

Summary of the International Conference on Professional Learning Communities

The two-day conference held in German and English was moderated by Professor Dr. Katja Kansteiner (PH Weingarten) and Professor Dr. Peter Theurl (PH Vorarlberg). The participants – among them student teachers, teachers as well as school heads, school supervisors and members from different fields of advanced training reflected the implementation possibilities, modes of action, quality characteristics, fields of application and support needs of PLCs.

The consortium was pleased about the great international interest in the conference which was brought out as hybrid event addressing both, scientific and practical discourses. The versatile contributions offered not only broad information and exchange opportunities, but also opened up to discuss new ideas. The plenary contributions as well as two workshop strands could also be attended online. Prof. Dr. Eva Frick, Vice-Rector of the PH Vorarlberg, thanked the PH Weingarten for hosting the conference and praised the very successful cooperation of the international “TePinTeach” project consortium.

In their joint German-English presentation of the TePinTeach project, Katja Kansteiner and Peter Theurl made it clear that the internationally valued method of PLC is considering high potential for the learning of student teachers, too, and thus for school development as a whole, starting with contributions from universities. During the conference, teachers, pedagogical teams and school administrators presented their particular experiences with PLCs. Other contributions reflected on the use of PLCs in the second phase of teacher training in Germany and in advanced training. The use of PLCs as a professionalization format for lecturers was also discussed.

Professor Dr. Anne Berit Emstad from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, promoted a reflective learning culture in her opening lecture. Effective professional development should be understood as structured professional learning that leads to changes in teaching practices and improvements in pupils' learning outcomes. Key question in a teacher PLC, she said, must be: „Is the way we do things here working for our students?“ Therefore, PLCs can be described as communities of continuous questioning and improvement. This requires letting go of previous habits and beliefs.

Other international keynote presentations looked at PLC-related responsibilities and orchestrations at the individual school. To that end, Niels Anderegg researcher at the Pädagogische Hochschule Zürich presented principles of teacher leadership and showed the needs for coordination of activities and results of PLCs at the single school.

The Dutch school leaders Pierre van Meeuwen and Fred Huijboom reported from their dissertations and demonstrated qualities that teacher PLCs could achieve. These insights after a two-year period of research made chances visible as much a schallenges.

The Symposium on the TePinTeach project's research results and the student teachers' responds gave the chance to the members of the consortium to report highlights and challenges they experienced.

The Swedish lecturer, Anja Thorsten, finally presented the method of Learning Study, through which teachers reflect systematically on learning-oriented teaching and which can be combined with the method of a PLC.

Finally, many students of the University of Education Weingarten who attended parts of the sessions learned how such a conference can be part of their later activities to improve in their job in the field of personnel development.