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From school improvement to student cases: teacher collaborative work as a context for professional development

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ABSTRACT

Research has extensively linked teacher collaborative work with opportunities for both explicit and implicit professional development. However, while teachers work together more often than before, little is known about how workplace collaborative contexts are structured in terms of who and how frames the problems of practice. Drawing on an ethnographically inspired case study, this article examines three common collaborative contexts and discusses how and why different ways of structuring them through problem framing mattered for professional development. The findings reveal that the context intended for school improvement offered only incidental opportunities for teachers to engage in problem framing. The 'work works' question was central in structuring the contexts intended for professional development and often acted as a limiting frame. In contrast, teachers' work with student cases involved broader opportunities for explorative problem framing. The analysis emphasises the role of framing questions in structuring teacher collaborative work.

Introduction

The literature shows that collaborative work is essential both for formally organised professional development and for what Evans (2019) terms 'implicit' professional development – development, which is not explicitly labelled as such and resides in day-to-day practice, particularly in professional interactions (Imants 2002, McLaughlin and Talbert 2006, Stoll *et al.* 2006, Vescio *et al.* 2008). However, a collaborative organisation of work does not automatically result in professional development underpinned by pedagogical enquiry, experimentation and reflection (Kelchtermans 2006, Horn and Little 2010, Kennedy 2014). In this regard, some studies draw attention to the deep-seated norms of classroom privacy and consensus-orientation, which narrow collaborative work to non-threatening and repetitive discussions (de Lima 2001, Engestrom and Kerosuo 2007, Little and Curry 2009). Others point out the limitations of externally imposed collaborative work, in which teachers are positioned as implementers of progressive ideas defined by policymakers (Hargreaves 2000, Talbert 2010, Kennedy 2014).

Indeed, some countries not just recommend but mandate schools to organise teacher collaborative work. To this end, one interesting example is Norway, which in the last decade has swayed back and forth between the reforms inspired by the new public management and more social-democratic, egalitarian approaches (Helgoy and Homme 2016, Imsen *et al.* 2017). How teacher collaborative work is currently structured is illustrative. On the one hand, collaborative forms of 'explicit' professional development typically come to schools as part of externally designed projects

intended to promote novel perspectives on teaching and learning (Kirsten 2020). At the same time, many of these projects emphasise teachers' explorative, agentic position towards professional development (Hermansen 2017, Tronsmo 2018). Moreover, schools are required to provide time, space and support for routine collaborative work, which can be seen as an important context for implicit professional development.

Put in Evetts' terms, opportunities for professional development come both 'from above' and 'from within' the specific professional settings. Mausethagen and Smeby (2016) emphasise that rather than forming a dichotomy, the 'from-above' and 'from-within' axes structure the space for workplace professional development in sometimes complementary and sometimes conflicting ways. It concerns not only logistical aspects (such as how often teachers get to work together) but also particular ways of structuring collaborative work through problem framing. This makes it interesting to explore how and who gets to frame professional problems as well as how different ways of framing may matter for professional development as a process taking place explicitly and implicitly.

Against this background, this article focuses on structured contexts for workplace collaborative work in broader terms – both explicitly intended for professional development and those intended for routine professional tasks such as, for example, discussions of student cases. Empirically, the article draws on an ethnographically inspired qualitative study, in which collaborative work of one teacher team in a Norwegian school was followed closely for one year. The research questions are as follows: How are some of the common contexts for collaborative work structured? If there is variation, what are the associated limitations and opportunities for professional development? These questions do not tie professional development exclusively to collaboration but place individual perspectives on learning beyond its scope. Moreover, it is not suggested that collaborative work should necessarily bring about professional development, but rather that such opportunities can be better structurally integrated into daily practice.

In what follows, I first review some of the cross-cutting themes in the earlier research on teacher collaborative work as a context for professional development, provide an analytical perspective and detail the study design. I then present the findings and discussion concluding with implications for workplace collaborative work.

Previous research

Studies investigating teacher collaborative work as a context for professional development comprise a large field (Vangrieken *et al.* 2017) with multiple entrances and a long history (Clark and Lampert 1986, Day *et al.* 2012). A recurrent argument, which also foregrounds this article, is that although collaborative contexts are essential for teacher professional development, establishing them does not guarantee transformative and sustained changes in professional practice. Some studies show that even when given space for collaborative work, teachers often remain at the level of logistics, story-sharing or help-seeking and rarely engage in critical, theoretically-informed discussions and systematic experimentation with new ideas (Kelchtermans 2006, Stoll *et al.* 2006, Vescio *et al.* 2008, Horn and Little 2010).

The existing research outlines conditions for workplace professional development. These conditions include, for example, the focus on how students learn – rather than how teachers teach (Vescio *et al.* 2008), de-privatisation of classroom practice (Little 2002, Levine and Marcus 2010) and presence of open, critical discussions, in which disagreements are addressed rather than avoided (Achinstein 2002, Engeström 2005, Markauskaite and Goodyear 2014, Koffeman and Snoek 2018). At the same time, research indicates that the focus on student learning does not in itself prevent what Appleton terms 'activity traps' (2002) – collaboration centred on planning activities with little consideration of underpinning conceptual perspectives on teaching and learning (Earl and Timperley 2009, Biesta *et al.* 2015). In part, activity traps can be linked to how teacher professional knowledge is described in the literature – as complex but fragmented and activated in

response to specific situations (Markauskaite and Goodyear 2014). In addition, some studies highlight personal teaching experience, in contrast to more abstract knowledge, as often a sole source for implicit professional development (Lahn 2012, Mausethagen *et al.* 2017).

The studies above focus predominantly on the explicit forms of professional development and single initiatives. In contrast, research into how workplace collaborative work is structured as a whole – over an extended period of time and inclusive of both intentional professional development and routine collaborative work – has been limited. Moreover, while there has been an elaborate conceptual critique of teachers' shrinking autonomy and increasingly subordinate position towards the state (Vanderstraeten 2007, Hopmann 2015, Biesta 2015a), few empirical studies analyse this relationship at the micro-level of teacher collaborative work. This article aims to extend the existing lines of enquiry by focusing on workplace collaborative contexts as a whole, with opportunities for and limitations to both explicit and implicit professional development. These opportunities and limitations are thought to potentially come both from above and from within the school and teachers' immediate professional context (Evetts 2003).

Analytical perspective

This article combines two analytical tools – Evetts' (2003) concept of professionalisation 'from within' and 'from above' and Benford and Snow's (2000) work on frame analysis. Evetts (2003) suggests a continuum that describes how professions develop – some predominantly 'from above' while others – more 'from within'. The ideas of development as a process stemming from within schools are prominent in the literature emphasising teacher autonomy (Buchanan 2015, Frostenson 2015). However, as previously mentioned, such development may be limited by the norms of privacy and non-confrontation. Conversely, from-above development is typically associated with standardisation and managerial control (Jeffrey 2002, Ball 2015). At the same time, structural support is also a means for ensuring transparency of professional practice and sustainability of local initiatives. This suggests that from-above and from-within development is better seen not as a dichotomy but as a relationship, within which problems of practice are differently framed, and thus different opportunities for professional development are afforded (Mausethagen and Smeby 2016).

How problems are framed is a twofold process. Benford and Snow (2000) make a distinction between the two forms – diagnostic and prognostic framing. Diagnostic framing problematises the field and focuses on an issue, suggesting a particular perspective and interpretation. This interpretation indicates and sometimes prescribes a certain way of thinking. In Goffman's (1974) terms, a frame sets an interpretive context that communicates the answer to the question of 'what is it that is going on here?' It also creates rationales, assigns responsibility and delineates the scope of what is possible and meaningful to do in particular situations, leading to some solutions and eliminating others (Benford and Snow 2000). Moreover, who and how formulates the problems of practice may differentially position teachers as agents capable and willing to make a change (Coburn 2006, Horn 2007). For instance, framing achievement in a primary school in terms of tests results suggests a notably different course of action than framing it as the development of curiosity and socio-emotional skills. The process of formulating a specific course of action and solutions is referred to as prognostic framing (Benford and Snow 2000).

Together, these two analytical tools help to illuminate how workplace collaborative work is structured as a whole by focusing on the often-implicit level of problem framing, which underpins opportunities for explicit and implicit professional development.

Empirical setting and method

The study builds on a qualitative, ethnographically-inspired case study carried out with a 6th-grade teacher team. In Parker-Jenkins' terms (2016, p. 12), it can be viewed as 'an ethno-case study' that

'conveys a sense of conducting an inquiry with people, employing techniques associated with long-term and intensive ethnography but limited in terms of research time, engagement with the data and the extent of the findings'. Such an immersive approach helped to obtain a broader and more in-depth picture of workplace collaborative contexts over one school year.

A middle-size public primary school (550 pupils) located in an urban area in the Eastern part of Norway was selected using purposeful sampling as an information-rich site for observing systematic teacher collaboration (Flyvbjerg 2006). The selection was intended not as 'best practice' but rather as 'a good example of practice' (Kelchtermans 2015). Moreover, it was assumed that a diverse student profile offers a complex empirical picture of professional problems and tasks as well as a better outlook on the from-above/from-within dynamics, seeing that such schools often receive close attention from policymakers and local authorities in Norway (Elstad 2009).

The team included six teachers collectively responsible for 75 students. The pseudonyms are as follows: three headteachers (Hedda, John and Mary), a subject teacher (Alice), a pedagogical assistant (Rose) and a department head (Anna) who occasionally participated in meetings. The principal's pseudonym is Katherine. The team had worked together for several years and had a relatively balanced profile in terms of experience (from 3 years onward), age (from 26 to 60) and gender (one male teacher). The data was collected throughout the 2016–2017 school year, including in total 70 hours of non-participant observations, 'go-along' interviews, three in-depth group interviews (4 hours in total) and documentary data such as planning papers, meeting handouts and minutes. The field notes sought to capture as much of the content as possible, focusing on central topics and substantive turns of talk.

Throughout the year, the team met 43 times, of which 22 meetings were observed with a consideration to cover different collaborative contexts evenly. On a typical week, there were two afternoon meetings, participation in which was required. One was intended for routine planning and ongoing student cases and another – either for school improvement or professional development activities. The contexts intended for school improvement and professional development involved all teachers at school, but a plenary was typically followed by one or two hours of focused teamwork. Such an organisation of structured collaborative work is typical for Norwegian schools. The findings section provides a further description of teacher collaborative contexts.

Out of 22 analysed meetings, excerpts from five meetings were selected as most typical and information-rich in terms of by whom and in which ways problems of practice were framed. Specifically, this included excerpts from two school improvement meetings (out of overall three such meetings held that year), one day-long meeting intended explicitly for professional development (out of ten observed and analysed meetings) and two casework meetings (out of ten observed and analysed meetings). Selecting focal meetings across a broader range of data allowed us to draw a more ethnographically detailed account of collaborative work. In addition, the interview data helped to clarify the background to the issues discussed over the meetings and teachers' perspectives. The excerpts are reconstructed and abridged from the field notes taken during the observations with the quotes written down on the spot.

The analysis followed two steps. The data was first mapped with open, descriptive and then with focused, theory-derived codes (Brinkmann and Kvale 2014). The open codes were used to group the observations thematically by the type, theme and objective of the meetings, which were then supplemented with relevant interview excerpts (Saldana 2012). Then, the analytical perspective and research questions guided the analysis. The objective was to unpack various configurations of diagnostic and prognostic framing focusing in addition on how particular frames (in the form of questions, tasks, problem setting) structure collaborative work. At the third step, the data was explored as to how different ways of problem framing worked towards creating opportunities for and limitations to professional development.

This use of ethnographic methods in the study was underpinned by ensuring ethical arrangements in the conduct and the analysis of data and by the process of reflexivity towards fieldwork practice and relations (Hammersley 2006, Brookfield 2009). This required awareness of my

positioning as an outsider – a researcher and a person with a different cultural background, but also an insider as a teacher in the past. Such positioning played to my advantage, allowing to ask clarification questions while being generally treated as a colleague. To ensure the validity, the findings and possible interpretations were discussed with other researchers as a method for communicative validity and, at an earlier stage, with the teachers as a way for respondent validation (Brinkmann and Kvale 2014). The analysis offers theoretical interpretations and analytical generalisations; thus the external validity of the findings might be limited to schools with similar policy and organisational contexts (Brinkmann and Kvale 2014).

Results

The following analysis examines three contexts constituting structured collaborative work at the examined school: 1) meetings intended for school improvement, 2) meetings intended for professional development and 3) routine team meetings. The contexts differed functionally but also signalled distinct patterns of problem framing. Specifically, the findings suggest that routine work on student cases involved ample space for from-within diagnostic problem framing, whereas the contexts explicitly intended for professional development relied on a more limiting prognostic frame of 'work works'. For the most part, the context intended for school improvement supplied diagnostic and prognostic framing 'from above', leaving the teachers in the position of implementers.

School improvement as policy alignment and teambuilding

Data for the first collaborative context involve two meetings intended as a 'primary discussion and planning space for strategic school development', as per the school documents. The meetings were similarly organised as a plenary presentation held by the school principal, followed by a task for teacher teams and a reflection round. The meetings shared a pattern, in which the work was structured mainly as policy briefing aimed to provide an externally developed perspective, while teachers' active participation was expected in teambuilding activities. Diagnostic and prognostic framing of the issues related to school improvement originated mostly from above school with the teachers being walked through the strategy rather than included in the framing process.

The first plenary meeting provides an example. Katherine, the principal, began the plenary by introducing long-term objectives. She was using professionally made slides provided by the local competence centre, which laid out 'the challenges of the 21 century' and 'evidenced solutions for schools'. Some challenges like digitalisation were more general, while others were more context-specific, such as rising dropout rates in local high schools. Katherine pointed to the slide visualising test data and talked about the importance of early intervention in primary school. She pointed out that it was their 'responsibility zone' and that they need to think about their long-term impact. 'What is the shortest way to get there?' she asked and transitioned to the slide with solutions. She also stressed that the school's current 'contribution effect' is 3.7%, which was 'somewhat higher than average', and that 'it meant that the measures worked'.

This excerpt supplies an illustration of diagnostic and prognostic framing stemming 'from-above'. The meeting outlines a policy landscape as a way of diagnostic framing and sets a specific prognostic frame – early intervention for student achievement. Katherine further narrows this frame with an efficiency-focused question ('the shortest way there') and the emphasis on test results. When she concludes the presentation by asking for clarification questions, the teachers remained largely silent but livened up during the break and warm-up activities. Later that day, as part of teambuilding, the teams were invited to complete a three-question assignment. They were asked to '1) to reflect on the school vision, 2) share what they know about the school history and 3) recall what the new policy plan is called and what its focus areas are.' To address the questions, the teachers briefly recollected the points Katherine made earlier, often borrowing wording from the

slides. It is notable here that collaborative work is structured through questions for understanding, rather than a critical examination of policy perspectives, and teambuilding activities. Later during the interview, the teachers referred to the issues brought up at the meeting as mainly beyond their discretion ('beyond my pay grade', as one of them put it), highlighting however that they do not 'fundamentally disagree' with the external frames and often find them 'in theory relevant', 'making sense' and 'inspiring'.

However, while distancing from the issues of school improvement cut across the data, there were nuances to the pattern. One such example comes from the second planning meeting, which began with the same slides as a context framer followed by a teamwork assignment, this time focusing on digitalisation objectives. The task question for teams asked 'to reflect on the work in the first semester from the perspective of digitalisation objectives'. In workgroups, teachers brainstormed activities involving technology, which they found to 'be working'. There was nevertheless an interesting departure from the main pattern when Mary interrupted her suggestion in the brainstorming by pointing out that she finds digitalisation rhetoric 'somewhat empty of pedagogy'. Her statement redirected the discussion towards a more critical exchange of perspectives related to the role of digital solutions in teaching. However, at the reflection round, the teachers only briefly mentioned this part, focusing instead on presenting a brainstormed list of activities 'that work'.

Collaborative work in this excerpt is structured similarly – it starts with a pre-set diagnostic frame. However, it proceeds with a more open framing question for group work. Interestingly, this question does not prescribe a focus on prognostic framing and brainstorming with the 'what works' framing question is evoked by teachers themselves. This has an important outcome of zooming in from a more principle discussion about digitalisation to more specific brainstorming of activities. The optics zoom back out when Mary suggests a reframing question. However, her question and the following discussion are not picked up further at the reflection round, overridden by the focus on activities.

The data reveals that the context intended for school improvement was to a large extent limiting in terms of opportunities for formulating diagnostic and prognostic framing formulated from within the school. In the first example, collaborative work is framed largely as policy alignment and team building. The framing questions are didactic – formulated in a from-above manner to elicit correct answers, rather than inviting for more horizontal and critical exchange of positions and reflection. In contrast, the second example involves a more discursive question for prognostic framing. However, with some incidental exceptions, the teachers structure collaborative work as brainstorming, shifting the focus from the broader educational problems to the specificity of classroom activities. Such dive into specifics gives a glimpse of a pattern characteristic to the collaborative context explicitly intended for professional development.

'What works' as a primary frame for explicit professional development

The collaborative context intended explicitly for workplace professional development included two large- and three small-scale professional development projects held in the year of data collection. These projects involved either some form of collaborative lesson planning or experience exchange. The school administration designed small-scale seminars in-house, whereas larger development projects, such as Lesson Study, were curated by the local competence centre in line with the national guidelines. In total, the data for analysis included ten meetings, excerpts from one of them are provided below as typical and information-rich. What comes strongly across the analysed meetings is an extensive focus on producing prognostic frames while outsourcing or bypassing development of diagnostic frames. The focus on prognostic frames generated positive resonance as useful and relevant learning, and the framing question of 'what works' was routinely used by the teachers. There were, however, some limitations to this frame.

The following excerpt from the end-of-the-year experience exchange workshop illustrates the pattern. Objectives for this meeting were formulated by the school administration: 'to stimulate

professional reflection' and 'develop better continuity across the grades'. There were two rounds of meetings, in which teams worked together. The task was to share and discuss 'what worked and did not work that year'. Alice started the meeting by introducing the Food and Health subject as 'the focus area for all sixth-graders as per the national curriculum'. She detailed the logistical plan, read out the objectives from the national curriculum, showed a homework template and concluded with 'some tricks' about temporary ability grouping. This was all that the teachers prepared, so they decided to use the remaining time on brainstorming suggestions for the other team. Activities and small projects like as a cooking workshop or a windowsill garden were brainstormed on the whiteboard. In the process, the teachers engaged with one another's ideas by asking for elaboration and sharing similar experiences. They also noted activities, which did not work 'because they took too much time' or 'were not well-suited for the age'. Brainstorming was absorbing, and the other team left with a long list of activities and tips. Later that day, when the teams were sharing reflections at the plenary meeting, they presented this list of activities as a takeaway. In the follow-up interview, they clarified that 'what worked' to them implied in this instance 'what the kids enjoyed', 'what I was actually able to pull' and 'what gives results'.

The following week the team had a routine team meeting, in which they expressed content with the experience exchange workshop characterising it as 'practical', 'useful' and 'inspirational' because 'there was so much interesting one can do [in the classroom]'. However, when asked why they considered certain activities 'working' and others not – beyond the logistical reasons of limited time and resources – the teachers shared that they found some 'conceptual challenges' in teaching Food and Health. For example, Rosa explained that '[their] students come from the families holding different perceptions about what "health" and "healthy food" mean'. She added that this makes 'teaching good food and health habits complicated and challenges [their] own ideas about good habits'. The other teachers came with more examples noting that they 'do not really get to discuss those challenges in-depth' and 'do not have good solutions for them'.

On the one hand, the 'what works' framing question in these excerpts steers the teachers' attention towards the specificity of prognostic frames leaving the underpinning pedagogical rationales implicit and taken-for-granted. This pattern is prominent across the data making from-within development of diagnostic frames (similar to the abovementioned frame problematising varied perceptions of good food habits) limited to incidental opportunities, which take place mostly outside the structured contexts for collaborative work. Furthermore, the excerpt from the reflection round at the plenary meeting suggests that without articulating diagnostic frames, prognostic frames may become too loosely connected to the pedagogical rationales and instead become tied to more immediate concerns ('what was possible to pull'). On the other hand, the interview data indicates that the focus on concrete activities and solutions offered a sense of productivity and relevance.

The pattern characterising the collaborative context intended explicitly for professional development stands in some contrast to how the teachers engaged with ongoing student cases during weekly team meetings.

Explorative diagnostic questions as a frame for casework

Weekly teamwork constituted the third structured context for collaborative work. It involved curriculum alignment, timetabling and catching up, but most commonly, it focused on systematic work with ongoing student cases and social dynamics in and outside classrooms. This included specific cases of learning difficulties, socioemotional learning, classroom climate, peer relations and multiple issues connected to student wellbeing. Although this collaborative context was not explicitly intended for professional development, the data suggests that it provided opportunities for teachers to develop not only prognostic but also diagnostic frames. This was typically done through a chain of questions problematising teachers' former experiences, building contextual background and exploring alternative solutions. Moreover, casework resonated strongly among

the teachers as an essential context for implicit professional learning. The following excerpt illustrates how a typical case meeting was structured.

The meeting focused on Mike – a new student recently transferred to school from a refugee introduction course. Hedda started by sharing observations on what was happening to Mike, 'He is spending much time with an assistant outside the classroom; it's difficult for him to follow instruction and he is not participating in social interactions either'. She added that 'it is important to include him in the classwork as much as possible'. 'What do you think? What are your observations? Asked she. The teachers followed up by gathering the context such as family circumstances and observations from different school contexts. Then, taking her turn, Mary expressed some doubt, 'I am not sure here … I think Mike needs more language tutoring'. To that, Hedda posed a discursive question, 'So … I wonder if it is a lack of inclusion that hinders language learning in this instance or poor language skills that prevent inclusion. How do we approach this?' After an exchange of perspectives, John asked the following question, 'In this concrete case, what is in Mike's best interest? I think that it is to make him feel more confident and included.' Later, the teachers decided on a solution – to temporarily use more English as a language of communication in the classroom 'to help Mike grow confidence and start building relationships'. In the follow-up interview, they noted that this was 'somewhat original' as it is 'much more common to simply add more language tutoring in such instances'.

This excerpt starts with the teachers supplying the context and opening the case for interpretation. They come up with two possible diagnostic frames – one taking departure in language learning and one in inclusion. Framing here is structured by three diagnostic questions coming from different teachers. The first builds the context ('what is happening to the student?'), the second problematises it by contrasting alternative perspectives ('is it more about language or inclusion?') and the third shifts the attention from a possible deficit perspective (from what is wrong with Mike) to the student's current needs (what is in his best interest?). These framing questions functioned differently than the 'what works' question in the context intended explicitly for professional development. Rather than focusing on generating solutions on the onset, the questions helped unpack the case and create space for different perspectives. These perspectives, however, were rarely explicitly linked to more abstract knowledge regarding second language acquisition, learning or development of social-emotional skills but rather to personal experiences.

Another example of how a chain of explorative diagnostic questions framed collaborative work comes from a meeting focused not on individual cases but social dynamics in the class. The agenda was brought up by John and concerned 'distractions and disruptions' in the learning environment after the summer break. The case was first unpacked from several perspectives using the framing question 'what is it that is going on'. This included a review of John's current instructional strategy and other teachers' ongoing experiences with these students. The second step was framed by a specifying question ('what is it that we are struggling with?') and the third – by the question of students' current needs and teachers' available resources. As a result, the team decided to focus on developing more 'collaborative experiences' through facilitating daily outdoor games and testing if 'this experience transfers to other learning contexts'.

The two above excerpts illustrate a notable observation across the data on casework – a way of structuring collaborative work through explorative diagnostic questions, which signal the limits of teachers' current knowledge and open space for reframing and ultimately a broader scope of possible solutions. Later in the interview, the teachers referred to this as 'important learning about what we don't know'. They added that socioemotional learning is an area 'with a lot of dilemmas' and 'many subjective experiences'. They emphasised that casework involves much learning because 'it builds a collective knowledge base of cases'. Moreover, discursive questions oriented the teachers towards the solutions with a potential impact within their competence and resources. They shared that casework 'makes [them] feel vulnerable and very responsible', noting that 'responsible' to them was a feeling of 'having to and being able to make a difference'. Hence, the data from casework meetings provides multiple examples of explorative problem framing

formulated by the teachers and stemming 'from within' the local professional practice. At the same time, opportunities for professional development in this collaborative context may be, in some respects, limited because diagnostic frames remain specific to cases with personal experiences being almost an exclusive knowledge reference in discussions.

Discussion

This article shows how some of the common contexts for teacher collaborative work are structured in terms of who and in which ways frames the problems of practice. The analysis indicates that while it mattered whether the frames originated from within or from above the specific professional setting, the type of questions framing collaborative work played at least an equally significant role in shaping opportunities for explicit and implicit professional development. In what follows, the findings are first summarised and then discussed in terms of opportunities and limitations that framing questions carry for explicit and implicit professional development. To this end, the three collaborative contexts provide an interesting variation.

The first context intended for school improvement was structured mainly as teambuilding and policy briefing with pre-set diagnostic frames. Whereas teachers' work was often framed by didactic rather than discursive questions, teachers sometimes themselves re-framed externally formulated explorative questions into more specific 'what works' questions. Moreover, discursive questions posed by the teachers in connection to the issues taken up at these meetings were rarely picked up for deeper exploration in structured collaborative work. This happened, for example, with a discussion regarding underpinning pedagogy in digital solutions, which got sidelined by the brainstorming of activities and never reached a wider plenary. Overall, the data suggests that this collaborative context positioned teachers to a greater extent as implementers of external ideas and bystanders in relation to more principle issues of school improvement.

The second context intended explicitly for professional development reveals a similar pattern, in which the question of 'work works', sometimes formulated from-above and sometimes by the teachers themselves, acted as a primary frame. It focused the attention on brainstorming activities, which left the process of diagnostic framing largely under-articulated and peripheral. In part, these findings resonate with the existing research in highlighting the focus on prognostic framing as, on the one hand, productive, relevant and inspirational but, on the other hand, lacking a conceptual perspective (Earl and Timperley 2009). Moreover, sharing hands-on experience and activities that 'did not work' to some extent helped to 'de-privatise' teaching practice (Horn and Little 2010). However, de-privatising here did not extend to discussing possible tensions in the underpinning perspectives on teaching and learning but remained caught up in 'activity traps', where ideas were built on one another rather than critically deliberated as alternatives (Appleton 2002, Markauskaite and Goodyear 2014). In this, the analysis concurs with the existing research in noting that the focus on 'what works' have limitations for pedagogical enquiry and experimentation because the choices are likely made in favour of more predictable and familiar solutions (Atkinson 2000, Biesta 2015b). In sum, the findings suggest that this collaborative context provided many opportunities for professional development as a cumulative process of extending prognostic frames but few opportunities to problematise existing practices through articulating and negotiating diagnostic frames.

In contrast, routine work on student cases supplied multiple examples of from-within diagnostic framing. This was achieved by structuring collaborative work through a chain of explorative framing questions. Rather than shifting the focus to solutions ('what works best?', 'what is the shortest way to get there?), those questions "complicated" cases and signalled the limits of teachers' knowledge, encouraging them to look beyond the familiar ways. As the teachers reflected, collaborative diagnostic framing created a stronger sense of responsibility as they tested different frames, within which their professional actions could make a difference. At the same time, casework relied almost exclusively on teachers' experience and contextual information as knowledge sources. In addition, developed diagnostic frames were tightly linked to specific cases

and rarely left team meetings to become a subject for more conceptually informed discussions in the contexts intended explicitly for professional development. This observation may illustrate the fragmented nature of teacher professional knowledge and its heavy reliance on personal experience (Lahn 2012, Markauskaite and Goodyear 2014, Mausethagen *et al*. 2017). In this regard, student casework can be seen as having considerable untapped opportunities as a context for implicit professional development underpinned by pedagogical enquiry, experimentation and reflection.

Across the three collaborative contexts, the analysis emphasises the role of framing questions. In particular, framing questions substantially differed in relation to the scope of problems addressed. More zoomed-in, case-specific collaborative work was framed with discursive, problematising questions while more zoomed-out, principle issues of school improvement were framed through didactic and efficiency-focused questions. Whereas the 'what works' frame was often suggested by the school administration, it was also a common from-within frame evoked by the teachers, particularly in the contexts explicitly intended for professional development. One possible way to explain why it was so is to look at the structural relationship between the teachers as a professional group and the state. The literature notes that teachers' space for professional autonomy has been historically bound to the choice of classroom methods whereas more fundamental issues of education were considered the domain of the state (Vanderstraeten 2007, Hopmann 2015). This analysis suggests that distancing from the more fundamental educational concerns and pedagogical rationales is limiting in terms of opportunities for explicit and implicit professional development.

However, rather than merely pointing to the areas where the teachers lacked autonomy, the analysis suggests that collaborative work related to the issues of school improvement and explicit professional development may benefit from being structured through more discursive and problematising framing questions. This is important in at least two respects. First, it is because teachers' professional problems are increasingly broader and deeper than those related to individual student cases and a choice of relevant classroom activities (Hopmann 2015, Biesta 2015b). Even in casework, the teachers dealt not just with student problems but also with student potentials and larger pedagogical aspirations. Moreover, problems in education do not exist as objective facts of nature but are value-laden, politically charged and socially contested (Coburn 2006). And so are different ways of framing these problems, including the questions that routinely structure teacher collaborative work. This may imply that teachers' work requires a much wider scope of diagnostic frames and perhaps a different type of questions to frame collaborative work as well as better availability of conceptual resources to support the framing process. Second, as the data suggests, framing questions are linked to teachers' sense of professional agency and responsibility. Specifically, structuring collaborative work through discursive, problematising questions not only stimulated novel and alternative perspectives but also shifted the focus towards pedagogical strategies, in which teachers feel that they make a greater difference. This sense of commitment and personal investment was, however, much more evident in relation to student socio-emotional development than more academic aspects of pedagogical work or school development.

This takes the discussion to the more practical takeaways. Specifically, to what kind of from-above support, structures and resources bring about opportunities for professional development as a collaborative process stemming from within the local professional practice. The analysis suggests a need for more explorative, teacher-led collaborative work that goes beyond student casework and teaching methods and involves diagnostic framing related to more principle issues of professional practice. For instance, while it does not follow that extending collaborative contexts will necessarily broaden the scope of professional problems, collaborative work may benefit from more content-focused, explorative facilitation within the already existing contexts. As some studies suggest, such facilitation or conversation protocols can work towards breaking the persistence of 'activity traps' and encourage a more critical and more conceptually-oriented stance (Andrews-Larson *et al*. 2017). In this regard, it is important to further empirically examine collaborative contexts, in which

teachers engage with a broader scope of professional problems than those related to classroom practice and student cases.

Conclusion

Over the last decade, extending contexts for teacher collaborative work has been a popular policy idea, based on a firm belief that it brings about opportunities for both implicit and explicit professional development. This study suggests that such confidence may be of little avail if explorative problem framing remains primarily limited to work with student cases while school improvement and explicit forms of professional development are framed increasingly through the 'what works' question and policy alignment. The analysis particularly stresses the role of framing questions in structuring teacher collaborative contexts.

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