

Chapter 45

The “Co–Creation–Wheel”: A Guiding Instrument for Sustainable Change – A Case History of “Communities of Practice” in Dutch Elementary Schools

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ABSTRACT

This case history reflects on a long-term change and development project in the Netherlands, undertaken in communities of practice (CoP) of 20-36 professional development schools for primary education. The initiators were 10 boards of groups of elementary schools and the University for Teacher Education for primary education. The project leader was Dr. Paul Hennissen, and Dr. Corry Ehlen of CoCreatia Consulting and Research was invited as external consultant. For 8 years, several methods of in-service quality improvement were used to strengthen the self-management ability of teachers, teams, and head teachers. The case history especially demonstrates the application of “Co-Creation-Wheel” as a guiding tool in an innovation team. This instrument stimulates the individual CoP members and the CoP as a group to co-creative innovation. The digital tool of “Co-Creation-Wheel” proves to be suitable for a bigger number of participants. Complexities of the project and success factors are shown.

INTRODUCTION

The project ‘CoPs in PLCs’ (Communities of Practice in Professional Learning Communities) was started in Limburg, the Netherlands, in 2010. The initiators were cooperating partners, consisting of 10 Executive Boards of groups of primary schools, 36 in total, and the Primary Teacher Training College ‘De Nieuwste Pabo’. It was a public-public cooperation, partly funded by the National Government, in which, from 2015, CoCreatia Consultancy and Research was a private partner.

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The project was carried out in South and Middle Limburg, two Dutch regions with a total of 900,000 inhabitants, 250 primary schools and one Primary Teacher College. The expected product of the project was an improvement of primary education and of learning outcomes through in-service quality improvement of teachers, staff, management and organization. To manage this project a research centre ‘School-Based Teacher Education’ was set up, with Professor dr. Paul Hennissen as project leader.

Urgency, Goal, Method

There was a clear *urgency*. Research had shown that current and future teachers become better professionals if professionalization takes place at the workplace (Hennissen, 2011). Studies (Timperley et al., 2007; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) have demonstrated that CoPs of future teachers and their educators, collectively reflecting on their work, have a positive influence on:

- Professional development of teachers: they learn about their own actions as a teacher and their views in dialogues with colleagues.
- School development: schools increase their ability to make policy and to be innovative. They become a PLC that optimally supports CoPs.
- Closing the gap between theory and practice: research and reflection is directly linked to specific work situations.

The *goal* of this project was to train current and future teachers of primary education to cooperate in communities. The training was aimed at cooperation at two levels: in the school as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) (Mitchell & Sackney, 2002; Verbiest, 2011), and in a Community of Practice (CoP) (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002) consisting of teachers, student teachers and the university teacher educator of the student teachers of the primary schools.

The CoP *method* of working in this project is based on research on professionalization (Hennissen, 2011), showing that schools must take ownership of the content of research and must choose themes that have maximum support from the members in the CoP, who in this way guide their own learning process. The project was supported by a scientific model supplied by Hennissen. The head teachers of the schools supported the project providing a good structure and ensuring a learning culture with shared leadership.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As a theoretical basis for this project a framework on the coherence of personal, interpersonal and organizational capacities (Figure 1) in the school as an organization was used (Mitchell & Sackney, 2011). This was the focus of the research centre for the support and research of the CoPs and PLCs in the primary schools.

Explanation: The individual capacity of the teacher, consisting of the ability to reflect and to make use of up-to-date knowledge, supports the pupil. The interpersonal capacity within the team, consisting of the ability to learn from each other and to share a common vision on learning and teaching, promotes the quality of the collective learning. Learning together within a CoP is part of this interpersonal capacity. The organizational capacity to support personal and interpersonal capacities consists of creating the right atmosphere (culture), organizing consultation classes (structure) and shared leadership (Verbiest,

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