# Community Engagement and German Teacher Training in Four American "SPARK for German" Teaching Labs

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**Abstract Deutsch:** Das Akronym SPARK steht für „Strukturiertes Programm zum Aufbau von Ressourcen und Kompetenzen für den DaF-Unterricht in den USA". Dieser Artikel skizziert das Programm und zeigt, dass SPARK Labs stark in Bezug auf Größe, Gestaltung und Zielgruppe variieren. Vier ausgewählte SPARK Labs werden vorgestellt, um die Bandbreite der Möglichkeiten solcher Labs zu illustrieren. Es folgt die Analyse einer Umfrage unter studentischen Lehrkräften in SPARK Labs, die auf folgende Punkte zielte: Einstellung gegenüber ehrenamtlichem Engagement, Förderung berufsbezogener und pädagogischer Kompetenzen durch die Mitarbeit im SPARK Lab und Erkenntnisgewinn im Hinblick auf die Diversität an Schulen. Der Artikel zeigt das Potenzial von SPARK, Studierende für eine Lehrtätigkeit als Deutschlehrer*in in den USA zu interessieren. Er betont die Vorteile einer Verbindung von Hochschullehre und Praxiserfahrung sowie die Möglichkeit, junge Menschen für das Lehramt zu gewinnen und Deutschprogramme zu fördern.

**Schlagwörter:** Praktikum, ehrenamtliche Arbeit, Sprachenlernen, Lehrerausbildung, USA

**Abstract English:** The acronym SPARK stands for Structured Program for the Acquisition of German in the U.S. – Resources and Know-How. This program varies widely across the U.S. in size, teaching methods, and audience. This article presents four SPARK Labs as case studies, illustrating the program's impact on college/university student instructors. Results from a Fall 2023 survey of SPARK instructors highlight their attitudes toward community engagement, perceived professional development, awareness of diversity, and teaching skills enhancement. The article suggests that SPARK can encourage students to pursue teaching careers in German at K-12 levels, emphasizing the importance of connecting higher education institutions with K-12 schools to create sustainable pathways for future educators. Additionally, it proposes strategies for strengthening inter-institutional collaborations to support existing German programs.

**Keywords:** internship, community-engaged learning, language learning, teacher training, United States

# 1 Igniting Passion for German Language and Culture: Sparking Educational Change[1]

**S**tructured **P**rogram for the **A**cquisition of German in the U.S. – **R**esources and **K**now-How (SPARK) is the name of the program designed by the Goethe-Institut Washington, D.C. (GI) and supported by the American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) facilitating kindergarten to college-level (K-16) collaboration and language learning (L2). College, university, and high school German programs can apply to become SPARK Partners and then function as designated SPARK Labs that run enrichment programs. SPARK's mission is to promote exploration of German on all levels in community engagement and service learning settings. The latter entails "serving while learning, acting to assist and benefit others while feeding one's own mind and heart," without "a tightly bound definition," and is therefore "open ended, limited only by the creativity of someone who helps another and who in turn is enriched by what he or she has learned from the other" (Kronick et al. 2011: 1). With more than 130 labs across the U.S., SPARK has grown immensely since its inception in 2019 (see SPARK for German [English] 2023). The GI supports SPARK Labs with curricula and professional development opportunities, as well as mentoring and logistical support. SPARK has been adopted across the U.S. by college-level programs who see its benefits in promoting hard- and soft-skills applicable to workforce development.

Aimed at strengthening existing German programs and at increasing the demand for new ones, SPARK has not only developed into a networking and support tool, but it has also begun to facilitate horizontal and vertical communication in times when a lack of qualified teachers has been one of the reasons for cutting German programs in the U.S. Through this mutually beneficial program, students teaching in SPARK Labs gain valuable professional experience, while pupils (K-12 students) receiving instruction are provided with the opportunity to engage with German language and cultures. The duration and specifics of teaching are often defined by the availability of participating SPARK Lab resources and the need of their community partner(s). Most often, small teams of students deliver playful German language lessons one hour per week for eight to 10 weeks per semester. Many SPARK Lab directors incorporate a reflective component as part of SPARK student instructors' community engagement and service learning in their college/university classes that encourage student teachers to think about the experience more deeply (see Appendix I and II). According to Thomsen, this reflection is "the most important aspect of service-learning," as "(s)tructured reflection on the service experience differentiates service-learning from volunteering," thus allowing students to deepen their critical thinking skills (Thomsen 2005: 6f.). Through SPARK, student instructors engage in learning outside of the classroom, which enables them to apply academic knowledge to real life situations, thus helping them improve their linguistic literacy, pedagogical aptitude, and 21st century professional skills (McChesney 2023). In addition, SPARK encourages learners to become active participants in their discipline and community. They learn

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[1] Eine Zusammenfassung auf Deutsch finden Sie am Ende des Beitrags.

directly from community leaders as they build a diverse skill set and begin to understand systemic social and organizational challenges while engaging with L2. Connecting language learning and teaching with contemporary issues furthers diversity and inclusion, another value of SPARK (LaFountain 2023). This type of community-engaged learning "encourages students to challenge assumptions and biases, understand and appreciate diversity, believe they can make a difference, examine multiple dimensions of social problems, take responsibility for their learning, and engage in citizenship behaviors" (Kronick et al. 2011: 150). One of the key benefits provided by SPARK to student instructors includes guidance regarding career options that students might have otherwise overlooked: "In a very real sense, service-learning often helps developing students to begin to answer the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Where am I going?' After having had an opportunity to contribute their talents, students may find out what they can do and what they enjoy doing" (Thomsen 2005: 5). Overall, SPARK Lab directors observe that student instructors – as evident in regular reports and presentations delivered in their college/university courses – strengthen their linguistic, cultural, and transferable skills because of their work with SPARK.

# 2 SPARK for German Lab Profiles

This article discusses community outreach projects with examples from four post-secondary German programs that differ in scope, size, educational mission, and location: some are undergraduate only, while others have undergraduate and graduate programs; some are private and others are public; two are large Research 1 institutions with strong emphases on the humanities and natural sciences with midsize German programs, and two have smaller German programs with a focus on undergraduate education, and in one case international engineering. The following profiles describe each program's academic context and the current scope of its SPARK Lab as case studies representing the diversity of SPARK programs nationwide.

## 2.1 Montclair State University

Montclair State University is a public university in northern New Jersey with about 24,000 students. The German program is run by one full-time faculty member, one faculty member with a joint appointment in German and French, and one adjunct faculty member. There are about 25 majors, including those who are sole German majors, double majors, and Language, Business & Culture majors with a concentration in German. While the program used to have a master's program and offered teaching certification, this has not been the case in over 20 years and there is only one university in the state that offers a Master of Teaching in German Language, but some Montclair State University graduates pursue state certification through the "alternate route" program and do work in public schools.

Montclair State University opened its SPARK Lab in Fall 2020. Since then, between 12 and 20 students per semester have taught a 6- to 8-week course per semester as part of the local public elementary school's after-school enrichment program. Enrollment has varied from 12 to 35 children, and classes

meet weekly for one hour, usually with pairs of student instructors leading each lesson. The program has used the Goethe-Institut's *Felix und Franzi* and *KinderUni* curricula and has developed units on such topics as "LEGO Castle Building" and "Global Outdoor Clubonl" in response to community requests. Starting in spring 2024, the program is a 1-credit college course, giving Montclair students more structured framing including required reflection papers and readings in addition to their material preparation and team-teaching.

## 2.2 University of Chicago

The German program at the University of Chicago confers BA and PhD degrees. The University of Chicago's undergraduate program features three tracks to major in Germanic Studies and a minor. There is no teaching licensure program at the University of Chicago, though the institution is actively engaged in researching the city's public school system and publishing policy recommendations. The University of Chicago's chapter of the SPARK program was founded in 2020 and continues under the supervision of one instructional-track professor. Between four and eight students per year participate in the program, of which most are undergraduates and perhaps one per year is a graduate student. In addition to receiving an internship stipend or work-study compensation, the University of Chicago's students make regular use of summer language instruction offered by the SPARK organization. Following online and in-person training, SPARK participants at the University of Chicago engage in eight preparatory meetings and eight sessions at a local public elementary school. During preparatory meetings previous sessions are analyzed and the current week's lessons planned. The Lab relies on activity suggestions provided by the GI *KinderUni* curriculum. Since the teaching space is not conducive to presenting videos, student instructors create additional activities. Groups of two to three student instructors facilitate sessions for a class of approximately 20 children aged six to eight. The SPARK Lab director attends one session per week, with an experienced student assigned to other teams. At the request of the school's principal, University of Chicago students also assist children with their homework before beginning SPARK activities.

## 2.3 University of St. Thomas

The University of St. Thomas offers a major and minor in German and a dual degree with Engineering. The program, led by an associate professor and an adjunct with a joint appointment in film studies, has 25 majors (80% Engineers). Prioritizing 21st Century Skills (ACTFL 2011) and workforce development, the program focuses on transferable skills, linguistic literacy, and intercultural competence. The curriculum spans canonical literature, German for the professions, cultural/historical studies, and experiential learning. Courses incorporate Community Engaged Learning (CEL) with German nonprofits, companies, or K-12 schools. SPARK, introduced in early 2023, is integrated in the curriculum as CEL, experiential learning, or volunteering. Regardless of the modality, students in any course carrying a CEL designation at St. Thomas undergo online training facilitated by the university.

Although the University of St. Thomas currently does not offer a teaching licensure program in German, SPARK has piqued students' interest in teaching. Depending on modality and schedules, 5-15 students per semester teach in afterschool/enrichment programs or beginning German classes. Collaborations with area middle or high schools involve weekly 60-minute lessons delivered in teams of two or three over 8-10 weeks. Class-time incorporates curriculum development, demonstrations, and reflections. The SPARK Lab director monitors student instructors' progress, observes teaching teams once per semester, and regularly communicates with CEL partners. Grades are based on reflections and reports, an *Arbeitszeugnis* if integrated into a German for the Professions course, and a group presentation. While the GI offers curricula for all levels, some students teaching in K-5 prefer to create their own instructional materials building on the GI's curriculum.

## 2.4 University of Tennessee, Knoxville

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) is a land-grant university with almost 37,000 students. The German Program offers degrees at the undergraduate and graduate levels (MA and PhD). Students pursuing a K-12 teaching career complete extensive additional coursework and must pass a qualifying assessment to obtain teaching licensure. The SPARK Lab at UTK opened in 2020, and on average eight undergraduate and graduate students participate per semester teaching in elementary and middle schools. Many of the UTK students enroll in the 1-credit "German Community Service Practicum," an course that can be repeated three times and applied toward the German degree. In this class, students get acquainted with the SPARK curriculum, learn how to plan their own German lessons, and receive pedagogical training. The director also keeps close ties with the World Languages Specialist of the local school board, who helps identify schools with an interest in hosting "SPARK for German." Additionally, the SPARK Lab director attends all SPARK classes offered by student instructors to provide support and feedback. The SPARK Lab mainly serves elementary schools, adapting the *Felix und Franzi* curriculum, but it occasionally serves middle schools, and, for that age group, widely draws from the *Kinderuni* curriculum. Depending on the partner schools' needs and infrastructure, student instructors teach during regular morning classes as cultural enrichment, or during an after-school program. All partners have expressed a strong interest in continuing with the SPARK program and would like to see it expanded at their schools.

## 3 Analysis

In fall 2023, an online survey was administered to 53 college/university students who had taught at one of the four SPARK Labs mentioned above. The survey, which received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from all four institutions, included 44 multiple-choice and four open-ended questions on topics related to community engagement, service learning, professional development, interpersonal skills, exposure to cultural diversity, and familiarity with teaching environments. The survey drew many questions from existing tools in Gelmon et al. (2018). The responses to the initial questions on community engagement revealed that at least one third of those answering the survey

had not previously volunteered in the community, and 83% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "My work in SPARK helped me believe that I can make a difference in my community," suggesting a link between SPARK participation and a new sense of community involvement. Moreover, SPARK Labs build relationships not only between students and communities, but also among students. 86.8% of the students who took the survey agreed or strongly agreed that they developed a good relationship with their peers through SPARK, with 67.4% strongly agreeing. A striking 83% agreed with the statement that SPARK helped them learn how to plan and complete projects in teamwork and 86.8% agreed with the statement that SPARK enhanced their leadership skills, with 56.6% strongly agreeing. In addition, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that their community work enhanced their ability to communicate their ideas in the real world.

Many SPARK Labs work with highly diverse and sometimes underserved communities from their CEL partners, and the demographics of these populations are often quite different from the demographics on some college/university campuses or the demographics of students studying world languages such as German in college/university. Uju Anya has noted that Black students "hold only 4% of undergraduate degrees in world languages, while they earn 11% of all bachelor's degrees and represent 12% of the U.S. population" (Anya 2020: 97f.). For instance, while 6% of University of Chicago students identify as Black or African American, at Bret Harte Elementary School in Hyde Park, Illinois, where their SPARK program teaches, 88% of elementary school students are Black (see The University of Chicago, n.d.; Bret Harte Elementary School in Hyde Park Illinois 2019). In this context, exposure to cultural diversity through SPARK Labs refers to more than just German cultural knowledge. Indeed, 67.9% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that SPARK made them more comfortable working with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The fact that 66% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that they are more likely to pursue work with people from diverse backgrounds because of this experience suggests that SPARK is helping to build student readiness to work in culturally diverse environments, which is a highly valued professional characteristic for this generation (see LaFountain 2023; McChesney 2023).

Many students participate in SPARK before considering pursuing a world language teaching career. Independent of their career goals, they, according to the survey, strongly appreciate the general professional skills that they gain through SPARK. Moreover, 77.4% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that SPARK makes them more attractive to potential employers, and 84.9% agreed or strongly agreed that it helps build their resumé, with 52.8% strongly agreeing. Students also highlighted the professional value of SPARK in open-ended questions. One student, for instance, elaborated on the link between experiences gained through SPARK and professional development:

> "It made me a more fluent and confident speaker, both German and English. In addition to that, I learned how to teach effectively. [...] I became a better public speaker and communicator in just a few short months. Being able to practice these skills with children was something that I needed to do in order to feel comfortable in front of my peers. [...] Because of SPARK, I was able to learn how to trust my partners and understand that everyone brings different skills to the table."

My work in SPARK has made me more attractive to potential employers in my profession once I graduate
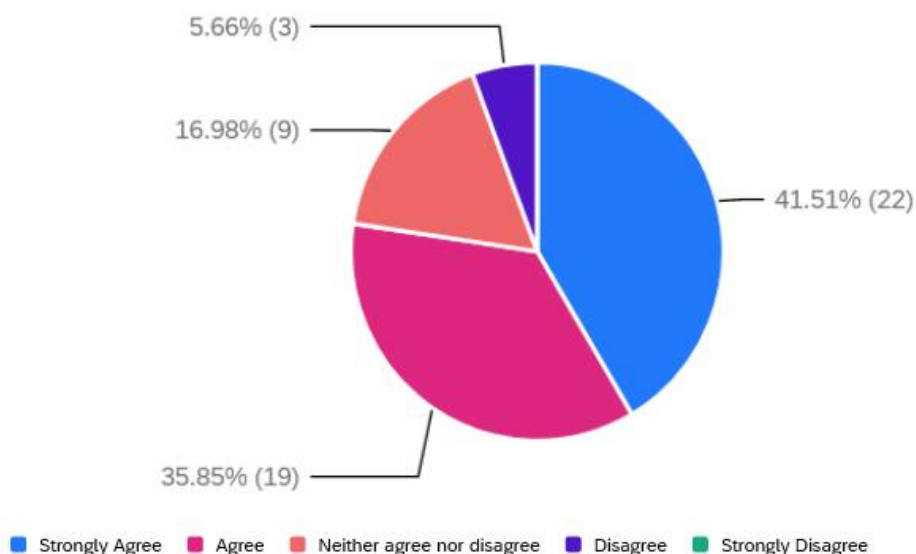


FIGURE 1: Pie chart for question 11. My work in SPARK made me more attractive to employers in my profession once I graduate.

One of SPARK's goals is to build students' readiness to teach German in various settings. In response to survey questions, over 85.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed with all of the following statements: that SPARK gave them experience leading and facilitating small groups of learners, that it gave them practical ideas for classroom management, that it provided them with ideas for introducing new vocabulary, that it helped them better understand how to use hands-on materials in teaching, and that it fostered an understanding of how to create a playful and supportive classroom. Because many students join SPARK with little previous interest in teaching, it is of interest that 67.9% of respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement that SPARK made them curious about teaching someday. Moreover, 88.7% agreed or strongly agreed that SPARK made them more confident regarding possessing the skills necessary to teach in the future. The survey concluded by asking students to assess to what extent the statement "I am considering teaching German to non-native speakers in the future" applies to them. A striking 39.6% responded "yes" and an equally notable 47.2% responded "maybe," while only 13.2% responded "no."

In summary, these responses suggest that students are appreciating gaining the concrete skills needed to teach German, that this is building their confidence, and that SPARK helps students consider pursuing a career in teaching German. Although the survey findings do not offer additional insights into the underlying reasons for the outcomes, the researchers affiliated with the SPARK Labs who conducted this study note the emergence of growth mindset in their students, increased workforce readiness skills, and an additional interest in the SPARK program as well as in pursuing careers in education.

SPARK made me more confident in my ability to teach in the future



1.89% (1)
9.43% (5)
54.72% (29)
33.96% (18)

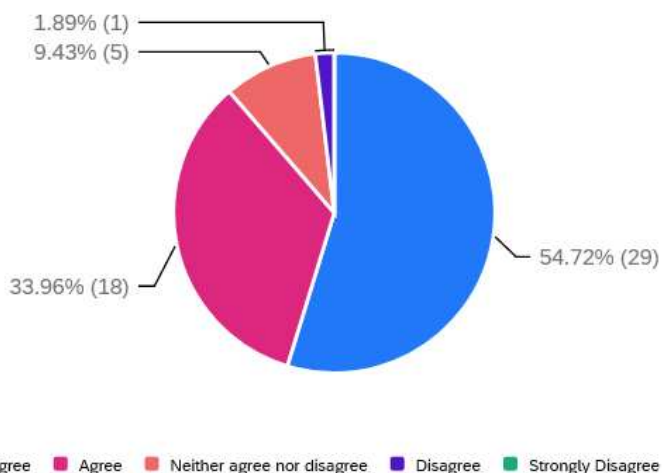Strongly Agree ■ Agree ■ Neither agree nor disagree ■ Disagree ■ Strongly Disagree

FIGURE 2: Pie chart of question 42. SPARK made me confident in my ability to teach in the future.
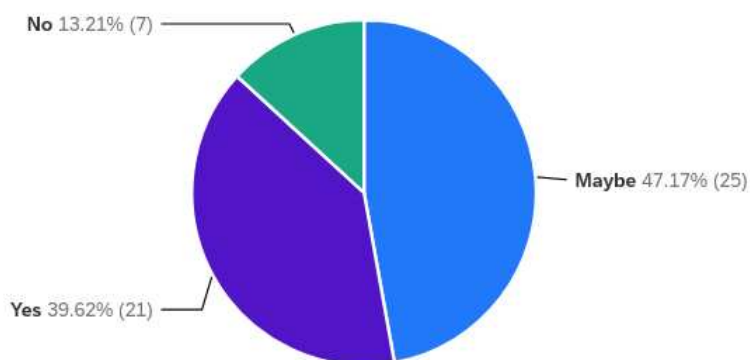
I am considering teaching German to non-native speakers



No 13.21% (7)
Maybe 47.17% (25)
Yes 39.62% (21)

FIGURE 3: Pie chart of likelihood to teach

# 4 Conclusion

Considering the dearth of research on SPARK program outcomes, this survey provides essential new insights. It is worth noting that for many participants, community engagement is central to the appeal of the SPARK program. Since survey participants' linguistic literacy in German varies widely, with 7.6% listing themselves as beginners, 30.2% as intermediate, 20.6% as advanced, and 18.9% as having native or near-native proficiency, the desire to connect with a broader community and the benefits thereof are paramount. Although possessing intermediate to advanced proficiency in German language (B1/B2) is preferred for students teaching in SPARK Labs, those with lower language proficiency' levels (A2.1, A2.2) have effectively assisted at some of the researchers' institutions. This approach offers notable advantages for college/university German programs, fostering a sense of community while exemplifying to students at all proficiency levels that they can

effectively apply classroom-acquired knowledge outside of class. This can in turn also serve to build enthusiasm to continue German beyond an institutional language requirement at a time when the number of college/university-level learners of German is decreasing in many places in the U.S. (see Lusin et al. 2023). Building a sense of belonging for college/university students has become a top educational priority in the U.S. since COVID and the youth mental health crisis caused in part by prolonged isolation and online teaching (see The U.S. Surgeon General's Advisory 2021, 2023). The SPARK program makes a significant contribution in building belonging, as well as toward the goals of boosting transferable skills and readying the next generation of German instructors to teach with an eye to diversity and transdisciplinarity. One student on the survey, for example, comments, "SPARK is a very interesting combination of community work and my own studies where aspects from one end improve the other. I gained a better understanding of my own skills while teaching and was more engaged in teaching as it was related to my studies." The emphasis on diversity and transdisciplinarity in the SPARK program offers two main benefits for the profession of teaching German: It allows students of German to develop enthusiasm in working with diverse groups of pupils (students K-12), and it gets more potential teachers into classrooms early. Ideally, this will inspire a generation of German teachers that better reflects the demographics of the American population.

It must be noted that the quantity and nature of SPARK student instructor preparation continues to vary immensely among programs. Among the four programs examined for this study, for instance, some student cohorts receive no general community engagement training, while others work through a rigorous college/university mandated CEL module that addresses such topics as how to support diverse populations and how community engaged teaching is fundamentally tied to civic citizenship. These variations also apply to the scope of language and pedagogical training. Some SPARK Labs only meet once or twice to discuss general approaches to teaching world languages before their teaching starts. In others, students meet weekly, discuss readings on teaching methods, attend GI professional development workshops, prepare detailed lesson plans, receive feedback on mini-demo-lessons, and/or get introduced to level-appropriate material that they try in class themselves. In addition, some SPARK Labs require student instructors to regularly reflect on their own performance, experience, and techniques. In some programs, student instructors are observed only once or twice per semester, while in others they teach alongside a professor as part of a mentor-student team where there is constant feedback. In some, students adhere very closely to the GI curricula, while other SPARK Labs largely create their own materials. It further needs to be noted here that some SPARK Labs consist primarily of students who have decided on a teaching career and have taken teaching methodology courses, while others have students who see their German teaching as a complement to other career paths and have had no prior pedagogical training. As students are often participating in SPARK without having committed to a career teaching German and professors leading SPARK Labs are rarely compensated for this additional workload, the structural variations depend on such things as scheduling, course contact hours, institutional-level infrastructure, student teaching experience, and SPARK mentor availability. It remains a vital asset

of the SPARK for German network that each lab has the flexibility to adapt its offerings to its own context and needs. Within the wider framework of German language instruction in the U.S., this survey about SPARK outcomes underscores the need for further data collection and analysis to strengthen the pipeline of both German students and educators. Amidst a large-scale trend of declining German programs in secondary schools as well as colleges and universities, the structural and institutional challenges related to teacher training programs are frustrating. Yet, possibly in part because of SPARK participation, the institutions involved in this study that currently do not offer teacher training are considering reviving it. Future work measuring what impact students' participation in the SPARK program may have had on seeking a career as a German teacher is desirable.

Looking ahead, there are several aspects of the SPARK model that are not addressed by this study, such as the significant and often undercompensated efforts required to establish and maintain these partnerships (see Baumgartner et al. 2022). Further research is certainly also needed on the learner outcomes, the types of CEL training, the pedagogical and didactic schooling that student instructors receive, and the long-term career development outcomes of student instructors. This case study including sample SPARK Lab profiles and outcomes offers a snapshot of the dynamic work that is taking place in SPARK Labs across a nation where the future of German study is at a pivotal crossroads. This initial glance at the student instructor outcomes of these SPARK Labs suggests both the achievements of these labs and areas for further development.

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# Zusammenfassung des Beitrags auf Deutsch

**„SPARK for German" – Ehrenamtliches Engagement und Lehrerfahrungsvermittlung im Fach Deutsch in den USA am Beispiel von vier "SPARK for German Labs"**

Das „**S**trukturierte **P**rogramm zum **A**ufbau von **R**essourcen und **K**ompetenzen für den DaF-Unterricht in den USA" (SPARK) ist ein seit 2019 bestehendes, gemeinsames Projekt der American Association of Teachers of German (AATG) und des Goethe-Instituts in Washington, das darauf zielt, die Zusammenarbeit zwischen Schulen und Hochschulen im Bereich DaF zu fördern. Hierbei geht es nicht nur allgemein darum, das Interesse an DaF in den USA zu stärken, sondern ein zentrales Anliegen von SPARK ist es, insbesondere Kindern, die im schulischen Umfeld noch keinen oder nur wenig Fremdsprachenunterricht erhalten, einen möglichst frühen Zugang zum Deutschlernen zu eröffnen. Um dieses Ziel erreichen zu können, bietet SPARK umfassende Qualifizierungsmaß-nahmen für zukünftige Deutschlehrer*innen an (z. B. Sprachkurse des Goethe-Instituts, Sommer-

akademien, pädagogisch ausgerichtete Seminare, usw.) und stellt darüber hinaus auch ein breites Spektrum an Ressourcen für die Unterrichtsplanung und -gestaltung bereit (vgl. SPARK for German [Deutsch] 2023). Letzteres umfasst eine Lernplattform mit altersspezifisch differenzierten Curricula samt dazugehörigen, didaktisch aufbereiteten Unterrichtsmaterialien wie *Deutsch mit Hans Hase, Felix und Franzi, Kinderuni, Junioruni*. Des Weiteren werden pädagogische Leitfäden und thematisch zusammengestellte Materialkisten für den Einsatz im Klassenzimmer bereitgestellt, und es gibt regelmäßige Workshop-Angebote, die den Austausch zwischen SPARK Labs fördern und dadurch auch zur landesweiten Vernetzung beitragen.

Die meisten der mehr als 130 über die gesamte USA verteilten SPARK Labs sind Deutsch-programmen an US-amerikanischen Hochschulen/Universitäten angegliedert und bieten Schulen im Primar- und Sekundarbereich, d. h. im amerikanischen Schulsystem Schüler*innen vom Kindergarten bis in die 12. Klasse (K-12), einen spielerisch gestalteten Deutschunterricht an, der darauf ausgerichtet ist, das Interesse an Deutsch zu wecken. Es ist dabei ein erklärtes Ziel, in allen Bereichen und auf allen Ebenen dieser Partnerschaften eine differenzierte Auseinandersetzung mit der deutschen Sprache und Kultur zu fördern. So ist es ebenfalls wichtig zu betonen, dass die SPARK-Partnerschaften zwischen Hochschulen und Schulen (K-12) primär durch das ehrenamtliche Engagement aller vor Ort Beteiligten zustande kommen und von diesen auch nachhaltig unterstützt und getragen werden.

In den meisten Fällen findet der durch SPARK Labs angebotene Deutschunterricht nicht als Teil des Regelunterrichts statt, sondern ist in das Nachmittagsprogramm der jeweiligen Schule (*After School Program/Enrichment Program*) integriert. Durch ihre ehrenamtliche Mitarbeit in einem SPARK Lab können Studierende Einblicke in den Arbeitsalltag von Lehrer*innen gewinnen und erste Unter-richtserfahrungen im Bereich DaF sammeln. Erklärtes Ziel für die Unterrichtsgestaltung ist hierbei, den Schüler*innen einen spielerischen Zugang zur deutschen Sprache und Kultur zu eröffnen. Die Organisation sowie die individuelle Unterrichtsgestaltung variieren je nach den vorhandenen Ressourcen der einzelnen SPARK Labs und dem lokalen Bedarf. Als gemeinsamer Nenner lässt sich jedoch feststellen, dass alle SPARK Labs darauf zielen, den Wert des frühen Erlernens von Fremdsprachen stärker ins Bewusstsein zu bringen und dabei gleichzeitig Studierende über die Unterrichtserfahrungen dafür zu sensibilisieren, eventuell eine Laufbahn als Deutsch-lehrer*in anzustreben.

Der Artikel zeigt, wie vier Deutschprogramme an US-amerikanischen Universitäten SPARK in ihren Lehrplan integrieren. Diese Deutschprogramme an der Montclair State University (New Jersey), der University of Chicago (Illinois), der University of St. Thomas (Minnesota) und der University of Tennessee, Knoxville unterscheiden sich in Bezug auf Umfang, Größe, regionales Umfeld und Bildungsmission erheblich, so dass anhand dieser Beispiele auch ein Querschnitt dessen vermittelt wird, wie unterschiedlich die angegliederten SPARK Labs gestaltet sein müssen, um Bedürfnissen vor Ort gerecht werden zu können. Im Herbst 2023 führten die in diesem Artikel vorgestellten SPARK Labs gemeinsam eine Umfrage unter Studierenden durch, die als studentische Lehrkraft in einem

dieser vier SPARK Labs mitgewirkt hatten. Insgesamt beteiligten sich 53 Studierende an der anonym durchgeführten Umfrage, in der Einstellungen und Wahrnehmungen in Bezug auf folgende Themenbereiche abgefragt wurden: (1) das Maß der Bereitschaft zu und die allgemeine Wertschätzung von ehrenamtlichem Engagement, (2) die Einschätzung dessen, ob SPARK zur eigenen berufsbezogenen Entwicklung beigetragen hat, (3) die Beurteilung dessen, ob SPARK neue Einsichten in Bezug auf die linguistische und kulturelle Vielfalt an Schulen vermittelt hat und (4) die Bewertung dessen, ob bzw. inwiefern die Lehrtätigkeit im SPARK Lab für die Entwicklung der eigenen pädagogischen Einsichten und Fähigkeiten förderlich ist bzw. war. Die Umfrageergebnisse zeigen, dass die Mehrheit der Befragten eine positive Bilanz in Bezug auf die ehrenamtliche Tätigkeit im Rahmen von SPARK zieht. Genannt wurde unter anderem, dass die Mitarbeit im SPARK Lab Einsichten und Erfahrungen vermittelt hat, die für die Entwicklung der eigenen beruflichen Interessen von Vorteil sind. Weiter zeigen die Umfrageergebnisse, dass die Mitarbeit in einem SPARK Lab für die an Schulen vorhandene linguistische und kulturelle Vielfalt sensibilisiert, und dass die Teamarbeit im SPARK Lab auch im zwischenmenschlichen Bereich zu wertvollen neuen Erkenntnissen geführt hat. Die Umfrageergebnisse betonen ferner den Beitrag, den die SPARK Labs bei der Vertiefung von Schlüsselkompetenzen wie z. B. Team- und Kommunikationsfähigkeit, Führungskompetenz und Empathie leisten. Die Befragten schätzten darüber hinaus die praktischen Erfahrungen, die sie durch ihre selbständige Lehrtätigkeit in den Partnerschulen der SPARK Labs sammeln konnten. Die Ergebnisse der Umfrage zeigen auch, dass einige der Studierenden, die zuvor kein Interesse an einer Laufbahn als Deutschlehrer*in zeigten, aufgrund der Erfahrungen im SPARK Lab anfangen, sich für diesen Beruf zu interessieren. In Anbetracht dessen, dass es derzeit in den USA einen Mangel an Deutschlehrer*innen gibt und dies zur Schließung mancher Deutschprogramme beigetragen hat, ist gerade dies eine beachtenswerte Feststellung (vgl. Kissau 2020).

Die hier vorgestellten Umfrageergebnisse schärfen auch den Blick dafür, dass es notwendig ist, weitere Daten zu sammeln, um genauer analysieren zu können, inwiefern die ehrenamtliche Mitarbeit in einem SPARK Lab konkret dazu beitragen kann, junge Menschen für die Möglichkeit einer Laufbahn als Deutschlehrer*in zu gewinnen. Auch erste Anzeichen dafür, dass SPARK dazu beitragen könnte, Deutschprogramme wiederzubeleben, die im Laufe der vergangenen Jahre abgebaut oder geschlossen wurden, sind derzeit zu anekdotenhaft, um daraus weiterführende Schlüsse ziehen zu können. Um diesbezüglich konkrete Aussagen machen zu können, müssten zuerst belastbare Daten gesammelt und analysiert werden. Ein weiteres Augenmerk sollte darauf gelegt werden, die langfristigen Auswirkungen der durch die Leitung eines SPARK Lab entstehenden zusätzlichen Arbeitsbelastung besser einschätzen und verstehen zu lernen, um dann auf dieser Basis konkrete Empfehlungen für eine adäquate Kompensation und/oder einen angemessenen Arbeitsausgleich aussprechen zu können. Insgesamt deuten die Ergebnisse der Umfrage darauf hin, dass „SPARK for German" in vielen Bereichen, die für den Deutschunterricht an Schulen in den USA von Relevanz sind, einen positiven Beitrag leistet und dass dieses Programm, das sich flächendeckend über die gesamten USA erstreckt, auch das Potential in sich birgt, Studierende für das

Lehramt im Fach Deutsch zu gewinnen. Besonders die Betonung von Flexibilität, Vielfalt und Transdisziplinarität, worauf bei SPARK sehr viel Wert gelegt wird, unterstützt die nächste Generation von Deutschlehrer*innen darin, wichtige Schlüsselkompetenzen zu entwickeln, die angesichts der Herausforderungen ihres zukünftigen Berufslebens sicherlich von unschätzbarem Wert sind.

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**Angaben zur Person:** Pascale LaFountain promovierte in Germanistik über Theater im 18. Jahrhundert an der Harvard Universität und arbeitet seit 2011 als Associate Professor of German and French an der Montclair State University in New Jersey. Sie ist die Autorin eines Buches und zahlreicher Artikel, darunter die kürzlich erschienenen Studien "Decolonizing German from the Bottom Up" (MLN 2023) und "Prioritizing Diversity in an Elementary School - University SPARK Teaching Partnership" (Unterrichtspraxis 2023).

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