

TEAMS AS BREAKERS OF TRADITIONAL WORK PRACTICES – A Longitudinal Study of Planning and Implementing Curriculum Units in Two Elementary School Teacher Teams

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Abstract

The study analyzes planning processes in teachers' collaborative curriculum-making. Two teacher teams in an elementary school were the object of research. The concepts of planning the curriculum units in the teams differed from one another due to the fact that the organization of the teachers' collaboration changed completely in the school. Theoretically, the study was based on cultural historical activity theory.

The study is longitudinal using multiple complementary types of data: discourses, interviews and observations. A multi-methodological approach was used.

The study addresses the question of “on what preconditions will the teamwork of teachers break the traditional, individual-based teaching patterns?” The study is divided into four problem areas: (1) Differences and similarities of the planning processes in curriculum-making in two different teams; (2) Changes in the contents of planning-discourse as the organization of the teachers' collaboration was changed; (3) Collaborative learning in the teacher teams; (4) Preconditions for the teams to make network contacts.

1. Different planning trajectories of the teams were examined. The teams did not develop in a linear manner, endogenously, but the boundaries of the teams were opened.

2. The analysis addressed the use of social languages in the team discourse. As an instrument of collaboration, the talk of the teacher teams reflected the change in the organization of the teachers' collaboration: from a pedagogically oriented team that have been initiated from below into a school-wide, administratively implemented structure of teams coordinating courses.

3. Collaborative learning was examined as an ongoing re-formulation of the teams' objects. A methodology for describing the turning points of object formation was developed.

4. The quality of the team's outward-oriented network contacts, was analyzed. A methodology for describing and analyzing the teachers' work as a network was developed. Network building required of the team the building of a shared object in mutual cooperation .

One might expect that the historically evolved discourse patterns of a profession show a great deal of independence of the specific organizational arrangements of teacher collaboration. The study showed, however, that talk is the most fluid instrument of collaboration and, thus, particularly sensitive to change in the organization.

Keywords: Teamwork, planning, teachers, elementary school, local curriculum-making