

## National Report Austria

### 1.1.National Context of Education in relation to PLCs and Internship

Teacher students at the University of Teacher Education Vorarlberg have to attend five courses of internship-training during their studies. In the second and third semester of their bachelor Studies they attend a so called „Tagespraktikum“ (Daily Internship), during which they participate at schools one day each week, observe teaching lessons and teach an increasing amount of lessons themselves. During this Daily Internship the students are being observed by a professional teacher (mentor) and a university professor. Furthermore, they have to attend classes on didactics, analysing and reflecting the internship.

In the fourth and fifth semester they attend a so called „Blockpraktikum“ (Block Internship) for four weeks each, where they teach independently under observation of a mentor at the school and a university professor.

In the eighth and last semester of their Bachelor Studies they carry out a project in a content field they are specialised in (e.g. Inclusive Education, Natural Sciences, Theatre ect.).

Until today, student teacher PLCs are not part of the curriculum of the internship training but will.

### 1.2.Methods

We asked

- Teacher Trainers/University Professors (n=17)
- Student Teachers (n=38)
- Mentors (n=8)
- Head Teachers (n=4)
- Teachers (n=7)

with specially developed Questionnaires and moreover did some interviews with professors and students at the University of Teacher Education Vorarlberg.

The teacher trainers/university professors are all members of the Institute of Primary Education at the University of Teacher Education in Vorarlberg, they are a representative sample of the college.

The questioned students represent a whole age group, they have recently finished their Bachelor Studies and are at present in the first semester of their Master Studies.

The questioned mentors attend an in-service training for mentors, where they learn about PLCs. They serve student teachers in their internship since many years.

The head teachers took all part in the Erasmus+ Project HeadsUp and are all familiar with the PLC-Concept.

The questioned teachers represent the college of a small Primary School in Vorarlberg.

### **1.3.Current status of Learning Opportunities for student teachers in the contexts of PLCs**

#### **1.3.1. Concepts of cooperation and learning communities etc.**

##### ***From the perspective of student teachers***

Asking student teachers about concepts of cooperation, 37 of 38 said, that they were taught cooperative learning concepts in at least one class during their Bachelor Studies. All of them are familiar with a big number of concepts (in total twenty seven were listed), mainly in the field of didactics, e.g. concepts which they can use in school to have pupils work cooperatively. Most frequently mentioned were Partner- and Teamwork, Placement, Marketplace, Fishbowl, Think-Pair-Share, Expert Talk, and others. No one knew PLCs.

##### ***From the perspective of mentors***

The 8 mentors we collected data from are attending an in-service training for mentors in which beneath other issues they get to know the PLC-Concept. Being asked which concepts of cooperative learning they are familiar with, 5 said PLCs (they are currently all working in a PLC!), 4 „Kollegiales Unterrichtscoaching“ (collegial teaching advice). Other concepts they are familiar with are Partner-, Group Work (4 each) and a few numbers of additional didactical approaches.

##### ***From the perspective of teacher trainers/university professors***

11 professors who teach in Primary Bachelor Studies said that in at least 1 of their courses cooperative Learning- and Working Concepts are taught or made a subject of discussion. A more detailed examination of the answers shows a wide variety of Cooperative Learning Concepts being taught, but they are mostly in the field of didactic approaches and are meant for student teachers to work with at school: Partner and Group Work, Partner and Group Puzzle, Placement, Think-Pair-Share, Cooperative Games and many others (in total 19). Only one colleague mentioned PLCs. Item 2 of the Questionnaire filled in by the colleagues, asking “Which concepts of cooperative learning do you personally know?”, brought similar findings: only 3 of 17 mentioned PLCs.

#### **1.3.2. What is being practiced in different levels?**

In our data collection we only asked the mentors on their practical experiences with concepts on collaborative learning.

##### ***From the perspective of student teachers***

N/A

##### ***From the perspective of mentors***

Mentors report, that student teachers they work with have only little competence and knowledge in the field of cooperative learning and working concepts.

##### ***From the perspective of heads***

N/A

##### ***From the perspective of teacher trainers/university professors***

N/A

#### **1.3.3. Benefits they see**

##### ***From the perspective of student teachers***

All student teachers agreed that one can benefit a lot from cooperative learning- and working concepts. First of all, they find it important to get to know many of them in order to improve their teaching skills. Furthermore, they pointed out, that the most beneficial aspects are: working together, having success, sharing workload, finding different solutions, being more motivated, sharing experiences, finding friends (!).

***From the perspective of mentors***

Mentors find cooperative learning concepts beneficially for some reasons: getting to know different didactical approaches, new experiences, share workload, exchange of problem-solving strategies.

***From the perspective of heads***

N/A

***From the perspective of teacher trainers/university professors***

All Teacher Trainers agreed that it is important, that student teachers get to know cooperative learning concepts during their studies and all of them encourage their students to work and learn cooperatively. The main benefits they see are: students get familiar with these concepts and will work with them in schools when they have finished their studies, they will gain and strengthen personal, methodological, democratic and social competencies, they will benefit from the support cooperative learning approaches give, learning cooperatively makes more fun and is more effective, they can practice cooperation and communication and last but not least it strengthens their competencies in social learning.

1.3.4. Obstacles/difficulties they see/encounter

***From the perspective of student teachers***

The biggest difficulties the student teachers have/had with cooperative learning groups are: finding a place and a common date to perform the group work, time-consuming, unstructured work, difficulties to bring many different point of views together, differently motivated participants, some benefit from others work, while participating only little.

***From the perspective of mentors***

The main difficulties mentors see are: finding time to get together, coping with/accept different points of views.

***From the perspective of teacher trainers/university professors***

7 colleagues found that there were no difficulties, the others didn't find much. The most frequent concerns were: some of the students do not work properly but benefit from the others work, working in cooperative learning groups is very time-consuming, important preconditions such as trust, knowing each other etc. are not always given

1.3.5. What are the needs, what would they like to have in the future to improve their learning opportunities in PLCs

***From the perspective of student teachers***

Fixed framework and structure of their work, professional coaching, clearly defined aims, time and space to meet and work together.

***From the perspective of mentors***

Clearly defined aims, ability to work in a team, willingness to compromise, be able to communicate properly.

### *From the perspective of teacher trainers/university professors*

Having enough time, having suitable premises and sufficient resources.

\*\*\*\*\*

#### **1.4. Summary and Overall Discussion**

Austrian student teachers get to know a great variety of Collaborative Learning- and Working Concepts during their Bachelor Studies – in total more than 25. They are mainly taught on them during classes accompanying their internship training or in seminars on methodological and didactical issues. They are mainly used as didactical means in order to make pupils work and learn cooperatively.

All student teachers appreciate Cooperative Learning, they believe that it is important, that they know different concepts for better and more effective teaching.

The students also point out that they benefit from working in Cooperative Learning- and Working Groups. Approximately 33% of them works constantly since a longer time in at least one student teacher group. They deal with topics related to their studies, prepare for tests or write papers etc. or with topics related to their work as teachers (most of the students work at least a couple of hours at schools. Beneath content-oriented profit (better academic success, less work etc.) they benefit in terms of increasing their personal and professional competencies and they get in contact with other students.

None of the student teachers is familiar with the PLC-Concept!

More than 60% of the questioned university professors state that they teach Cooperative Learning Concepts in their seminars, mainly as a method of teaching in schools, to make students work with such concepts in their internship training and are familiar when they start working at school. All of them said that they encourage students to work in Cooperative Learning Groups in order to increase their academic progress and their personal development in terms of self-, methodical, democratic and personal competencies.

Only a few of them is familiar with the PLC Concept.

The knowledge and the use of Cooperative Work arrangements in schools, especially in the field of school development, is rather poor. Teachers and mentors use Cooperative Learning and Working mainly as teaching methods in their classes but not for joined professionalization. They do not know many concepts for adult learning and so they find that student teachers they work with are not very good at cooperative learning. Nevertheless, they find them beneficiary for some reasons (didactical approaches, new experiences, share workload, exchange of problem solving strategies).

Cooperative Learning and Working is an extraordinary time-consuming method. This is the consistent statement and concern of all asked persons. It needs some preconditions (personal and structural) such as trust, motivation, clearly defined aims and support.

Simultaneously all agree that it can be extremely beneficial for all persons involved and produce very good results.

#### **1.5. Implications and suggestions**

The Teacher Studies (Bachelor and Master) at the University of Teacher Education Vorarlberg seems to provide a sufficient amount of Cooperative Learning- and Working Concepts to the students in terms of didactical and methodical approaches for good teaching at schools. On the other hand, nearly no ambitious concept like PLCs and others who are a means of

professional or school development play any considerable role in the Teacher Students Training.

School development plays an important role in schools in Vorarlberg but the possibility to do school development with Cooperative Approaches like PLCs is not exploited

In order to change this situation already student teachers have to get to know PLC-Work intensively and accurately during their studies. Lecturers have to make them work in student teacher PLCs and to support them in any way.

The PLC-Concept has to be – if somehow possible – compulsory and thus part of the curriculum so that students become familiar with it and try it out and work with it at least during their internship. This could have a great impact to the schools as from now on better-educated young teachers could be multipliers and bring PLC-Work into schools and foster school development.

On the other hand it seems to be absolutely necessary to make an increasing number of Head Teachers familiar with the PLC-Concept (or similar ones), train them in any aspect of PLC-Work as good as possible and encouraging them to implement PLCs at their schools and to support them as much as needed. That way student teachers meet teachers with the same competences on group oriented learning and development when they start working at school.