Promising practices

Center for Professional Learning in Teacher Education (ProTed): promoting innovation, research strategic partnerships and sharing of best practice in initial teacher education

Norway

Teacher education pathway category(ies): Ensuring the quality of initial teacher education

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

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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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Center for Professional Learning in Teacher Education (ProTed): promoting innovation, research, strategic partnerships and sharing of best practice in initial teacher education

Context

The Ministry of Education and Research established “Centres of Excellence in Higher Education” (SFU) in 2010 as a prestige arrangement for educational activities in higher education. The overarching goal of the SFU scheme is to contribute to the development of excellent quality in higher education, and to highlight the fact that education and research are equally important activities for higher education institutions. The SFU scheme, managed by the Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT), implies a “focused and long-term commitment to stimulate the development of teaching and learning methods at the bachelor and master’s level” (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016, p. 39[1]).

Since the launching of the pilot phase in 2010, four centres of excellence have been selected, including ProTed, the Centre for Professional Learning in Teacher Education. This centre, the result of a collaboration between the University of Oslo and the University of Tromsø, was established in 2012 to enhance quality in teacher education through developing integration and coherence via systematic experiments and disseminating results, and thus with the mandate of improving the quality in ITE.

One of the main challenges to improve the delivery of ITE into more research-based institutions is to go beyond “stand-alone efforts” and transform current complex epistemic structures within ITE programmes and organisations, rather than revisiting curricula and policy documents (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2016[1]). ProTed aimed at integrating scientific subjects, school subjects, pedagogy, and subject didactics, and thus create integrated teacher programmes (Vestøl, 2016[2]). ProTed is organised in work packages, each contributing to the design of coherent teacher education practices – Figure 1.
How does ProTed promote innovation, research, collaboration and sharing of best practice in initial teacher education?

**Innovation**

The first three work packages (Figure 1) are designed to highlight innovation in teacher education programmes related to student centred study designs. A large body of development projects collectively generates a movement towards the future, experimenting with new design elements throughout the five-year course of the study programmes (ProTed, 2017[3]). A good example of an innovative ProTed project is its strategic alliance with the National Knowledge Centre for Education and the establishment of an annual “Knowledge Parliament”. This is an annual meeting for teacher educators to explore issues such as developing research-based initial teacher education, joint development of the knowledge and practice field by researchers and practitioners as the start of a sustained, collaborative approach to developing quality.

**Research**

This strand is developed in a dedicated work package called “Teaching subjects”, aiming at investigating ways of teaching, disseminating and researching within subjects disciplines (Vestøl, 2016[2]). For example, Vestøl and Lund (2017[4]), describe how ProTed integrates theory, practice and research in two cases. First, using digital exams where students are requested to apply knowledge from pedagogy, subject disciplines and practices in their analysis of a classroom situation presented in a video. As discussed by these authors, this case shows the diverse ways in which knowledge integration takes place and the multiple strategies teacher candidates need to develop to deal with holistic interpretations of these classrooms. The second case is the “Introduction to R&D” project, where students are introduced to the use of research procedures. In this project, students focus on classroom observation and interviews of their teacher educators, followed by a two-week intensive work analysis.
**Strategic partnerships**

ProTed also has an important and strategic role in leading the group of teacher educators doing revisions to the ITE programme guidelines for slimming down the content and increasing coherence and links with practice. A strong example is the development of strategic partnerships between teacher education institutions (TEIs) and schools as centres of excellence (Lund and Eriksen, 2016[5]). The ProTed University Schools concept has been adopted by a number of TEIs. They create an arena in which TEIs and schools can enter into joint research projects and engage together in reading and evaluating research and planning small scale enquiries focussed on improving everyone’s practice. As discussed by Lund and Eriksen (2016[5]), the work conducted by ProTed makes gradual contributions to teacher education programmes that develop professional teachers who are prepared to teach in rapidly changing knowledge societies.

Hunt (2014[6]) argues that teacher education programmes cannot continue as isolated institutions and new relationships with schools are needed to connect theory to practice. Underpinning the importance of these partnerships is the triad-model developed by Lillejord and Børte (2016[7]) among mentors, supervisors and students to improve teacher candidates learning. In order to become professional education, TEIs need to partner schools to develop a common understanding on principles and practices, which in turn requires competent and engaged leadership.

**Sharing of best practice**

As showed in Figure 1, work packages four and five are concerned with the dissemination and implementation of new practices and research on teacher education. Work package four is concerned with building learning communities of teacher educators locally, nationally and internationally, aiming at integrating research- and experience-based knowledge on teacher education. To this extent, ProTed has increased efforts in two areas: developing research and development competences among staff, and is currently developing a model to improve the training of teacher educators (ProTed, 2017[3]). Further, work package five synthesises the knowledge produced through the other work packages, evaluates this knowledge in light of national and international research, and develops models for study design and quality descriptions. In 2018, two new projects aim at conducting an overall analysis of the “Oslo model for teacher education”. One is the post-doctoral project “Using video as an instructional tool to strengthen teacher candidates’ knowledge base and professional identity” – a longitudinal study, and a review on all research and evaluation of the entire teacher education programme at the University of Oslo.

**Why is it a strength?**

The OECD review team in its visit to Norway on 24-28 April 2017 considered that ProTed:

- **Offers an integrated model to innovate in all the dimensions of Initial Teacher Education.** ProTed values and reinforces the importance of quality in initial teacher education by promoting innovation, research, strategic partnerships among universities and schools and within universities for sharing best practice, including collaborating in the development of national guidelines in ITE.
- **Places the necessary emphasis on the role of teacher educators.** The actions undertaken by ProTed include not only the recognition of the key role of teacher
educators in designing ITE programmes (e.g. through the Knowledge Parliament), but also tailored opportunities for building their skills and knowledge.

**How could it be improved?**

The OECD review team noted that:

- *It will require to build more capacities to sustain and scale the ProTed model.* There is a general need to sustain, expand and deepen initiatives to share and scale good practices and research on effective teacher education across all those universities and schools that develop ITE programmes.

- *There is a need for further research on the outputs and impact of the programme developed by ProTed compared to other ITE programmes in Norway.* The need to generate more evidence to acknowledge the results of the so-called “Oslo model” is currently within the future plans of ProTed. Given the gap of research regarding the impact of different teacher training paths, the capacity of ProTed to generate comparative analysis between this model and other programmes might represent an important step to understand and improve initial teacher preparation models.

**For more information**


