

National Report Norway

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

In Norway there are regulations demanding that “All school staff must take an active part in the professional learning ecommunity to develop the school.” (regulations for the Education Act). And teacher team has been well established as an organisational structure in Norwegian schools for many years before PLC was presented.

PLC is not mentioned in the national framework for any of the programmes for teacher, even though teacher-students have at least 120 days with practice (school-practicum) in schools. Teacher education in Norway constitutes a 5-year Master’s degree, and there are different Teacher Education Programmes, and each program has its own national frameworks that are statutory. I.g: for Years 1–7, Years 5–10, Years 8-13 and for Vocational Teacher Education. is also opportunity for one-year teacher training program (PPU) that builds on a previous master degree in school related subjects, and there are programmes for vocational teachers education.

In a larger research report from NIFU, which contains several contributions on the quality of Norwegian higher education, reference is made to that student-active learning forms – like R&D- work, case-based learning and exploratory learning - are especially useful for engaging, helping active students and stimulating in-depth learning (Damsa et al., 2015). Furthermore, it appears that student active learning forms are not used a lot, while plenary lectures and traditional Exam forms dominate.

Although collaboration between teacher students is relatively common in Norway, the use of the term PLC is not very common. There are though promising results of a student program at North University, where students in their last year support first year students, a kind of student-active learning form Supplemental Instruction (SI). SI is a voluntary offer of academic support led by students themselves (Helde & Suzen, 2019). The main component of SI is an informal collaborative learning environment under the guidance of a student who has recently graduated in the relevant subject. The main function of the SI leader is to “... facilitate discussions among SI participants and model successful learning strategies at key moments in the SI sessions” (The Center of Academic Development, 2006, p. 10). Still, the SI does not focusing on the core content of their carrier – teaching, so for the students participating in TePinTeach at NTNU it’s a new experience.

1.2. Methods

We asked

- Teacher-Student (n=6)
- Principals. (n=17)

1.2.1. Teacher-students

The teacher-students were asked both before and after being a part of a student PLC, and used the interview guide developed by TePinTeach when we asked them about their experiences with PLCs. The students answered individually. The students were all in their last year of education before becoming teachers. The students are all joining The Teacher Education Programme (PPU). PPU gives qualifications for work as a teacher in upper primary and lower secondary school (grades 5 - 13 in the Norwegian school system) as well as in adult education. The two major components of the program are classroom practice and educational and didactic theory. The students interviewed are all studying Biology Didactics.

1.2.2. Principals

We have also gathered information from a principal PLC, all from parentship schools, where student-teachers have their practice. They have described how they experience their schools as a PLC.

1.3. Current status of learning opportunities for student-teachers in the contexts of PLCs

1.3.1. Concepts of cooperation, learning communities etc

From the perspectives of student-teachers

In the interview the students gave examples of various ways of collaboration, but they have not heard about PLCs before. They have all collaborated extensively with others during the studies, both in group assignments as well as in more informal colloquium groups. One is telling about how they collaborate in in Biology by working in pairs when they are having practice in the school, and how she sees this as important due to becoming a teacher. She says:

In many schools, it is common to have professional groups working together on educational programs, so the experience of couples practice may come in handy as a future teacher. Especially because couple practice took place in a group of two teacher students and one who has worked as a teacher for several years, in a relevant subject.

They also work in groups when they are doing their R&D assignment (mandatory group assignment included as 1/3 of their grade), and collaborative learning is emphasized. As a part of the R&D assignment, the students have to read theory about collaborative learning, they attend a lecture, and write an essay about how they have collaborated during the R&D assignment. But it's not structured like a PLC, and there aren't any university staff s attending meetings in order to support them in developing the collaboration.

From the perspectives of principals

The principals all report that their teachers collaborate in teachers' teams as common in Norwegian schools and feel a collective responsibility for all students learning and development. School development is a familiar term in the schools.

Some of the schools have structured PLCs, but the teacher students are not a natural part of the PLCs when they have their practice. There are some teams at some of the schools that have given students the opportunity to participate as observers in PLC groups. The students find it interesting to observe what life-long learning can look like.

1.3.2. Benefits they see

From the perspectives of student-teachers

Very often the collaboration is about writing texts. They distribute the texts to each other and then everyone is given responsibility for giving feedback. They also work together when creating reports or other assignments given as a part of their requirement in the studies. The students value collaboration. One says:

Collaboration has had a lot to say for my competence, as discussing subjects and practicing explaining it to others is a good way to learn. Especially the latter has probably been a good exercise with regard to becoming a teacher, although this has not been the real purpose.

From the perspectives of principals

Teachers learn by and of each other, there is all lot of sharing of both practice and materials, but unfortunate teacher-students is not a part of this learning .

The principals feel that their own role as facilitator is important in order to promote learning among the teachers.

1.3.3. Obstacles/difficulties they see/encounter

From the perspectives of student-teachers

The groups are very much left alone with no support of teacher educators or others, and whether the collaboration is function or not depends on the communication and relation between the members. One says:

The collaborations I've been part of have sometimes consisted of people with very different involvement and lack of good communication. I would say it is these two factors that have had the most negative impact on the group

Some of them have also participated in a University program called Experts in Teamwork (EiT), EiT is a master's degree course in which students develop their interdisciplinary teamwork skills. The course is compulsory in some master's programmes and programmes of professional study at NTNU. They have different experienced with the EiT, the difference seems to lie in whether the collaboration within the group functioned or not. One says:

Most collaborative experiences are positive, but sometimes you do not quite fit in with the partners or have completely different ideas about goals and then the collaboration process becomes very tiring with little positive feelings involved.

Most of their experiences seems to rely on the communication and the relation between the students that are in the same group. Another one states:

Generally, I have had very positive collaborative experiences, with one major exception. The big exception was EiT, which is a subject intended to develop and assess the ability of collaboration. Here I experienced working with a very poorly composed group that did not work together at all, this was extremely frustrating along the way and the result was then as well.

From the perspectives of principals

Teacher-students are not in school in a regular basis, and are not a part of a specific team. It need fassilitation f teacher students are to be a part of teachers PLCs.

What are the requirements to improve their learning opportunities in PLCs

From the perspectives of student-teachers

Most of the student teachers experiences with collaboration is connected to giving feedback, how to organize groupwork, and planning practice. They find it useful to work with feedback, as they have gained some insight into how to guide students on how to organize the group work.

The interview indicates that they lack experiences about how to deal with issues like misleading communication and bad relations among the group members. They lack experiences with being a part of a PLC, so they are not able to articulate any needs about learning opportunities in future PLCs.

From the perspectives of principals

The question they raise is whether they go into the depths of evaluating the relation between teaching and students learning.

1.4. Summary and Overall Discussion

The students have opportunities to collaborate with other students, as there are a lot of tasks and assignments that they are supposed to do in groups. During their teacher education programme the student teachers have “couple-practices” (two and two students work together in practice) and work closely throughout the period, they plan lessons together, and run them together. They discuss the subjects and help each other understand difficult things while working in groups. They also collaborate on different assignments.

Even though there are opportunities to collaborate, some of the teacher’s students say that they have experienced that communication and motivation are crucial to good collaboration. How the groups are put together may be random, and there is not always a good group composition, so it has been challenging in some cases. They also state that low motivation and poor communication gives little involvement, and this affects the results.

1.5. Implications and Suggestions

Most of the group work is connected to academic tasks, but they also collaborate about their R&D task, which is directly of groupwork connected to develop as a teacher. The students acknowledge the benefits and effects of collaboration, so the thought of a student PLC is promising, but in the beginning, it should be supported by university teachers or other facilitators. In a student PLC they are all at “the same” level, as they all are teacher-students, in a teacher PLC there will be a variation, as more experienced teachers, expert teachers will join together with the novice teachers. International research shows that expert-teachers’ is important in order to support the improvement of novice-teachers’ teaching (Jin, Meirink, van der Want, & Admiraal, 2019). On the other side novice teachers contribute with their fresh new eyes, new ideas and competence in the teachers PLC. In the student PLC the facilitators can take this role, and they can provide a structure and can model interaction about how to give and take feedback, and how to participate in a learning conversation.

Most group work are connected to academic tasks, but they also collaborate about their R&D task, which is directly connected to develop as a teacher. But they don’t collaborate with experienced teachers in their R&D, still there are lack of opportunities to be a part of a PLC focusing on the core business of teaching – student learning and development.

By being in a student PLC, the student could experience the contribution of a PLC, what significance it had for their own development as teachers. They pointed out that being able to discuss the lesson plans with others gave them many ideas to develop and improve their own lesson plans. Their peers contributed with an external look, they were asked challenging questions that invited to reflection, and they had to critique and inquire into their peers lesson plans, which also lead to reflection of their own plans.

At last – even though it’s a small sample of data, there are indications that there is a need to focus better on communication in the collaboration, both for the sake of relations, but also in the case of being a reflective learner.

References

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