettina Amrhein and research faculty Run Tan who both are experts on inclusive didactic from the Education Department and researchers on English Didactic from the Language Department. It is agreed that through four phases of research process (namely: before the seminar; offer the seminar; testing in the praxis-semester; reflections), we are able to develop a strongly evidence-based teaching model that can contribute to more capable inclusive teaching in University English Didactic.

### 3 Inquiry-based learning in the model of inclusive English Didactic

Many literature studies have also showed that for children with special educational needs, “to participate in general education foreign classes allow them to be fully immersed in a language and its cultures and to receive the assistance and support of their peers who are also learning that new language” (Kleinert, Cloyd, Rego & Gibson, 2007). Some researchers also argued for the idea that it is beneficial not only to this group of children with special educational needs, but also to the whole class: “including children with disabilities in a foreign language learning class may seem overwhelming, but best practices for students with disabilities can also be best practices for all students” (Duvall, 2006); “best practices for students with learning disabilities are generally best practices for all students” (Landmark, Ju & Zhang, 1997, p. 1). After all, we all know that as a human being, one of the most key important life experiences is through communications with people, and language serves as the bridge for communications between two different cultures (Kleinert et al., 2007).

Even though we know that there are a great number of benefits when we argue for including everyone in English classrooms from various perspectives, we need to keep in mind that in preparing them to get ready for real practices, we will need to teach them about how to implement inclusive practices in their English classroom on a daily basis, which is one of the biggest challenges for teaching English inclusively. Therefore, it has become quite clear and urgent to us as to how we can enable those future English teachers with certain concrete tools that they can always apply on their daily practices. It is under this situation that we have constructed the basic goals of our WM 9 project, which is to apply the method of inquiry-based learning to enable our future teachers to research their practice by actively reflecting and critically examining their teaching activities. It enables our English student teachers to apply scientific research methods they have been taught to explore certain English teaching problems they have identified from their practices or to testify gained theoretical knowledge of inclusive English Didactic, which leads to a much better impact and more interesting and attractive acquisition of the knowledge themselves (Burns, 1997). Moreover, the application of inquiry-based learning also contributes to supervising whether our English student teachers are on the right track to realize the goal of teaching English inclusively. Specifically, during their teaching, they will encounter those following situations: what kind of problems they may have in designing specific learning tasks, e.g., past and present tense; whether they have evaluated each student’s vocabulary according to their ability. By applying inquiry-based learning, they will have a much clearer idea of how they are doing and can carry on the implementation of inclusive teaching in the English classroom sufficiently.

Apart from that, to apply inquiry-based learning (FL) also contributes to more effective inclusive English teaching results. According to McKay (2006), it is one of the most effective ways for professional development in practical English teaching. Specifically, conducting inquiry-based learning enables our English student teachers to testify what has been researched as scientific knowledge, they can see how the existing knowledge of English teaching really works in real classroom practices, and find out whether they are truly effective, if not, how to make adaptations to make it work. By conducting research themselves, teachers have gained potentially new perspectives or insights into English learning and teaching processes in order to become a more effective English teacher. Last but not the least, the knowledge created in the whole inquiry-based learning process can contribute more to the already existing research knowledge of inquiry-based learning in English Didactic and other relevant subject-related didactics (McKay, 2010).

#### 4 Possible contributions to an online portal and a competence center for researching learning

For the online portal, our students' successful experiences of applying inquiry-based learning in accomplishing successful inclusive English teaching experiences will be widely shared in various digital formats (e.g., videos or digital documents). Moreover, we have designed the pre- (before their praxis semester) and post-interview (after their praxis semester) structure to compare the students' ideas about the concerned research questions, which will generate relevant new changes to the existing WM 9 seminar. Based on those changes and reflections, we will be able to develop a strong evidence-based teaching model that can contribute to a more capable inclusive teaching in University English Didactic, as potential reference to other inclusive subject didactics.

Regarding the competence center, first of all, we strive to provide a comprehensive two-layer of support for our potential audiences: the first layer of the support is to build thorough theoretical knowledge of the understanding of inquiry-based learning and inclusive English Didactic. Specifically, a complete list of key literature of the concepts of the two will be offered at the online-portal. Secondly, we would also offer guidance and support regarding strengthening English student teachers' specific inquiry skills and inquiry competences acquisitions in order to accomplish their research projects during praxis semester and even for future references during their teaching as an English teacher. Thirdly, we plan to invite seminar English teacher student back to share their experiences and make those sharing available online so that all other students can look it up for references.

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