OECD Initial Teacher Preparation Study

Promising practices

Integrating knowledge and practice in Teacher Education in Norway

Country category: Norway

Teacher education pathway category(ies): Equipping teachers with what they need to know and do

Stakeholder category(ies): researchers; teacher educators; teacher candidates

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This case study describes a “promising practice” drawn from an OECD review of initial teacher preparation in Norway from 24-27 April 2017.

The OECD review team – Hannah von Ahlefeld (OECD), Philippa Cordingley (Centre for the Use of Research and Evidence in Education), Liesbeth Hens (Ministry of Education and Training, Flanders) and Danielle Toon (Learning First) – identified a number of “promising practices” in each country. These practices may not be widespread or representative, but seen in the context of other challenges, they represent a strength or opportunity to improve the country’s initial teacher preparation system – and for other countries to learn from them.

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Promising practice 4. 
Integrating knowledge and practice in teacher education in Norway

Context

Historically, teacher education in Norway has been characterised by tensions between subject disciplines and pedagogy. These include mainly conflicts between academic disciplines and how to teach them, and tensions between the practical and more theoretical dimensions of pedagogy. (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2018[1]). Further, the lack of opportunities for teacher candidates to learn in the context of practice and connect with what they have learnt in ITE has been cited as one of the key areas in which teaching programmes could be strengthened in Norway (Hammerness, 2013[2]).

More recently, the National Qualification Framework (NQF) and guidelines for initial teacher education (ITE) have given particular emphasis to the importance of integrating academic knowledge, subject didactics, the pedagogy underlying them, and the need to build on research-based evidence to sustain teaching practices (Ministry of Education and Research Norway, 2011[3]). Teacher educators are required to align these different dimensions of teaching – subject knowledge, knowledge of pedagogy, subject didactics, and practice. The guidelines for teacher educators are developed in ways which put this alignment requirement at the forefront of their collaborative efforts, as shown in Figure 1.
However, the nature of the pedagogical knowledge of teachers and how this knowledge is mobilised to frame their teaching are complex issues. For example, teachers deal with different typologies of knowledge, and the processes whereby these diverse types of knowledge can be influenced and governed to integrate new evidence and promising practices are still not well known (Guerriero, 2017). Recent research has called upon the need for a strategic “governance of teacher knowledge” (Révai and Guerriero, 2017) in order to better facilitate the mutual interaction between new evidence-based research and the repertoire of practices and understandings of teaching and learning to ensure a better professionalism.

Another key challenge is strengthening the “knowledge dynamics” that mediate in how explicit knowledge of facts and theories are codified into classroom practices that are not clearly articulated – or that are difficult for teachers to consciously speak about - and vice versa (Révai and Guerriero, 2017). To illustrate this with an example: the science of teaching informed by research is relatively easy to communicate in the form of words and symbolic representations to teacher candidates. In contrast, the way this knowledge is used responsively, creatively and intuitively in real classroom situations is much harder to express given its personal and highly contextualised nature (Paniagua and Istance, 2018).

This difficult relationship between theory and practice in teacher education is well reflected in the responses of new teachers in TALIS: while 50% report that they feel very well prepared in relation to the content of their subject, only 33% of new teachers expressed this level of confidence regarding the pedagogy and classroom practice of these subjects (OECD, 2014). Further, well established concepts in educational sciences and ITE programmes such as personalised learning and instructional alternatives, e.g. collaborative learning, are still rare to see in classrooms, and shows the limited impact of education reforms in ITE (Wyss, Kocher and Baer, 2017).
The importance of “Professional subjects”

The emphasis in the Norwegian system on combining both subject knowledge and subject didactics – i.e. content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987[10]) - provides a good example of the “practical turn” in teacher education around the world (Jenset, Klette and Hammermoss, 2017[11]). Current framework plans and guidelines in Norway now explicitly recognise the need to strongly connect content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge, and then offer opportunities to plan and implement teaching practices accordingly.

One of the most visible efforts to that effect is the so-called “professional subjects” where the academic subject and the corresponding subject didactics are defined together. The main goal is that subject related didactics is taught in relation to both pedagogical knowledge – i.e. knowledge of practice – and the academic subject itself (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016[12]). In this regard, the OECD team observed an interesting example of an established approach whereby a team of pedagogical, subject and subject didactics faculty make visible to teacher candidates the way their subject content and subject didactic knowledge are intertwined. The overall goal is to help candidates to make connections across all the dimensions included in the programme, as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Professional Subjects

Integrating theory of the subject and pedagogy with pedagogical content knowledge and general didactics

In the faculty of natural sciences in the University of Oslo, the NOKUT Expert Committee (Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education, see promising practice 5) the OECD team observed examples of enhanced didactical work connecting subject knowledge and subject didactics across the faculty where the new teacher education co-ordinator was working in close partnership with ProTed (Center for Professional Learning in Teacher Education, see promising practice 6).

Why is it a strength?

The OECD Review Team in its visit to Norway on 24-28 April 2017 considered that it is a strength in ITE because:

- It offers enhanced opportunities to grounded practice. Subject knowledge and subject didactics are both given prominence in ITE and are growingly widely recognised as a strength by school leaders and the teacher candidates themselves.
The depth of knowledge generated by this trend can be included as part of a strategy to improve the practical readiness of teacher candidates.

How could it be improved?

The OECD review team noted that:

- There are further possibilities to align theory and practice, subject didactics and general didactics. In some subjects of ITE programmes, there is limited coherence between didactics and subject knowledge. A better alignment of didactics and academic knowledge in the subject matter in ITE can enhance learning opportunities grounded in practice of teacher candidates. In addition, improving the collaboration between teacher educators and schools where teacher candidates develop their practicum will help foster a stronger continuum for teachers’ professional growth and development from ITE to in-service teaching.

For more information


