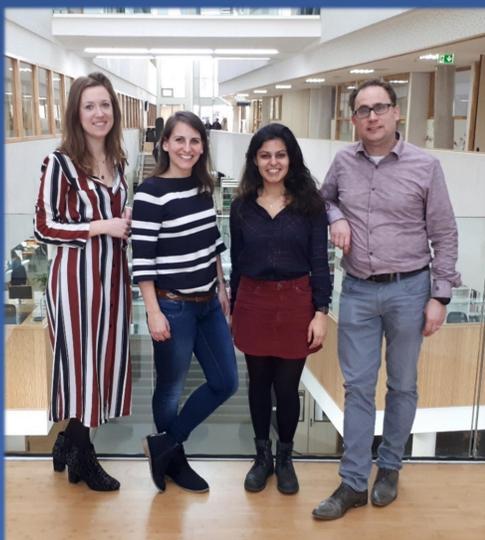


Creating a powerful learning environment for ALPO-students to practice the role of change agent in primary school

Introduction

Academic teachers in the Netherlands who graduate from Academic Primary Education Teacher Training (ALPO) are expected to be initiators of innovation processes in school. The role of scientist practitioner to be a change agent in education (Van der Wal-Maris *et al.*, 2012) requires that they can convince colleagues and make them enthusiastic about educational innovations. In order to achieve this, knowledge and skills in managing school development and doing practice-based research are required, besides knowledge of the topic itself.



Project members ,from left to right:
Inge Thielen, academic teacher
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Design

To prepare students for the class-transcending role of academic teachers, we designed through educational design research (Plomp & Nieveen, 2013) a new module in which they could practice these skills explicitly (↓). This module replaces the old research assignment 'Citizenship Education' and has been designed in close collaboration with alumni in order to be as close as possible to the (future) practice of academic teachers

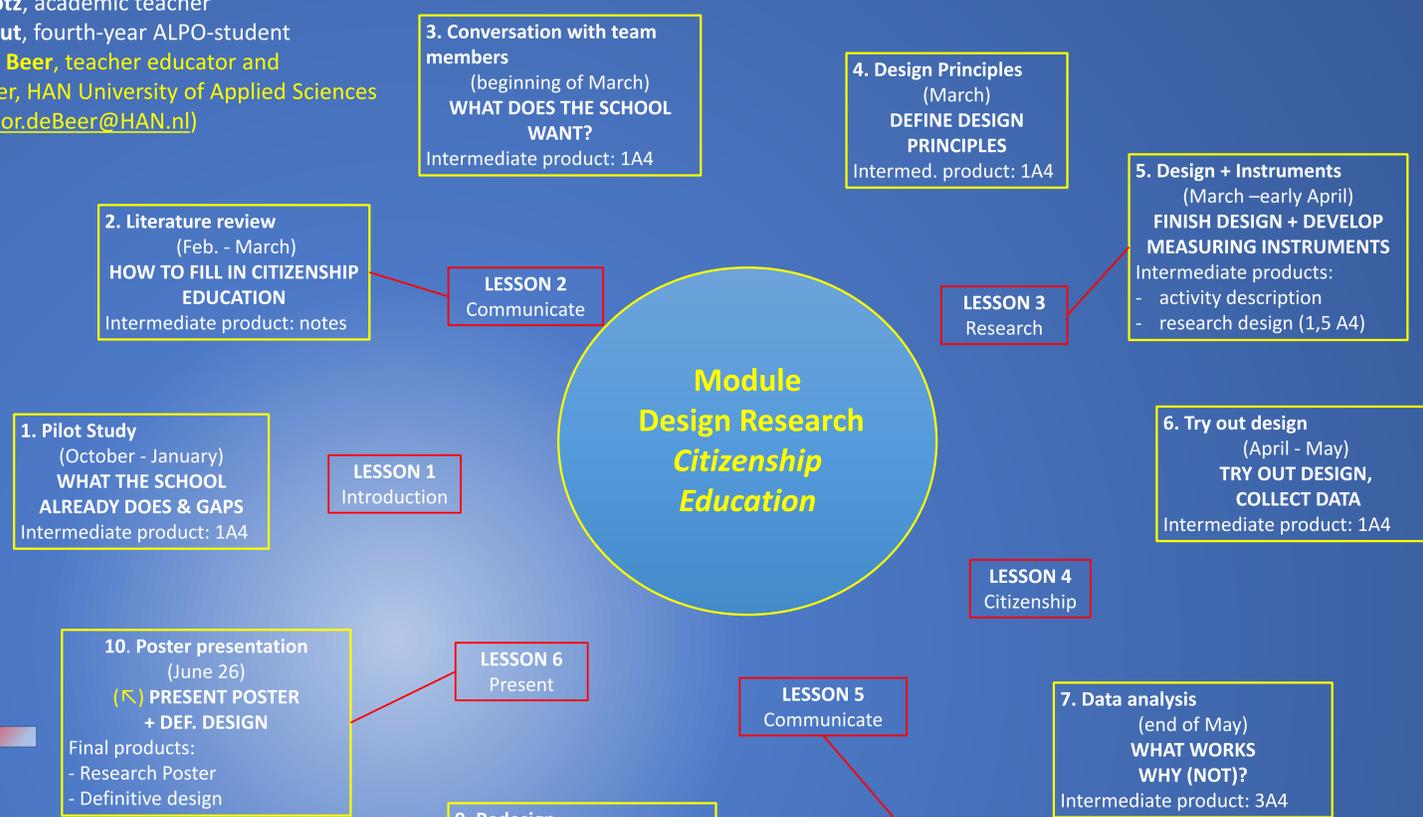
Aim of the module

In this module students are challenged to take on the role of change agent within their internship on the topic of citizenship education. In doing so, they set their learning objectives in line with their own zone of proximal development. The aim of the module is to get students more familiar with and more skilled in their role as a change agent. At the same time, the school acquires appropriate citizenship education by the work of the student.

Gap

Research among students and alumni has made clear that at this moment too little attention is being paid in the curriculum to develop skills related to initiating school development and doing practice-based research (Van der Heijden, 2017).

Presentation Research Posters



Research Question

To what extent does the new module help third-year students to:

- gain insight into the role of academic teacher as a change agent?
- practice the required skills?

Research Method

Data has been collected at different times during the module. Observations of the lessons, the answers to a questionnaire and submitted student products (research posters (↑), intermediate research products and reflections) have been analyzed. Instrument construction and data collection has been done by a fourth-year ALPO-student as part of her bachelor thesis.

- 41 students (38 female) participated in the module.
- 36 (88%) completed the assignment and were assessed (n=36).
- 35 of them (97%) also submitted their reflection (n=35).
- 25 out of 41 students (61%) completed the questionnaire (n=25).

Results

		Class		
		A	B	Total
Thanks to the citizenship module, I know what it means as an academic teacher to be a change agent.	No	13%	8%	8%
	±	20%	40%	32%
	Yes	80%	47%	60%

		Class		
		A	B	Total
Thanks to the citizenship module, my skills as a change agent have increased	No	33%	20%	20%
	±	40%	47%	44%
	Yes	60%	20%	36%

		Class		
		A	B	Total
I challenged myself to take on the role of change agent while making the assignment	No	10%	27%	20%
	±	10%	47%	32%
	Yes	80%	27%	48%

- In taking the lead in the conversation with team members almost all students felt a bit anxious, but afterwards they were very positive.

"I had never had a conversation with team members on my own initiative about my assignments and I thought it was quite exciting to take a first step here." (A14)

- Students were enthusiastic about practice-based research, but it was more demanding than they initially thought.

"In addition, I found the practice-based research very instructive. For me it felt very different from the research at university, where everything is much more rigid. I discovered ways in which you could collect valid and reliable information in practice, without a lot of hassle and a hundred measurements." (A16)

- The module now practices too many new skills at once. This makes the assignment time-consuming and difficult.

Student Experiences

"Before the assignment I had my doubts about the interest of other teachers, but (...) I have noticed that my opinion is taken seriously and that teachers are very proactive when you come up with a good plan or good ideas yourself." (B1)

"Because we consulted together, it did not feel like "my assignment for my education", it felt like we were working together to design education that the school needed." (B16)

"It gave me a huge boost to hear that the teachers looked positively at my design and that I really could contribute to education within the school." (A14)

"After all I look back on this assignment with a good and satisfied feeling. It was a lot of work, but it was also very satisfying." (B7)

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Discussion

Students valued the module as challenging and very informative. Supervisors at primary schools were pleased with conversations that students started within the teams and were satisfied with the educational products that resulted from it.

Recommendations

In general:

- More attention should be paid in the whole ALPO-curriculum for the class-transcending role of the academic teacher.
- In their internship students should be partnered with academic teachers (role models).

This module:

- More focus on and guidance in conducting practice-based research.
- Further specify the assignment.
- Better manage expectations by showing good examples.