Communicative Learning Spaces and Learning to Become a Teacher

Sjølie, Ela; Francisco, Susanne; Langelotz, Lill

Department of Industrial Economics and Technology Management, NTNU, Trondheim, Norway; School of Education, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia; Department of Educational Research and Development, University of Borås, Borås, Sweden

Ela Sjølie (corresponding author), PhD, associate professor

IØT, NTNU

7491 Trondheim, Norway

 ela.sjolie@ntnu.no, tel: +47 93025101

Susanne Francisco, PhD, lecturer

School of Education, Charles Sturt University

Wagga Wagga, NSW Australia

sfrancisco@csu.edu.au

Lill Langelotz, PhD, senior lecturer

Department of Educational Research and Development

Högskolan i Borås
S-501 90 Borås, Sweden

lill.langelotz@hb.se

Communicative Learning Spaces and Learning to Become a Teacher

This paper explores teacher learning. Specifically, it focuses on access to 'communicative learning spaces' (a concept we have coined and developed within this paper) and argues that the creation of such spaces can be a powerful enabler of teacher learning. We draw on the findings from three studies conducted in three different countries - Norway, Australia and Sweden. Common for the three studies is that they aimed to understand how to 'become a teacher' using the lens of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014). The cases focused on different stages of teacher learning - initial teacher education, the induction phase of teacher learning in the workplace, and the continuing professional learning of in-service teachers.

In this paper, we ask the following questions: What features characterise communicative learning spaces that support teacher learning? What enables and constrains the development of a communicative learning space? In addressing these questions we highlight two examples of communicative learning spaces that supported teacher learning and an example where an unsuccessful attempt was made to create a communicative learning space. Using the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014) we examine what enabled and constrained the development of these communicative learning spaces in each of the three cases.

Introduction

Learning to 'become a teacher' is more than learning to teach and more than undertaking the role of a teacher. It is an ongoing and dynamic process that includes both technical development of teaching practice as well as the development of teachers' personal and, in some cases, political awareness (c.f. Noffke 2009). Becoming a teacher is a concept that is difficult to define. When does one 'become' a teacher? Is it during pre-service training? Is it when you first walk into a classroom to teach? Is it in the first few years as an educator? Or are good teachers always 'becoming a teacher'? And if that is the case, what is it that supports this initial and ongoing 'becoming'? In this

article we take the view that ´becoming a teacher´ is an unfinished process during teachers' professional lives - a continuing learning process.

Professional collaboration is increasingly seen as important in relation to teachers' professional learning and development (Langelotz 2014; Vescio, Ross, and Adams 2008). Although taking different forms, collaboration has become central in the normative discourse about teacher learning through all stages of a teacher's professional life span: initial teacher education, workplace induction, as well as in the arrangement of continuing professional development (CPD) for in-service teachers (Langelotz 2017a). In initial teacher education, collaboration is used in the context of school-university collaborations, aiming to address the perennial dilemma of the theory-practice divide or disconnection between university and school in teacher education. In the attempt to strengthen the connection between the school and university components of teacher education, there is a call to create common spaces for dialogue between school teachers, university staff, and student teachers (Zeichner, Payne, and Brayko 2015). In the research literature, these common spaces are often referred to as "hybrid spaces" that connect campus courses and field experiences in university-based preservice teacher education (Zeichner, Payne, and Brayko 2015; Zeichner 2010).

Within the context of novice teachers and in-service teachers, teachers' collaborative learning is emphasised as a keystone to achieving educational change (Langelotz 2017b). Research literature (Langelotz 2014, 2017a; Kennedy 2014; Little 1990; Opfer and Pedder 2011) points out that when teachers come together and collaborate around their teaching and student learning, transformative development in the teaching practices may take place. Teacher learning communities (TLC) or professional learning communities (PLC) are used as concepts to describe this kind of organised, collaborative and collegial teacher learning practices (Langelotz 2017b). In

this article, we explore communicative spaces as sites for collaborative learning. Specifically, we develop the concept of a communicative learning space, addressing the questions: what are the characteristics of a communicative learning space that support teacher learning, and what enables and constrains the development of a communicative learning space? To do this, we draw on the findings from a process where we shared research findings and experiences from three different studies that explored teacher learning across different environments and stages of teacher learning.

The article begins by outlining the theory of practice architectures, which formed the theoretical foundation for each of the research projects on which this paper is based. Next, we introduce the concept of communicative learning spaces and trace its conception to Habermas' notion of communicative action (1996) as well as the notion of third space (Bhabha 1994). We then outline the three research projects, and report on the findings as they relate to the development, or otherwise, of communicative learning spaces. The question of what enabled and constrained the development of communicative learning spaces across the three studies is then discussed, focusing specifically on the sharing of stories, trust, and the development of a 'performance space' rather than a communicative learning space. The practice architectures that contribute to these three factors in each of the studies are also explored.

Practice theory

We recognise learning as a practice. We also recognise that particular practices - that are not specifically designed as learning practices - are practices that support learning. For instance, team teaching is a practice that – aside from supporting student learning - enhances teacher learning (Francisco 2017). We understand practices as "a socially established, cooperative human activity involving utterances and forms of understanding (sayings), modes of action (doings) and ways in which people relate to

one another and the world (relatings) that hang together in characteristic ways in a distinctive project" (Mahon et al. 2017, 8). In exploring what enabled and constrained the development of a space that supported teacher learning in three different sites, we are looking at practices that are undertaken in these sites.

The theory of practice architectures takes a site based, ontological approach to exploring practices. More specifically, the theory of practice architectures considers the arrangements within particular sites, and contends that each local site is made up of practice architectures that prefigure the practices that occur at that site (Kemmis and Grootenboer 2008). Practice architectures are made up of cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements. Cultural-discursive arrangements are those arrangements that enable or constrain the '*sayings'* that occur in, and about the site. They include the language that is used (for instance, theoretical discussions in a teacher education classroom or the less formal language around the table at teachers' morning tea) and the topics that are addressed. The material-economic arrangements include the physical arrangements (such as where tables and chairs are placed in a classroom or staffroom), systemic arrangements (such as timetabling), the material artefacts (such as lesson plans) and the resourcing available at a site. The material-economic arrangements enable and constrain what is done at a site, the '*doings*'. The social-political arrangements enable and constrain the '*relatings*' that take place in a site, and relate to issues of power and solidarity (Kemmis et al. 2014). While it is possible to consider each of these arrangements in isolation, in reality they are inter-related. For instance, the relationship between a teacher and a student is prefigured not only by the social-political arrangements, but also by the physical arrangements (such as the layout of the chairs and desks in a classroom), and the cultural-discursive arrangements (such as the formality of language used). While the practice architectures present in a site

prefigure particular practices, they do not predetermine particular practices; human agency is also important. For instance, humans are able to make changes to many practice architectures (such as changing the layout of chairs and desks in a classroom or introducing new language or concepts), or to undertake practices in a way that avoids a prefigured approach (such as moving the location of a class from a formally set up classroom to a patch of grass outside).

Communicative spaces as sites for professional learning

In this article, we introduce the concept of *communicative learning spaces*. The concept emerged through our shared revisiting of three research projects that had in common an exploration of what enables and constrains teacher learning. Looking for similarities across the three cases, the importance of communicative spaces became evident, which in the end led to the development of the concept of communicative learning space. In arriving at a definition of communicative learning spaces we have drawn upon various theoretical perspectives.

Based on Habermas' (1996) concept of communicative spaces, which has been further developed by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005), communicative learning spaces share many of the same characteristics. It is a democratic, safe and supportive social space where trust is crucial. A communicative space is a feature of Habermas' (1996) notion of *communicative action.* Communicative action is when people come together with the intent of reaching intersubjective agreement as a basis for mutual understanding for the words we use and a broadened understanding of others' point of view, so as to reach 'an unforced consensus' about what to do (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). Communicative action opens up a communicative space between people, and Kemmis and McTaggart argue that such spaces allow for the building of "solidarity between the people who open their understandings to one another" and "underwrites the

understandings and decisions that people reach with legitimacy" (76). Following Kemmis and McTaggart in using the concept of communicative spaces, in this article we define it as a space where collaborative interaction can take place, in our cases between teachers in different stages of their professional development. We focus on communicative spaces as spaces - which might include physical, social, affective and discursive elements - that serve to support teachers' professional learning. When adding 'learning' to the concept of communicative space we are deliberately focusing on a communicative space that supports and nurtures professional learning - to be more specific: teachers' professional learning.

Teachers' professional learning is a complex (never-ending) process and includes development of technical skills as well as personal and political awareness (c.f. Noffke 2009). It includes possibilities for teachers to act as autonomous professionals. Professional learning involves learning "how to go on" (Wittgenstein et al. 2009). How to go on in the site, where teachers are undertaking the role of a teacher is never stagnant; it changes constantly. As a result, professional learning involves ongoing development: from initial teacher education, through the phase as a novice teacher, and throughout the whole career.

It is also established that professional learning and educational change may take place in democratic, safe and supportive social spaces, which are spaces that nurture relational trust (Bryk and Schneider 2003; Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Rönnerman 2016). According to Bryk and Schneider, successful partnerships for learning rely on relational trust, which is built through repeated social exchanges. Edwards-Groves et.al. (2016) note further that

> *Through these repeated exchanges, participants' words, actions and ways of relating with one another display their expectations, obligations, intentions and commitments. Trust grows over time through interpersonal exchanges in which the*

> *words, actions and ways of relating validates these expectations, obligations,*
> *intentions and commitments" (p. 375).*

Another concept that is relevant in exploring teacher learning is that of third space, which was first developed in depth by Bhabha (1994) as a metaphor for the space in which cultures meet. Bhabha identifies hybridity as "the third space which enables other positions to emerge. This third space displaces the histories that constitute it and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through perceived wisdom" (ibid., p. 211). Third spaces can thus be seen as more democratic and dialogic spaces than traditional collaborations. The notion of third space has been used to describe collaborative practices in teacher education. Zeichner (2010) uses the concept of third space to argue for the value of a space between the understanding and knowledge of the academic environment, the teacher practitioner environment, and the community where teachers can learn to be teachers. As the notion of third spaces involves a rejection of binaries such as practitioner and academic knowledge and theory and practice, Zeichner argues that the concept of a third space can be seen as helpful to address the perennial dilemma of the theory-practice divide in teacher education: "an either/or perspective is transformed into a both/also point of view." (ibid., p.92).

In this chapter, we bring together Kemmis and McTaggart's understanding of Habermas' communicative spaces and Bhabha's understanding of third space to allow us to focus on what we refer to as *communicative learning spaces*. We use the empirical evidence from three separate research projects to consider how such a space might enable teacher learning. Further, we draw on this empirical research to consider the factors that enable and constrain the development of a communicative learning space. In arguing for the importance of communicative learning spaces in enabling teacher

learning, we are not arguing that these are the only sites of learning for teachers. We are instead identifying communicative learning spaces as one of the sites of teacher learning. Furthermore, we reveal conditions that enable or constrain communicative how learning spaces evolve.

The research contexts - setting the scene

We have undertaken a retrospective analysis of three separate studies from Norway, Australia, and Sweden. Common for the three studies is that they aimed to understand 'teacher learning' through the lens of the theory of practice architectures. The differences include the different stages of teacher learning that each of the studies addressed - initial teacher education (Norway), the induction phase of teacher learning in the workplace (Australia), and the continuing professional learning of in-service teachers (Sweden). Our curiosity regarding communicative learning spaces started when we shared experiences and data from these studies and found both similarities and differences between them.

Through a process of sharing research findings and experiences we explored these three studies further. We wrote memories from our studies and shared memories from our studies orally, asked each other questions, and collaborated as 'mirrors' to each other's stories. It became apparent relatively early in the process that for each of our research projects, teacher learning was supported within a communicative space. We then used the theory of practice architectures to identify what enabled and constrained this particular type of communicative space. Over time it became apparent that what we were identifying was something that we have since identified as a communicative learning space. The storytelling and sharing became our own communicative learning space. Sharing these stories deepened the understandings of earlier results or gave rise to new understandings that we had not discovered in our

original studies. This insight related to factors that supported the establishment of communicative learning spaces, and in particular the importance of directing attention to cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements.

In the following sections we present the findings related to communicative learning spaces for each case. We then highlight two key themes that became apparent in exploring the commonalities among the three cases. Together these themes can inform what to consider when seeking to establish communicative learning spaces with the aim of nurturing teacher learning. We begin with the Australian case.

The Australian case: an unstructured informal space for novice teachers

The Australian study (Francisco 2016), undertaken over two years, and using a case study approach, explored the work-based learning of nine novice Vocational Education and Training (VET) teachers. These teachers worked across four urban campuses and eight different teaching departments. At the beginning of the study, the participants had no prior teaching experience, and no educational qualifications related to teaching. The theory of practice architectures was used as the theoretical frame for conducting and analysing this research.

In this study, where the work place was the primary location of learning to become a teacher, communicative learning spaces could be found in a number of the sites. In this paper we focus on one manifestation of a communicative learning space which was apparent across two of the sites; that is, a shared daily morning tea. In both teaching departments the morning tea was arranged around a large communal table. All experienced and novice teachers who were employed on a full time basis attended this morning tea daily. Part time and casually employed teachers attended as often as they were able, sometimes coming on campus on a day when they were not teaching to do so. It became a shared space for discussion that allowed both social and professional

conversation. People came together in different configurations each day. They debriefed, told stories, and shared the highs and lows of their teaching. For novice teachers, hearing the stories and anecdotes of experienced teachers informed their own teaching approaches.

The sharing of stories was a key part of the arrangements of the informal gathering that took place over morning or afternoon tea. This story sharing was often quite explicitly about seeking and giving guidance to new teachers. One of the novice teachers from this study noted that at morning tea (he refers to it as 'smoko'):

> *I'll discuss with the other teachers, they'd discuss what works for them, or what doesn't work for them, you know just sort of pretty much get around at smoko, saying we'll try this next time, we'll do that. Ewan*

Michael, in another teaching department to Ewan, was a novice teacher who worked part time. He found the daily morning teas in his department so valuable in supporting his learning that he often arranged to come on campus even on days when he was not teaching so that he could access the stories that were told by the experienced teachers at that time and in that space.

> *I make a big effort to be here for the morning tea break even if I'm not teaching at those times. Just to hear what they are doing. What's difficult for them. What they find nice. All their good and bad stories. Michael*

In the cases discussed, the practice architectures at each site regularly enabled the creation of a communicative learning space for professional learning specifically focusing on how to teach well. Stories were shared that highlighted teaching practices and teaching tips. In the sites where a communicative learning space was created, some common arrangements were evident. The cultural-discursive arrangements included a shared industry-related language. For instance, during the morning teas held by the

horticulture teaching department, there was a shared language associated with the horticulture industry. This space also supported novice teachers to develop their use and understanding of teaching related language through these conversations. A large, easily accessed communal table in each site formed an important physical arrangement that supported regular gathering of teachers. Timetabling in both sites that ensured all teachers were able to take a break from 10.30 - 11.00 a.m., together with an expectation by all staff that they would meet at that time, was another arrangement that supported the creation of a communicative learning space. The social-political arrangements supported the development of solidarity and trust. They included an environment where the discussions ranged from weekend football, the latest product released from their industry, to how to better support the learning of their students. The result was a flattening of hierarchical structures in this space, which further served to support the development of a communicative learning space.

The shared morning tea enabled a communicative learning space - however it did not always result in the development of such a space on each occasion (at times it was just a space for social interaction). Also, as identified above, one of the important physical arrangements that enabled the development of the communicative learning space was a large communal table. Evidence from two of the other sites in the study shows that the existence of such a table alone is not sufficient for the development of a communicative learning space. For instance, the beauty therapy teaching department had a large table in the staff kitchen. However, this table was very rarely used either by the group as a whole, or by individual teachers. Similarly, there was a large table in the centre of the sport and fitness teaching department staff room. This table was usually covered with sports equipment, there were no chairs around the table for people to sit at, and teachers never sat there. So while the material-economic arrangements in these

other sites may have supported the possible use of these tables, it is likely that the social-political and/or cultural discursive arrangements constrained their use by teachers.

The Swedish case - a structured semi-formal peer mentoring space for in-service teachers

The Swedish study (Langelotz 2014) was an interactive research project that took place in a teacher team in a Swedish secondary school over 2.5 years. Some of the teachers in the team had, together with the principal of the school, decided to use a constrained nine-step model of peer group mentoring developed by Lauvås, Hofgaard Lycke & Handal (1997), as a method for the teachers' continuing professional development (CPD). The methodological research approach was action research (AR) and the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al. 2014) was used as an analytical frame. Furthermore, Foucault's notion of power (Foucault 2000, 2002) was adopted in the analysis in this study to examine how power came into play during the mentoring sessions. Foucault (2002) emphasises power as something fluid amongst people taking part in a practice. Power is everywhere, it is productive and exercised rather than possessed. Disciplining power is exercised in several institutions such as prisons and schools. Foucault highlights the dialectic relation between domination and emancipation, which was significant in this Swedish case (Langelotz 2013).

The main findings in this case show how democratic processes and the teachers' listening skills developed over the years through the constrained and disciplining nine-step model used to enhance professional learning. It was also found that for the teacher team, the peer group mentoring was liberating and stimulating while it sometimes seemed restrictive for the individual (Langelotz 2014, 2017a). An enabling condition was the constrained nine-step model that worked as a concrete model of how to

moderate the communication. It also worked as a symbolic artefact, containing discourses of 'the teacher as a reflective practitioner' and a historical discourse of adults' 'collective learning' based in a Nordic tradition of adult education (study circles) (Langelotz and Rönnerman 2014). There was a shared understanding of 'lifelong learning' and a growing discourse of the importance of 'collegial learning' in this Swedish site. Hence, the model used was both a cultural-discursive and a material-economic arrangement that enabled the communicative learning space where the teachers, for example, increased their political awareness. An example of this is shown in the following excerpt, where the teachers discuss ethnicity and gender and its impact on the relatings in the classroom. Later they problematise this further (Langelotz 2017a):

> *M: Do you think he (the name of the student) is more easy in my classroom thanks to my colour?*
> *I: (very quiet) I don't know… I would almost say so, but he is more black hehehe (M: mmm) I don't know but it seems reasonable, you are also a man, which I think matters (A: mmm). You also train him during the physic classes. He is good at physics …. and you can not treat him differently as you have the same skin colour.*

This excerpt is from a peer group mentoring session two years from the first starting session. Here the participants have deepened their relations over the years. They dare to talk about political issues such as colour and power relations. They challenge each other in a respectful way.

In the Swedish case the sharing of stories was part of the structured approach to support experienced teacher learning. The nine-step model explicitly relied on teachers to bring a case to the group that was related to an issue that they were experiencing in their professional life – we could say, they were telling a story. The story sharing made the teachers listen and look upon each other in new ways. One of the teachers noted:

'I'm more humble today than before…' when she described her increased insight and understanding of her peers' knowledge and experiences. A less rigid picture of 'the Other' (Todd 2008) appeared through the story sharing and through the listening practice that evolved. The teachers focused not only on each other's shortcomings but some of the prejudices held by participants (and the students) were exposed and challenged. This development may seem to be something of a paradox as the cases the teachers shared often took departure from "deficits" in their teaching approach. This deficit sharing did not, as one might think, end up in ideas of each other as poor teachers. It rather nuanced their impression of each other, and the teachers noted that they listened to each other in "new ways".

To listen is the essence of language (Todd 2008). And the shape of listening settles the way the 'sayings' in a language practice will improve. The teachers developed over time a way of listening to each other without judging. They expressed (and showed with their hands) how the story sharers in this practice were allowed to 'put the cards on the table' and the problem presented became distanced from the story sharer and turned to become 'everybody's interest', as the teachers noted. This highlights two features that are important to authentic listening practices (cf. Todd 2008) - distance taking and the suspension of our inherent tendency towards judgments. Indeed, this evolved listening practice deepened the relations amongst the teachers, and the ability to listen carefully without immediate judgement was, according to the teachers, one of the most important learning outcomes in the project of professional development. One of the teachers said: 'Your problem is no longer just yours, once you have shared it, it becomes everyone's problem and responsibility' (Michael). In other words they felt responsibilities to each other and they tried to solve the problems

together – solidarity grew amongst the teachers. They also noted that they were more and more comfortable to share issues that they had never shared before.

The relations between the teachers and the researcher also strengthened over the years. The interactive research approach partly enabled the peer group mentoring practice but at the same time affected the teachers' positioning of each other (Langelotz 2014). The interactive research approach disciplined (c.f. Foucault 2002) both the teachers and the researcher to contribute to develop the peer group mentoring practice towards a communicative learning space. Elements of intersubjective trust (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Rönnerman 2016) include the development of a shared language, as well as the development of "withness, togetherness, collegiality and cooperation" (278). The communicative space was characterised by a shared purpose which enabled the professional learning to take place.

The Norwegian case - a formal hybrid space in a university-school partnership in teacher education

The Norwegian study (Sjølie 2014a), a case study of an upper secondary teacher education programme, explored student teachers' academic learning practices. In particular, it investigated the common claim that teacher education is 'too theoretical'. The theory of practice architectures was used to illuminate some of the difficulties student teachers encounter when engaging with educational theory as part of their initial teacher education.

The particular teacher education program had an established university-school partnership and the student teachers who participated in the research study were part of a project that tried out an alternative practicum model. This alternative model aimed to bridge the disconnect between campus activities and field experiences through a close collaboration between university teachers and school teachers. The main idea of the

project was to have a continuous alternation between campus activities and school practicum throughout the entire semester, with teachers from the collaborating schools responsible for parts of the courses on campus. The model can be seen as an attempt to create what Zeichner (2010) describes as a 'third space' in teacher education; a space where academic knowledge and practitioner knowledge come together in less hierarchical ways. An important finding from the study was that this collaboration was not sufficient to create a space where the different participants - university teachers, school teachers and student teachers - could develop shared understanding and take a shared responsibility for learning (Sjølie 2017, 2014b). This *lack* of shared understanding seemed to constrain student teachers' learning, and the study argues for the need for a communicative space that supports student teacher learning.

Focusing on the cultural-discursive arrangements in the site revealed a lack of shared language and understanding of core concepts. In this study, the student teachers' conceptualisations of theory were explored in depth, and the findings pointed to conflicts and tensions in their assumptions about theory and also to possible differences between student teachers', university teachers', and school teachers' assumptions about theory. 'Theory' and 'practice' are two very common words in initial teacher education, but the new space did not seem to contain critical dialogue amongst and between university teachers, school teachers and student teachers about these two core concepts in teacher education. Rather than being a 'gap' between theory and practice, the findings point to a lack of shared understanding between student teachers, university teachers and school teachers (Sjølie 2017, 2014a) about the nature and purpose of theory in teacher education. For example, while student teachers, and partly also school teachers, seemed to be directed towards developing teaching skills for the classroom, the university teachers aimed to foster critical reflection. With the arrangements of the

close collaboration, the student teachers expected sameness, but instead they experienced the practices on campus and in school as different and disconnected. These conflicting understandings and expectations were not subject to critical dialogue, and thus the student teachers were left to themselves to sort it out.

The lens of practice architectures was also used to explore the social-political arrangements of this particular site (from the student teacher perspective). One of the findings here was that the student teachers were invoking certain distinctions and relations between 'us' (the students), 'academics' (university boffins), and 'teachers' (real practitioners). These distinctions were visible in the way they talked about theory and practice, and thus also part of the cultural-discursive arrangements. University was largely referred to as an 'artificial world' as opposed to the 'real world' in school. Teacher educators were referred to as 'the guys up on the hill', and words such as 'academics' and 'research' often had negative connotations, while 'those out there' or 'the real people' (school teachers) had positive connotations. The distinctions were also visible in findings that showed preconceptions and assumptions about 'the others'. While university teachers could talk about teaching methods used in schools as 'traditional' (and thus not very good), the school teachers could refer to what the student teachers learned on campus as 'fancy' and 'innovative' (and thus not very realistic). There were also more direct examples of the participants reporting that teachers talked in a denigrating way about each other.

Opening up a communicative space allows for building solidarity between people (c.f. Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). Although there were material-economic arrangements that allowed collaboration between university teachers and school teachers, the practice architectures of the space that was created did not support the development of solidarity and trust. In turn, the lack of solidarity and trust within the

space seemed to constrain the student teachers' learning. The relations described by the students worked to maintain relationships of power, for example leaving the student teachers with the question of what constitutes valid knowledge or whom to believe.

Creating communicative learning spaces

We have learned at least two things about what enables or constrains communicative learning spaces: firstly, sharing stories can enable the development of trust and solidarity and secondly, practice architectures can support a 'performance space' at the expense of a 'learning space'. Hence, we have learned that it is not enough to create isolated enablers to support communicative learning spaces. The Australian case is an example where a such a space opened up informally, although not planned for. In the Swedish case it happened because it was structured. In the Norwegian case, although structured and planned for, the lack of the development of a communicative learning space seemed to constrain the students' learning. There were considerable differences between the three cases, in terms of arrangements at the local site, the phase in a teacher's career, and also in terms of the complexity. However, exploring the commonalities among the cases led to important insights in relation to the practice architectures that enabled the development of a communicative learning space.

The main findings in our studies show the importance of developing relations and relational trust (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Rönnerman 2016) among the participants. The findings here have also in different ways emphasised that to bring people together is not enough to open up a communicative learning space. As argued by Zeichner et.al (2015) to merely bring people together in the same physical space to plan and deliver teacher education programs will not necessarily make any substantial difference in how knowledge is utilised. Also, in the context of CPD it is argued that implementation of professional learning programs and reforms alone rarely achieves

sustainable change in the educational practices (Opfer 2016). What previous research does show, however, is how enhanced relations (relational trust) amongst teachers facilitate professional learning and educational changes (Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Rönnerman 2016).

Opening communicative learning spaces is about creating possibilities for transformation to happen. In exploring the arrangements that resulted in the development of communicative learning spaces that nurtured professional learning, three factors became apparent: two which enabled professional learning and one that confined professional learning. The two enabling arrangements were the sharing of stories and the development of trust. The third, which appeared to confine the development of professional learning in the Norwegian case was the development of a 'performance space' rather than a learning space.

The sharing of stories

The sharing of stories is a practice that has been part of human cultures since pre-historic times. It has been the way that people share what has been done, what is to be done, and what is possible to be done. In sharing stories, people also share from their lifeworld, if only for a moment. This allows the opening up of understandings to one another, and a broadened understanding of others' point of view. It can thus be seen as a feature of communicative action (c.f. Habermas 1996). To be transported into someone else's life often also 'produces' empathy, which again reduces the distance between 'me' and 'them' or 'us' and 'the others', which for example the Swedish case showed us.

In the context of teachers' professional learning, storytelling has been used as a method for collaborative meaning making (e.g. Doecke, Brown, and Loughran 2000; Pereira and Doecke 2016). Pereira and Doecke (2016) emphasise the socially grounded

character of storytelling for the professional learning and renewal of teachers. Using Walter Benjamin's 'The Storyteller' as a frame of reference, they argue that a story is more than simply information to be shared. A story 'locates itself within a practical, social space where people, in the pursuit of interest, always need to negotiate with each other in order to get things done.' (p. 547). In our present research the sharing of stories became apparent as an important factor in supporting teacher (and also researcher) learning, and in the Australian and Swedish cases sharing stories was one of the key enabling arrangements. In Australia, story sharing was part of the practice of a morning tea or 'smoko'. In Sweden, sharing stories was a defined part of the structured peer group mentoring model. Interestingly, sharing stories between the authors of this paper supported the development of our own communicative learning space that enabled greater understanding of the findings from the research projects we had engaged in.

The practice architectures in the Swedish and the Australian sites supported learning through sharing stories. In both cases there was a shared understanding that stories were told, often about issues associated with participants' professional practice as a teacher. In the Swedish case, the telling of stories was supported by cultural-discursive arrangements of a shared understanding and discourse of 'lifelong learning' and 'collegial learning'. In the Australian case, the cultural-discursive arrangements that supported sharing stories included a shared language related to the occupation that the teachers were teaching about. In both cases the material-economic arrangements supporting story sharing included: regular timing of gatherings (daily smoko for the Australians and regular peer group mentoring meetings for the Swedes) with an agreed start time; and a large communal table that the teachers gathered around. The practice of the sharing of stories impacted on the social-political arrangements and in turn the relatings in the sites. The social-political arrangements included an unspoken agreement

to value and listen to the stories of others. Swedish participants explicitly noted that the story sharing made them look upon each other in a new way. In the Australian case, the shared morning tea, with stories as a key feature, resulted in flattening of hierarchical structures, in particular between novice and experienced teachers.

The enabling condition of sharing personal stories shed light on an important 'non-finding' in the Norwegian case, namely the seeming lack of a shared understanding of core concepts, such as 'theory' and 'practice', and also lack of solidarity between different participants in the site, particularly between university teachers and school teachers. Although not directly comparable, there might be some lessons to be learned from the Australian and the Swedish case. One lesson is to pay more attention to the importance of a common language. For instance, in the Australian case there were two key languages spoken. One was related to the industry that the teachers were teaching about (for instance horticulture), and the other was related to VET pedagogy. Newcomers shared the industry language with the experienced teachers, but not the pedagogical language. The regular sharing of stories and movement between industry and pedagogical language over smoko supported novices in learning 'how to go on the practice'; learning the language of pedagogy and understanding it in the context of particular practices.

Another lesson could be to pay more attention to story sharing between university teachers and school teachers. Story sharing is already part of the 'classroom talk' in teacher education, in the form that students and teachers share and discuss practical experiences. This is, however, a dialogue primarily between the students and the teachers or between the students. In the Swedish and Australian cases regular meetings led to participants coming to better know and understand each other and this nurtured the development of trustful relations. Sharing stories contributed to this

building of solidarity and trust between the teachers involved. This suggests the possibility that focusing on sharing stories as means of building solidarity and trust between university teachers and school teachers in turn might serve to nurture a communicative learning space for student teachers.

Trust and relatings

In each of the cases where a communicative learning space was established, relational trust had developed among the people involved. Leadbeater (1999) argues that trust is "a lubricant for knowledge creation: people share and act on ideas when they trust one another" p. 150). Bryk and Snyder (2003) note that trust is an important component in building successful partnerships for learning. Similarly, Hardy, Salo and Rönnerman (2015) identified trust as a factor in supporting teacher learning in at least two of the three case studies that they report on.

Our research suggests relational trust is a prerequisite for the development of a communicative learning space. In exploring the development of relational trust in action research projects undertaken by teachers, Edwards Groves et al. (2016) argue that the concept of trust can be understood as having five dimensions: interpersonal, interactional, intersubjective, intellectual, and pragmatic (pp 278-279). The research undertaken by Edwards Groves et al was focussed on the actions of the middle leader. Nonetheless, these dimensions are likely to be relevant more broadly, and it became apparent that elements of these dimensions are relevant to our cases. Three of the dimensions of trust as outlined by Edwards Groves et al (2016) were quite clear in the Swedish and Australian cases: interpersonal, interactional, and intersubjective trust. Interpersonal trust includes open and responsive relationships, 'a sense of belonging …[and] a mutual recognition of self and others as learners' (p. 278). Key elements of interactional trust were also apparent, including an 'open, safe and dialogic [space] ... an

opportunity to express ideas freely...shared participation...collaboration and cooperation…[as well as] opportunities to listen to one another and consider alternative points of view, approaches and solutions' (p. 278). Elements of intersubjective trust included the development of a shared language, as well as the development of "withness, togetherness, collegiality and cooperation" (p. 278). The Australian smoko, held mid-morning when teachers were taking a break from teaching or other teaching related activities, provided an intersubjective space where talk easily moved between social and professional discussions. Similarly, over a period of time and supported by the telling of stories, elements of interpersonal, interactional and intersubjective trust developed in the Swedish peer group mentoring meetings. The teachers saw each other as capable and emphasised their new understanding of each others' way of teaching.

We suggest that the development of relational trust within the Australian workgroup and the Swedish peer mentoring group allowed the participants to openly raise issues of conflict such as alternative approaches to teaching and learning (Langelotz 2017a) and concerns about the practices of others. It was with the solid basis of trust, developed over a period of time, that these alternative approaches and discussions about each other's teaching practices were able to lead to ongoing learning and development for the teachers involved. We also suggest that to openly raise issues of conflict and discrepancies is crucial to support professional learning. In the discourse about teacher education, including the site of the Norwegian case, the 'disconnection' between theory and practice is almost exclusively described as something unwanted or negative, and the student teachers experienced different teachers talking about 'the others', sometimes in a denigrating way. Rather than working together with university teachers and school teachers to explore and reflect upon the differences and tensions, students seemed to be left with the question of 'who's right?' or 'who ought to be

believed?': the 'academics' or the 'teachers' (or 'themselves'). Paying more attention to building relational trust between the participants may have better supported the development of a communicative learning space in this site and led to more focus on collaborative learning.

Learning space or performance space?

Identifying the factors that led to the development of a communicative learning space in the Australian and Swedish cases supported us to identify some factors that were absent, or that confined the development of a communicative learning space, in the Norwegian case. We do not argue that there was no learning in the Norwegian case. On the contrary, probably a lot of learning took place. But the spaces that were created through the arrangements did not work as planned.

As already mentioned, several recent studies use the notion of 'third spaces' to describe collaborative practices in teacher education (e.g. Zeichner 2010; Martin, Snow, and Torrez 2011; Ikpeze et al. 2012; Arhar et al. 2013; Klein et al. 2013; Taylor, Klein, and Abrams 2014). The focus in these studies is mostly on the *possibilities* of such hybrid spaces; that they can be seen as more democratic and dialogic spaces than traditional collaborations. Using the concept of communicative spaces, they are described as respectful and disciplined - as a space where people seek intersubjective agreement and mutual understanding (Kemmis and McTaggart 2005). In real life, however, despite these theorised benefits, such spaces can be filled with tensions. Rearranging hierarchical structures, building trustful relationships, and negotiating social interactions within a boundary-spanning territory, is not easy. It is hard work, and can be messy, socially complex and fraught with power differentials (Martin, Snow, and Torrez 2011; Langelotz 2013; Gutiérrez 2008). Norton-Meier and Drake (2010) argue that merely bringing people together in the same physical space will not necessarily

alter traditional hierarchies or the ways in which knowledge is utilised. The findings from the Norwegian study support this claim. Material-economic arrangements such as bringing school teachers on campus and arranging for collaboration through time-scheduling were in this case not sufficient to create a space where the different participants could develop shared understanding. The critical lens of practice theory proved useful to arrive at these findings, because it directed attention to the semantic and social space of this particular collaboration.

An important difference between the Norwegian case and the two other cases is the complexity and the asymmetric power relations. While the teachers in the Australian and Swedish case were all colleagues, the Norwegian case was set in a boundary-spanning context with university teachers, school teachers and student teachers. It was within a context of formal education, with practice architectures that might have supported the development of a 'performance space' at the expense of a communicative learning space. The student teachers in the Norwegian case were undertaking at least two roles: they were novice teachers in the schools, and students in the university, and they had to learn 'how to go on' in both of them. Different performances were expected of them in each role, and they were being assessed or evaluated on their performance: their performance in the classroom; their performance in exams; their performance in assignments; and their performance as a teacher more broadly. This formal learning situation contains asymmetrical power relationships, with student teachers being evaluated by both experienced school teacher and university lecturers, with each group evaluating them for different things and exclusion from a career as a teacher as the result of not performing appropriately. They were thus being directly evaluated for their performance in a way that the Australian and Swedish participants were not.

A formal learning situation as described above will necessarily have to be about performing to some degree. The power relations between students and teachers will be asymmetric at least to some extent as power is in play in all relations. Nevertheless, the argument we raise here is that the opening of a communicative learning space might be possible in such a context by paying more attention to the cultural-discursive and social-political arrangements of the practices, including building trust; positive and respectful relationships; and shared language and understanding of the nature and purpose of teacher education.

Concluding comments

Through exploring teacher learning across three different contexts, we have discussed the concept of a communicative learning space and identified some of the arrangements that have led to the development (or not) of such a space in our studies. Using the lens of the theory of practice architectures we were able to identify the arrangements that enabled and constrained the development of a communicative learning space. This lens enabled us to identify the cultural-discursive arrangements of a shared language, the material-economic arrangements of regularly scheduled meetings around a communal table, and importantly, the development of trust as an important social-political arrangement. In exploring the social-political arrangements associated with the development of trust, it becomes apparent that the development of solidarity and the ongoing development of trust are intertwined so that each supports and furthers the other. The development of a communicative learning space was apparent at times in the Swedish and the Australian cases. In both cases sharing stories was a key part of the arrangements. The Norwegian case has been presented as a 'non-finding' - the case where the evidence suggested the development of a performance space at the expense of a communicative learning space. This was mainly based on the findings that indicated

lack of solidarity and shared language, most importantly between university lecturers and school teachers.

While this article has focused on teacher learning, the argument extends beyond teacher learning. It is likely that the development of a communicative learning space - a democratic, safe and supportive social space where trust is crucial - is supportive of professional learning across a range of professions. It is, however, important to emphasise that a communicative learning space is not always harmonious; it is not idyllic, and it is not ideal. It is always contested, and the important thing is to create the conditions of solidarity under which contestation is possible.

References

Arhar, J., T. Niesz, J. Brossmann, S. Koebley, K. O'Brien, D. Loe, and F. Black. 2013. "Creating a 'third space' in the context of a university–school partnership: supporting teacher action research and the research preparation of doctoral students." *Educational Action Research* 21 (2):218-36.

Bhabha, H.K. 1994. *The location of culture*. London: New York: Routledge.

Bryk, A., and B Schneider. 2003. "Trust in Schools: A Core Resource for School Reform." *Educational leadership* 60 (6):40-5.

Doecke, B., J. Brown, and J. Loughran. 2000. "Teacher talk: The role of story and anecdote in constructing professional knowledge for beginning teachers." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 16 (3):335-48.

Edwards-Groves, C. J., Peter Grootenboer, and Karin Rönnerman. 2016. "Facilitating a culture of relational trust in school-based action research: recognising the role of middle leaders." *Educational Action Research* 24 (3):369-86.

Foucault, M. 2000. "The subject and power (org. 1980). ." In *Michel Foucault power. Essential works of Foucault 1954–1984 (Vol 3*, edited by J.D. Faubion, 326–49. New York: The New Press.

———. 2002. *Omsorgen om sig. Sexualitetens historia: Band 3. ((1976) [The history of sexuality, Vol 3. The care of the Self]*. Göteborg: Daidalos.

Francisco, Susanne. 2016. "How Novice Vocational Education and Training Teachers Learn to Become Teachers." PhD, University of Technology, Sydney.

———. 2017. "Mentoring as Part of a Trellis of Practices That Support Learning." In *Exploring Education and Professional Practice: Through the Lens of Practice Architectures*, edited by Kathleen Mahon, Susanne Francisco and Stephen Kemmis, 101–19. Singapore: Springer.

Gutiérrez, Kris D. 2008. "Developing a sociocritical literacy in the third space." *Reading Research Quarterly* 43 (2):148-64.

Habermas, J. 1996. *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy (W. Rehg, Trans.)*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Hardy, Ian, Petri Salo, and Karin Rönnerman. 2015. "Bildung and educational action research: resources for hope in neoliberal times." *Educational Action Research* 23 (3): 383-98.

Ikpeze, C. H., K. A Broikou, S. Hildebrand, and W. Gladstone-Brown. 2012. "PDS Collaboration as Third Space: An analysis of the quality of learning experiences in a PDS partnership." *Studying Teacher Education* 8 (3):275-88.

Kemmis, Stephen, and Peter Grootenboer. 2008. "Situating praxis in practice." In *Enabling praxis : challenges for education*, edited by Stephen Kemmis and Tracey J. Smith, 37-62. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Kemmis, Stephen, and Robin McTaggart. 2005. "Participatory Action Research: Communicative action and the public sphere." In *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 559-603. Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.

Kemmis, Stephen, Jane Wilkinson, Christine Edwards-Groves, Ian Hardy, Peter Grootenboer, and Laurette Bristol. 2014. *Changing practices, changing education*: Springer.

Kennedy, A. 2014. "Understanding continuing professional development: the need for theory to impact on policy and practice." *Professional Development in Education* 40 (5):688-97. doi: 10.1080/19415257.2014.955122.

Klein, E. J., M. Taylor, C. Onore, K. Strom, and L. Abrams. 2013. "Finding a Third Space in Teacher Education: Creating an Urban Teacher Residency." *Teaching Education* 24 (1):27-57.

Langelotz, L. 2014. "Vad gör en skicklig lärare? En studie om kollegial handledning som kompetensutvecklingspraktik [What 'make(s)' a good teacher? A study of peer group mentoring as a practice of professional development]." PhD, University of Gothenburg.

———. 2017a. "Collegial mentoring for Professional Development." In *Exploring Education and Professional Practice: Through the Lens of Practice Architectures*, edited by Kathleen Mahon, Author2 and Stephen Kemmis, 139-49. Singapore: Springer.

———. 2017b. *Kollegialt lärande i praktiken - kompetensutveckling eller kollektiv korrigering? [Collaborative learning in practice - professional learning or collegial correction?]* Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Langelotz, L. . 2013. "Teachers' Peer Group Mentoring - Nine Steps to Heaven?" *Education Inquiry* 4 (2):375–94.

Langelotz, L., and Karin Rönnerman. 2014. "The practice of peer group mentoring. Traces of global changes and regional traditions." In *Lost in Practice. Transforming Nordic Educational Action Research*, edited by Karin Rönnerman and Petri Salo. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.

Lauvås, P., L. K. Hofgaard, and G. Handal. 1997. *Kollegahandledning i skolan [Mentoring in schools]* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Leadbeater, Charles. 1999. *Living on thin air*. London: Viking.

Little, J.W. 1990. "The persistence of privacy: Autonomy and initiative in teacher' professional relations." *Teachers College Record* (91):509-36.

Mahon, Kathleen, Stephen Kemmis, Susanne Francisco, and Annemaree Loyd. 2017. "Introduction: Practice Theory and the Theory of Practice Architectures." In *Exploring Education and Professional Practice: Through the Lens of Practice Architectures*, edited by Kathleen Mahon, Susanne Francisco and Stephen Kemmis, 1-30. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Martin, Susan D., Jennifer L. Snow, and Cheryl A. Franklin Torrez. 2011. "Navigating the Terrain of Third Space: Tensions With/In Relationships in School-University Partnerships." *Journal of Teacher Education* 62 (3):299-311. doi: doi:10.1177/0022487110396096.

Noffke, S.E. 2009. "Revisiting the Professional, Personal and Political Dimensions of Action Research." In *The SAGE Handbook of Educational Action Research*, edited by S.E. Noffke and Somekh B., 6-23. London: SAGE Publications. Ltd.

Norton-Meier, L., and C. Drake. 2010. "When third space is more than the library: The complexities of theorizing and learning to use family and community resources to teach elementary literacy and mathematics." In *Cultural-historical perspectives on teacher education and development*, edited by V. Ellis, A. Edwards and P. Smagorinsky, 196-211. London, England: Routledge.

Opfer, Darleen. 2016. "Conditions and Practices Associated with Teacher Professional Development and Its Impact on Instruction in TALIS 2013." In, 0_1,3,6-57. Paris: Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Opfer, V.D., and D. Pedder. 2011. "Conceptualizing Teacher Professional Learning." *Review of Educational Research* (81):376-407.

Pereira, I.S., and B. Doecke. 2016. "Storytelling for ordinary, practical purposes (Walter Benjamin's 'The Storyteller')." *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 24 (4):537-49.

Sjølie, E. 2014a. "Pedagogy is just common sense. A case study of student teachers' academic practices." NTNU.

———. 2014b. "The role of theory in teacher education - reconsidered from a student teacher perspective." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 46 (6):729-50. doi: 10.1080/00220272.2013.871754.

———. 2017. "Learning Educational Theory in Teacher Education." In *Exploring Education and Professional Practice: Through the Lens of Practice Architectures*, edited by Kathleen Mahon, Susanne Francisco and Stephen Kemmis, 49-61. Singapore: Springer Singapore.

Taylor, M., E. J. Klein, and L. Abrams. 2014. "Tensions of Reimagining Our Roles as Teacher Educators in a Third Space: Revisiting a Co/autoethnography Through a Faculty Lens." *Studying Teacher Education: A journal of self-study of teacher education practices* 10 (1):3-19.

Todd, S. 2008. *Att lära av den Andre [Learning from the Other]* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Vescio, V., D. Ross, and A. Adams. 2008. "A review of research on the impact of professional learning communities on teaching practice and student learning." *Teaching and Teacher Education* 24 (1):80-91.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig, G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte. 2009. *Philosophische Untersuchungen : Philosophical investigations*. Chichester, West Sussex, U.K. ;,Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.

Zeichner, Ken. 2010. "Rethinking the connections between campus courses and field experiences in college- and university-based teacher education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 61 (1-2):89-99.

Zeichner, Ken, Katherina A. Payne, and Kate Brayko. 2015. "Democratizing Teacher Education." *Journal of Teacher Education* 66 (2):122-35. doi: 10.1177/0022487114560908.