

Erasmus + KA2 strategic partnership 2014-1-BE02-KA201-000432


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Word from the coordinator: Catholic Education Flanders – Belgium (Rik Vanderhauwaert)

Six European partners in the Erasmus+ KA2 project Linpilcare have been working for over three years on how to link results of practitioner inquiry with results of relevant academic research by using effective professional learning communities.

The partners have worked on the pillars of practitioner inquiry, professional learning communities and the ease of access to relevant results of academic research. The consortium has developed a frame of reference 'thinking through practice', 78 tools to support the frame of reference, run local & international courses and 2 international conferences.

At this moment, the project is ending and we are already preparing the further dissemination of the results of this exciting project. In this newsletter you can read how the partners finished the project and what they are planning after the lifetime of Linpilcare.

As project coordinator, I should like to invite you to attend the third international course on the content of Linpilcare. This course will be organized for the 3rd time from the 13th-17 November 2018 in Malaga, Spain. You can find all information about this course on www.linpilcare.eu or on <http://int.nascholing.be>

My thanks are extended to all the consortium partners and I am looking forward to meeting you on our international course in Malaga.

Estonian Experience in Linpilcare Project

University of Tartu – Estonia (Anita Kärner)

It has been nearly three years since the partner schools in the Linpilcare project have been actively cooperating. Initially, we met with each professional learning community as it was necessary to discuss topics regarding the aims of the project and their future inquiries. Altogether, there have been twenty-five Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings held at schools. In addition, five training days for all the schools together were carried out. Training introduced the conceptual framework (CFR): ‘thinking through practice’ and teachers tried and tested the tools of the project. At the final meeting, a whole module was tried out. Venues for the training events were in partner schools which enabled colleagues to see innovative activities “in the field”. The principles and ideas of Linpilcare have been separately introduced to the staff of the department of general education, at the Ministry of Education and Science. We also presented the project and its results to educators in several parts of the country.

As a partner of the Linpilcare consortium, we have participated in every activity of the project, from compiling the CFR to developing tools and in the translation of the materials developed by other partners into Estonian. Tartu hosted the first international conference of the project. In the multinational company of teachers, many local teachers benefitted from the talks and sessions. A number of Estonian educators also participated as learners in the two Linpilcare training weeks held in cooperation in Tartu. Significantly, they regarded the experience as really useful developmental process.

Although various collaboration and counselling methods collected in the project were familiar to many participants earlier, now they were seen from different angles and new contexts. The most innovative part for our PLCs was the teacher inquiry. Particularly, the part that inquiry, its interpretation and continuing professional development plays in one’s practice. In doing so, it emerged that improvement together with sharing within in the PLC largely depends on the interest and attitude of the school leaders. Some of the teachers’ practice inquiry was conducted in a number of schools, some within the framework of Linpilcare project, some supported by another international or local project. Participation in projects is a wonderful motivator in order to analyse one’s practice, share it with colleagues and to improve both teaching and studying, thus helping to find the way forward. One of the signposts that encourages teachers on this way is Nancy Dana’s book “Digging deeper into practitioner inquiry”, („Süvitsi tegevusuuringust. Uuriva õpetaja käsiraamat“ in Estonian, translated by Aet Sarv, edited by Anita Kärner), something that is already actively used by students of the teacher training in our universities.

In pictures, trainers Anita Kärner and Aet Sarv at the PLC training of partner schools; and the cover of the Estonian translation of Nancy Dana’s book.



Certifying in-service training courses **AlmadaForma – Portugal (Cristina Loureiro Santos)**

A new paradigm has been established for the system of continuous training in Portugal. Aimed at improving the quality of teachers' performance, the focus was on the priorities of the training system identified by schools and on the professional development of teachers. The aim was to ensure that training improved the quality of education and articulated with the objectives of local and national educational policies. In this perspective, the analysis of training needs, focused upon the identification of short-term priorities, constituted the central axis of the design of annual or multi-annual training plans. These are based on the results of school evaluation and the development needs of their teachers. It is necessary to strengthen the resources of training within the schools themselves and the production of quality training responses based on the identified priorities. In this context, not only is the experience and diversity of existing resources mobilized but also the significant improvement in the critical mass created by the increased number of qualified trainers in the schools. The professional value gained by teachers through continuing training demands the concerted efforts of all stakeholders with an emphasis on the establishment of partnerships both national and international.

Within this framework, not only training institutions, but also higher education institutions, training centres for non-profit professional or scientific associations, the central services of the Ministry of Education, as well as other public entities, private or non-profit-making cooperatives accredited for this purpose will benefit. The approval and certification of training courses is the responsibility of the Scientific-Pedagogical Council of Continuing Training and processed according to their own guidelines and rules.

Rounding up this PLC year in the Netherlands

Fontys – The Netherlands (Rutger van de Sande)

Over the last few months, the PLCs that were established in the Netherlands during project Linpilcare, have rounded up their activities. Participating teachers have presented their work and reflected on the process during several plenary sessions. Over the course of the Linpilcare project, teachers (mostly science and mathematics) from almost twenty secondary schools were actively involved in participating in PLCs that were facilitated by teacher educators from Fontys University of Applied Sciences.



However, the end of project Linpilcare doesn't mean that all these teachers will stop working as PLCs all together. In fact, new plans have already been made by some participating teachers to continue PLC work after the summer holidays. Building on what they have learned over the last few years will help them in making these initiatives successful.

The STEM Education Research Group from Fontys University (pictures included) that partners the Linpilcare project, has been making some plans in of its own to establish new PLCs with primary and secondary schools in the South of the Netherlands, and sometimes with the

participation of some technological companies in the 'Brainport' region. This will help all participants in developing their own teaching and understanding of educational practice, but also in making STEM education more meaningful and more relevant for all students.

Teachers and school leaders who are interested in working with our research group in establishing effective and sustainable PLCs focusing on STEM related themes, can contact dr. Rutger van de Sande (rutger.vandesande@fontys.nl).

Spin-off Erasmus+ project of Linpilcare

Vzw Nascholing in het katholiek onderwijs Flanders – Belgium (Wim Peeters)

Based on the principles of Linpilcare an Erasmus+ project was proposed in Slovenia, by the University of Ljubljana. It is called "3 Dimensions of Inquiry in Physics Education" (3DPhyE). It starts on the 1st of September 2017.

The academic partners in the project will carry out research on how groups of teachers inquire into their practice (this is the link with Linpilcare). Partners are from Ireland (DCU), Poland (U. Krakow), Belgium (Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen and two university colleges) and Slovenia (U. Ljubljana, coordinator, and ZRSS). During one of the trainings sessions, we will invite Linpilcare partners with experience in the field of physics, to contribute.

Linpilcare at the International conference of research in physics education (GIREP) in Dublin

This one week conference was held during July 2017 with almost 300 participants from more than 40 countries in attendance. On the Tuesday of the conference, teachers were in focus. Wim Peeters gave 3 workshops that reflected the international course given in Tartu. He aimed mainly at the practitioner inquiry section but also gave information on the other pillars identified on the Linpilcare website. Participants from Scotland, England and Ireland, in particular, showed very high interest with some regarding Linpilcare as a model of best practice to reflect upon. (www.girep2017.org, please look at the programme for Tuesday)

Linpilcare: from Flanders to Ecuador

In Flanders, the Linpilcare project has been presented to numerous groups of stakeholders, which includes heads of schools, teacher educators and teachers. Also in the pedagogical services the idea has spread widely. In view of a collaboration project with teacher education organisations in Ecuador, a colleague suggested to develop a course on data as a tool for reflection for future teachers. This idea was accepted. Principles from Linpilcare will be taken and presented during the course that will take place in April 2018 in Ecuador. (<http://www.vvob.org.ec/sitio/nuestros-socios>, please look down the list to meet Katholiek Onderwijs Vlaanderen)

The overview of the activities in Linpilcare Slovenia

Zavod Republike Slovenije Za Šolstvo – National Education Institute - Slovenia (Barbara Lesničar)

In Slovenia, the National Education Institute (NEI) has cooperated with 21 kindergartens, lower and upper secondary schools. Each school was appointed a facilitator, a NEI consultant who helped school teams to establish their own professional learning community (PLC) and to find out about their professional development priorities. Finally they designed context specific research questions. Each PLC was different. At some schools they started on a really small scale, e.g. five teachers collaborating on a common research question, at others the whole staff room was involved.

The NEI supported PLCs by providing three full day training activities on practitioner inquiry, moderation skills, group processes and expert advice provided by facilitators.

Both the pace, as well as the extent of work in different environments, varied considerably. For example, one of the high school PLCs researched their own teaching practice within the Linpilcare project. Their focus was the homework in Maths, English and German classes. The main inquiry question was: 'How can changes in the instruction and feedback concerning students' homework encourage both the development of critical thinking with students as well as the increased responsibility for their own learning?' The PLC designed the questionnaire to check students' opinions about this topic at the beginning of the school year. Following the data they gathered, the PLC members changed their instruction and feedback strategies. The students were given differentiated homework; they also designed themselves (the students) the non-typical types of

homework and uploaded the material in the virtual classroom. On a weekly basis, and working collaboratively, they assessed each other's homework and gave feedback. This is how their creativity and critical thinking was encouraged.

The very final activity NEI organised for schools was a whole day gathering of all 21 PLCs, where each of them presented their work and explained how it was connected to the three pillars of the Linpilcare project. The meeting concluded with a round table discussion on how to continue the work and how to ensure that the two year endeavours were not going to fade away. Everybody agreed that this was one of the biggest challenges for the future.



As the project round up, NEI published the book, Teachers Inquirers of their own Practice which contains articles on Common Conceptual Framework of the project, Practitioner Inquiry, PLC, a selection of tools and case studies from five Slovenian partner schools.



Dene Magna School: Trialling the Professional Learning Community

Dene Magna School (Liane Pitcher-Leigh)

This is a shortened version: to read the full article please visit www.linpilcare.eu at Dene Magna's space.

At Dene Magna School, every member of the teaching staff is required to undertake their own practitioner inquiry each academic year. At the beginning of this process one of the issues we considered was that of support and decided to explore whether, and in what ways, using the construct of a PLC (professional learning community) might provide effective support to staff. We therefore created one small PLC group, with 7 members, to explore this question in our efforts to give greater coherence and structure to the process of inquiry.

In order to make some judgement about the efficacy of the PLC model that was adopted, all participants in the school-based Practitioner Inquiry initiative were surveyed at the start and end of the process, using a 5 point Likert scale model. Email responses were elicited from across the range of participants and also separately, with the group of educators who formed the PLC group. The PLC participants also identified themselves generically on the final survey, in order that tentative distinctions between them and the non-PLC participants could be made. Observations of department and PLC group meetings were conducted in order to ascertain whether there were any notable similarities or differences and also to judge whether any recommendations could be made on the basis of these findings.

Dana and Yendol-Hoppey (2015: 9) state that, when PLCs are well done, they allow teachers to work together effectively to try to make sense of some of the complex detail surrounding student learning. They offer PLCs as an effective, potentially transformational vehicle that allow teachers to create solutions where they might otherwise be mandated by those outside the classroom, or indeed outside the profession altogether. Although the case study undertaken by Dene Magna was small, the results certainly begin to corroborate this statement.

It would seem that the results of this small scale case study suggest that the thoughtful use of PLCs may provide significant support to those undertaking practitioner inquiry. During the course of the year in which Dene Magna trialled them it became clear that PLCs don't just enable teachers to share ideas and resources; they also signify, as Seashore, Anderson and Riedel suggest (2003: 3), the expectation of "a school-wide culture that makes collaboration expected, inclusive, genuine, ongoing, and focused on critically examining practice to improve student outcomes."

References:

Dana, N. F. and Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2015) *The PLC Book*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Seashore, K.R., Anderson, A.R. and Riedel, E. (2003) 'Implementing Arts for Academic Achievement: The Impact of Mental Models, Professional Community and Interdisciplinary Teaming'. Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement College of Education and Human Development University of Minnesota [Online], Available:

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