



Effects of Collaborative Lesson Planning on Teacher Learning in the Practicum

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1. Background and Research Questions

According to Terhart (2000) planning, designing and reflecting on instructional processes are core elements of teaching. In the model of Content-Focused CoachingSM (West & Staub, 2003), teachers are assisted in their lesson planning as well as during the enactment of the lesson itself and for the reflection on the lesson. The emphasis lies on collaborative lesson planning.

This investigation focuses on collaborative lesson planning in the practical training of student teachers at the Institute "Unterstrass", which is part of the College for Teacher Education in Zurich / Switzerland.



Based on the rating of individual practicum-sessions:

1) To what degree do student teachers and cooperating teachers rate the learning by means of collaborative lesson planning to be helpful?

2) Does the perceived usefulness of student teachers' own lessons or reflections on the lessons differ depending on the condition (with collaborative lesson planning, without, as a bystander of the lesson planning of a fellow student)?

3) Do students rate the usefulness of learning from joint lesson planning with collaborating teachers as more helpful than the joint reflection of the lesson?

4) What do students rate as more helpful for their learning: Their collaborative lesson planning with cooperating teachers or listening as a bystander to the joint planning of a fellow student with a cooperating teacher?

5) Are collaboratively planned lessons rated higher on instructional quality by the cooperating teachers than lessons with no collaborative lesson planning?

Retrospective overall evaluation:

6) What are the benefits of collaborative planning that the student teachers and cooperating teachers stated to be helpful?

2. Method and Design

The effect of collaborative lesson planning on student teachers' learning was investigated on the basis of a quasi-experimental design, systematically varying the element of the newly introduced collaborative lesson planning. Each student was assigned to at least one lesson in each of the following conditions: with collaborative lesson planning, without, as a bystander of the collaborative lesson planning of a fellow student.

By means of questionnaires student teachers (N=26) of the first year assessed their own learning. In addition the cooperating teachers (N=10) assessed the learning of the students in each of the three conditions. Furthermore each lesson was rated by the cooperating teachers based on criteria for instructional quality. In retrospect, students and cooperating teachers also answered open questions concerning the experienced advantages and disadvantages of collaborative lesson planning.

3. Results

1) The usefulness of collaborative planning for teacher learning is rated (1=not helpful, 2=a little helpful, 3=helpful, 4=very helpful) by both, students (M = 3.12) and cooperating teachers (M = 3.35), as helpful to very helpful. The ratings of student teachers and cooperating teachers do not show a significant difference.

2) The benefit of teaching the lesson rated by the students does not show a significant difference whether or not they participated in collaborative lesson planning. Similarly, the benefit of the reflection on the lesson shows no difference within the three conditions (see Fig. 1).

3) When students were assisted with collaborative lesson planning of their own lesson, they rated the usefulness of learning from the collaborative lesson planning (M = 3.12) as more helpful than learning from reflection on the lesson (M = 2.5) [Z (N=23) = -2.869, p < 0.01]. Learning from the teaching of the lesson was rated as the most helpful (M = 3.48).

When students did not participate in any collaborative planning, they rated the teaching of their lesson as more helpful for their learning than the reflection of their lesson. This difference is significant [Z (N=20) = -2.272, p < 0.05]. The same pattern of results holds for student teachers participating in collaborative lesson planning as bystanders.

4) The collaborative planning of their own lesson was rated to be more helpful for their learning than attending lesson planning as bystanders only [Z (N=17) = -2.592, p < 0.05].

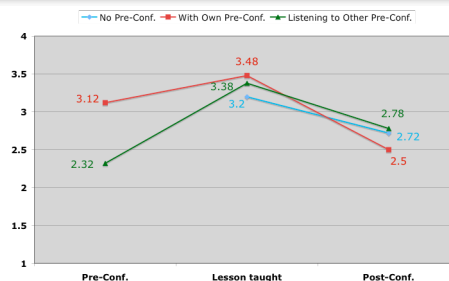


Fig. 1: Rating of the benefit of collaborative lesson planning, teaching the lesson and reflection on the lesson depending on the three conditions

5) The assessments of instructional quality of the lessons by cooperating teachers shows that the quality of lessons assisted with planning were rated significantly better (M = 4.06) than lessons without collaborative planning (M = 3.75) [Z (N=16) = -2.451, p < 0.05].

6) The most frequently mentioned benefits of detailed lesson planning by the students and the cooperating teachers can be assigned to the following codes:

Table 1: Benefits of detailed collaborative lesson planning

Code	Student Teachers (N = 26 equals 100%)		Cooperating Teachers (N = 10 equals 100%)		Total (N = 36 equals 100%)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Gain of confidence	10	38.5	3	30	13	36.1
Exchange / get ideas	10	38.5	1	10	11	30.5
Gaining form experienced others	4	15.4	2	20	10	27.8
Get help	5	19.2	-	-	5	13.8

5. Discussion

Student teachers rated cooperating teachers' assistance of lesson planning to be more helpful for their learning than the joint reflection after the lesson. Student teachers who were bystanders of lesson planning only, however, did not seem to benefit as much. Lessons with antecedent collaborative lesson planning were rated higher on instructional quality than the ones without. These results support the conjecture based on Content-Focused Coaching that the assistance of student teachers' lesson planning by cooperating teachers fosters the learning of student teachers.

Moreover, the benefit of the experimentally introduced innovation is supported by the fact that joint lesson planning has been sustained as an element in the practica by the Institute "Unterstrass" even beyond the conclusion of this research project.