

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


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Word from the coordinator:

Vzw Nascholing in het katholiek onderwijs Flanders – Belgium (Rik Vanderhauwaert)



Dear all,

After nearly three years of international collaboration with an outstanding international team, Linpilcare is at its final stage. We are proud to announce that the project team will realise all its objectives. As you know, Linpilcare works on the link between practitioner inquiry and relevant results of academic research by using effective professional learning communities.

The consortium has created a frame of thinking called 'thinking through practice'. 'Thinking through practice' is an open educational resource available in English, Estonian, Dutch, Portuguese and Slovenian. Please have a look at www.linpilcare.eu

The consortium will provide 78 tools (protocols, materials, case studies). We are working on the last tools and they will also be available as open education resource in English, Estonian, Dutch, Portuguese and Slovenian. Have a look at www.linpilcare.eu

The consortium has created national professional learning on the content of Linpilcare. We have also held 1 international conference and two international courses at the University of Tartu in Estonia. Further on in this newsletter, you can find a report of the second international course.

We invite you to attend the closing conference of Linpilcare in the wonderful city of Ljubljana (Slovenia) from Thursday the 24th until the Saturday the 26th of August. You can find all relevant information at www.linpilcare.eu.

If August is not suitable for you, we invite you to our third international course in the centre of Malaga (Spain) from Monday the 20th of November until Friday the 24th of November. Also here is all relevant information available at www.linpilcare.eu

Thanks to all partners for the splendid collaboration: we are looking forward to meeting you in Ljubljana or Malaga.

Rik Vanderhauwaert, coordinator of Linpilcare

The second international course in Tartu Estonia focused on the three pillars of Linpilcare namely: professional learning communities, practitioner inquiry and easy access to relevant results of academic research. Below is a report of the activities during the course.

1. PLC

Vzw PBDKO Catholic Education Flanders – Belgium (Rik Vanderhauwaert) and Fontys – The Netherlands (Rutger van de Sande)

Linpilcare defines a PLC as ‘A place where teachers inquire together into how to improve their practices in areas of importance to them, and then implement what they learned to make it happen.’ (Hord 1997). During this second international course on the content of Linpilcare participants learned about an effective professional learning community (PLC) and established a real PLC.

To do this, we used the insights on PLCs described in the Linpilcare frame of thinking: ‘learning through practice’ in combination with the tools that support ‘learning through practice’.

We worked as followed:

To start, participants mapped their prior knowledge. Therefore they used three protocols:

1. The block party, to challenge their thinking on PLCs;
2. Attributes of a learning community, to describe a place of positive learning for them and to derive attributes of an effective PLC;
3. Ground rules, to make a list of shared values and norms that the group needed in order to collaborate within the PLC.

After participants had mapped their prior knowledge, we delved deeper into the principles of PLCs by using:

4. The survey on professional learning communities in combination with the consensogram protocol.

By using these tools participants reflected on:

- Critical elements to create a PLC such as:
 - Reflective dialogue, de-privatization of practice, collective focus on student learning, collaboration & shared norms and values;
- Human resources to create a PLC such as:
 - Openness, trust and respect, cognitive and skill based, supportive leadership, socialization;
- Structural conditions to create a PLC such as:
 - Time, physical proximity, interdependent teaching roles, communication structures & teacher empowerment within school autonomy.

Further on participants delved theoretical deeper into the theme of effective PLCs using:

5. Theoretical principles on effective PLC's:

Participants discovered:

- The principles of effective professional learning, based on research of Prof. Helen Timperley (University of Auckland);
- What PLCs are, how they work and evidence on the fact that they really work, based on research of Prof. Nancy Dana (University of Florida);
- Three types of inquiry-oriented PLCs, also based on research of Prof. Nancy Dana.
 - **Shared inquiry:** PLC members conduct a single inquiry together.
 - **Parallel inquiry:** PLC members each conduct their own inquiry but support each other in the process.
 - **Intersecting inquiry:** PLC members conduct individual inquiries but all focusing on a common, shared theme.
- The importance of politics in schools in order to build effective PLCs.

We ended the learning week on the subject of effective PLCs by managing a real PLC. We worked in groups where a participant presented his/her dilemma; a facilitator facilitated the PLCs, participants reflected on the dilemma, asked clarifying and probing questions and made suggestions to untangle the dilemma.



Participants work in an effective real PLC

2. Digging deeper into Practitioner Inquiry

Zavod Republike Slovenije Za Šolstvo – National Education Institute - Slovenia (Barbara Lesničar) and Vzw PBDKO Catholic Education Flanders – Belgium (Wim Peeters)

The area which is closely interwoven with two other Linpilcare pillars (Professional Learning Communities and Academic Reading) is practitioner inquiry (PI). One of the reasons why we use this term within Linpilcare is to make a clear distinction between what academic research is on the one hand and inquiring professionals who seek out change by reflecting on their practice on the other hand.

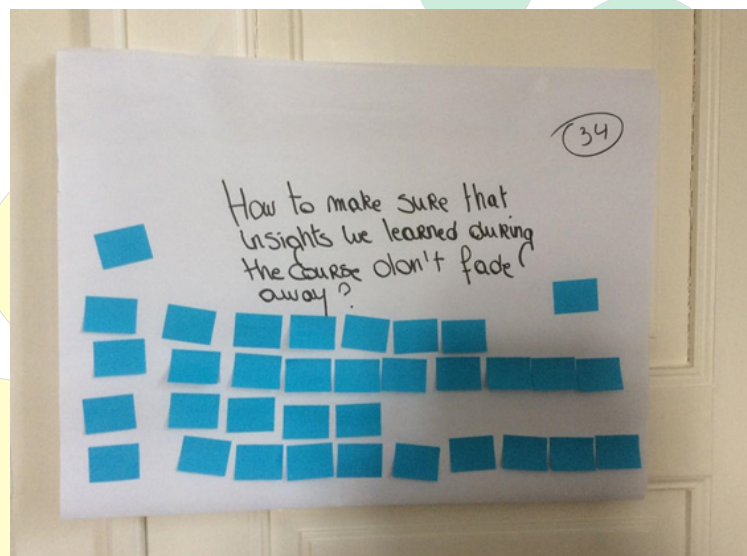
The purpose of this particular part of the course was to establish the inquiry cycle as means of revisiting one's own practice and to study it more closely. The participants went through all the phases of this process. The first step was to establish their own wondering/inquiry question or something which bothered them. In order to do so we used three different tools, the *Passion Protocol*, the *Litmus test* and *Choosing the Right Question Protocol*. All three tools gave the participants the possibility to refine their inquiry question and find out how and to what extent it was related to their practice. At this point it was important to make a clear distinction

between the academic research and PI. That is why the *Garden Metaphor* tool was used whereby we explained that our focus was to provide insight into a teacher's classroom practice in an effort to make change.



The following step was collecting data and the usage of the *Easy Ways to Gather Data protocol*. It informed the participants about different sets of qualitative data. To be more illustrative, the tutors, who had been working with several PLC's, provided series of best practices of practitioners who gathered data in connection with their inquiry question. Then the *What, So What, Now What Protocol* was introduced. The participants asked themselves questions as *What question/challenge do I have?*, *What kind of data do I collect?*, *Why is this important for me?*. That is how they tried to establish to what extent their set of data was relevant to their initial question. Introducing these issues in the following activity challenged both tutors as well as participants.

The latter were to decide what bothered them and to choose the most significant/relevant issue in the group. Then the groups voted for the »best« 'issue' and selected one of them. As the follow-up activity everybody had to write a piece of advice saying what would be the best thing to do or change in order to solve the selected problem. After that the groups had to analyse the data (answers/advice given) by using the *Atlas Protocol*. This tool allows for the interpretation of the data and their implications for the practice (e.g. what to change/how). This small cycle was an example of prototyping, and was used as a training in analysing real qualitative data the participants produced themselves during this cycle. The final step was the *Inquiry Brief Peer Feedback/Discussion Protocol* where the participants gave warm feedback and suggestions on each other's inquiry briefs.



All in all one could claim that the participants had to work very hard and dig deeper into their teaching practice, in a very efficient and realistic way, in order to come up with real wonderings and dilemmas. The main objective of the PI sessions was to use the inquiry cycle as a facilitation process to bring the participants to the heart of their inquiry question.

All tools are available at: <http://www.linpilcare.eu/index.php/intellectual-outputs/tools/practitioner-inquiry>

3. Academic research as a source of inspiration?

Fontys – The Netherlands (Rutger van de Sande)



A course day was devoted to questions concerning the use of academic research as a source of inspiration for teaching practice. Project Linpilcare is focused on evidence-informed teaching (EIT) as a means for teachers' professional development and curriculum innovation. During the course day, we established an understanding of what can be considered 'evidence'. And we explored several ways that different types of evidence can bring inspiration to teaching practice. Arguable two of the most important conclusions we reached were that (1) evidence constitutes more than the results of academic research (e.g. also the results of practitioner inquiry) and (2) the nature of evidence in education shouldn't be interpreted as being true for each and every individual teaching practice. Evidence can however show what seems promising in general and thereby guide (but not direct) teachers in their professional decision-making. In the first chapter of the frame of reference that was developed as part of project Linpilcare (and which was recently retitled 'Thinking through practice'), we elaborate on the concept of EIT and the nature of evidence.

4. Exemples from practice

University of Tartu – Estonia (Anita Kärner)

Participants at the second international Linpilcare course visited a school in Tartu that is involved in PLC, where several good examples of practices were discussed. The school is well-known for its language immersion programme for students whose mother tongue is not Estonian and who, by the end of year 9, have a good command of the Estonian language. The school takes part in various international projects in order to improve the teachers' professional discussion skills and shared learning. Being part of the Linpilcare community has given a better understanding on individual professional development through inquiry, while sharing a common topic, PLC members say.

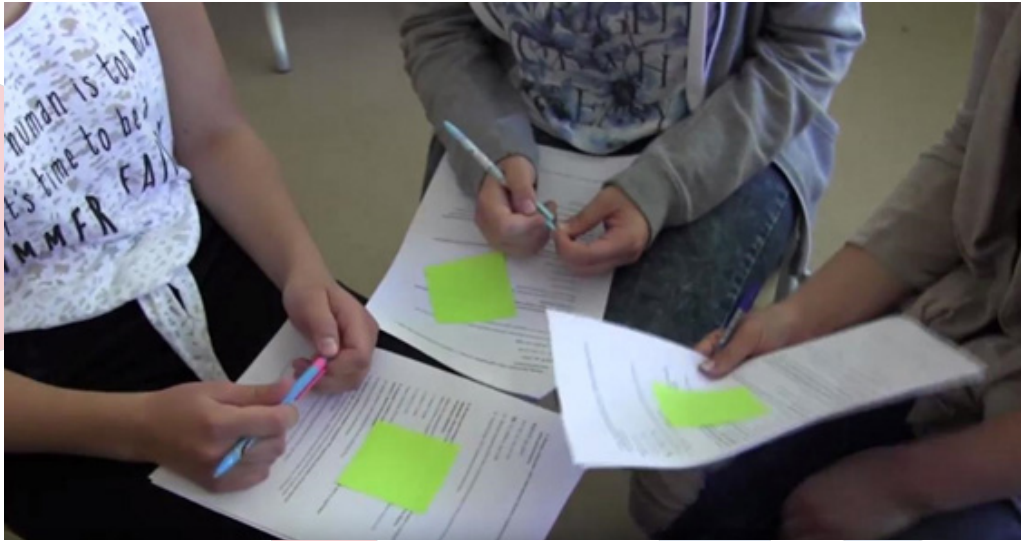
Aveliis Post, a teacher at the school summarized the process of the shared inquiry. She said that the aim was to get a clear picture of the level of students' general competencies at first. For that a test was compiled. It proved to be very difficult to measure the level of acquired competencies by using a paper and pencil test. Most students lack problem solving skills. They have difficulties with nonstandard tasks due to the lack of functional reading skills.

The development of general competencies should not be random but an acknowledged, directed and long-term pedagogical process. So, teachers of different subjects put together a project task, a (role)play called "JAPEST" – a real life topic focusing on exchange students' experiences. This kind of approach gives an impression of tasks being 'easier': it is not age-specific and different tasks create an integrated construction. Their use of general competencies were observed while students were solving the task.

Students who participated received feedback on their performance and realised their strengths and weaknesses in different competencies. Of all of the competencies observed, digital competencies were the least developed.

From now on, next steps of the inquiry will focus on finding new ways to improve this competency. As the first step, the PLC members held a Digital Day for 96 students of Year 5. Participants admitted that this kind of approach keeps students interested and encourages to advance.

Teachers find the Linpilcare project useful as it fosters teachers' individual initiative. The project does not prescribe what PLCs should do, it would rather motivate proceedings from students' actual needs.



5. Why practitioner inquiry?

A local contribution to Linpilcare by AlmadaForma – Portugal (Cristina Loureiro dos Santos)

Teacher inquiry is a continual cycle that all educators spiral through throughout their professional lifetimes—a professional positioning or stance, owned by the teacher, where questioning, systematically studying, and subsequently improving one's own practice becomes a necessary and natural part of a teacher's work.

Nancy Dana

And so, Prof. Nancy Dana, from University of Florida says it all.

By implementing action (practitioner) research in each one's own class, we can improve our practice, update the teaching methods, and serve as a role for younger teachers to become action researchers.

Summarizing, action research:

- Empowers the chance to change the method in which one continues to develop and make constructive changes that will have an impact on the quality of the pupils' learning experiences; being an action researcher is a vital part of one's personal and professional development and will offer a better education to our students.
- Improves, not only each one's individual development, but also the development of the school itself, since working with a researching methodology, mostly collaboratively, allows us to explore, inquire, reflect and plan for change and added development.

