15. COME TOGETHER

Professional Development of Career Guidance Practitioners through Co-Generative Learning

ABSTRACT

Movements in international career guidance research have been calling for the advance of more qualitative and collaborative research in career guidance. This chapter argues that such a development can take inspiration from the Nordic tradition of participatory action research. As a starting point, the chapter presents Norwegian theory on co-generative learning, a central concept of participatory action research. Based on two cases from a Danish action research and development project in career guidance that applied the Swedish action research method of research circles, the chapter discusses how collaborative research processes can facilitate professional learning and development.

INTRODUCTION

In the Nordic countries, participatory action research has played a prominent role in many areas of professional research and development (Pålshaugen, 2014). Often initiated and funded through a cooperation between employers' organisations and labour unions, a considerable body of new knowledge concerning professions and practice in the welfare state has developed through action research in the last 40 years (Gunnarson, Hansen, Nielsen, & Srisikandarajah, 2016; Pålshaugen, 2014). In this chapter, we discuss how a central concept from the tradition of action research, co-generative learning, can challenge and develop professional knowledge and practice in career guidance and can set the scene for more collaborative relations between career guidance research and practice where professional learning is facilitated. Co-generative learning is, in this context, understood as a working relationship between research and practice, where, broadly speaking 'insiders [i.e. professionals] become more theoretical about their practice and outsiders [i.e. researchers] more practical about their theory' (Elden & Levin, 1991, p. 130).

In order to show how this tradition works with co-generative learning and thus inspire more collaborative research in career guidance internationally, we analyse two action research cases from Denmark to explore how professional learning is facilitated. These cases have adopted a Swedish-developed action research method,

namely the research circle (Poulsen, Thomsen, Buhl, & Hagmayer, 2016). We explore this using the lens of (primarily) Norwegian theory on organisational and professional learning. However, before this, we begin by further developing the question of collaborative research in career guidance and how the Nordic experiences could prove to be an inspiration to this agenda. Following this, we explore the central concepts of co-generative learning and research circles, before presenting the cases, the analysis and the discussion.

ACTION RESEARCH, DEMOCRACY AND CO-GENERATIVE LEARNING

On the basis of a content analysis of articles in 11 journals that focus on career, vocational and work-related issues, Stead et al. (2012) call for more qualitative research in career guidance internationally. According to Stead et al., a central benefit of increasing qualitative research is the potential for posing other types of research questions and of including the experiences and voices of people in research.

The need to include people's voices, experiences and perceptions of career guidance through qualitative research is also discussed by Weber et al. (2018) in their proposal for a European research agenda on career guidance. This is linked to the need for developing 'research activities, which might strongly support the development of innovative career interventions and career support systems today and in the near future' (Weber et al., 2018, p. 4). For the authors, one way of securing this development is through more collaborative research between academics and career practitioners, thus emphasising the need to create spaces that encompass the voices of researchers, guidance practitioners and users (Weber et al., 2018, p. 18).

Following these calls, we argue that inspiration and experience for the development of more qualitative and participatory career guidance research and development can be found in the Nordic tradition.

Participatory action research is inspired by Lewin and the way he 'saw an inner relation between furthering a democratic culture, combating inequality and injustice and the blossoming of ideas, renewals and societal richness. And he found that research and science should be situated within such a horizon' (Gunnarson et al., 2016, p. 1). However, whereas action research in the United States primarily developed in management studies and, according to Levin (1999) receded somewhat from Lewin's agenda of democratisation by primarily focusing on the question of change within (private) companies, in the Nordic countries, participatory action research maintained and developed the democratic agenda put forward by Lewin (Levin, 1999; Gunnarson et al., 2016; Pålshaugen, 2014).

Both Pålshaugen (2014) and Gunnarson et al. (2016) emphasise that a special feature with Nordic participatory action research is the interweaving of participatory action research and the Nordic labour market model based on negotiations between trade unions and employers' associations. Much of the development of participatory

action research has been funded by the two sides of industry, thus legitimising the action research focus on democratisation and work-life changes.

The cases discussed later in this chapter derive from an action research project jointly funded by Local Government Denmark, the municipal employer's organisation, and the Danish Teachers' Union. In this way, a democratically legitimate agenda of change in the practice of teachers and career guidance professionals was the cornerstone of the action research process.

Co-Generative Learning

The concept of co-generative learning describes how different participants are brought actively into a development process in organisations (Elden & Levin, 1991). In this chapter, we borrow the concept from Norwegian researchers such as Elden, Levin, and Klev. According to Carlsen, Klev, and von Krogh (2004, p. 11): 'Co-generative learning is a process with reflection before, in and on continuous action. Ideally researchers and practitioners participate as equals in all phases of the experimental learning process'. Elden and Levin (1991, p. 34) argue that co-generative dialogue and learning occurs when 'insiders and outsiders operate out of their initial frames of reference but communicate at a level where frames can be changed and new frames generated'.

The concept focuses on how 'insiders'; those actively involved in work in a firm or organisation or system, and 'outsiders'; experts/academics/active stakeholders in the activity but not themselves part of the system, use different frameworks to understand the given system. They see things differently, and they bring different forms of knowledge into a development process. In the words of Elden and Levin (1991, p. 132): 'Richness and quality of the research depends on the ability of the insiders and outsiders to play their different frameworks and expertise against each other to create a new, third explanatory framework'.

Development based on co-generative learning will go beyond traditional categories of top down or bottom up in the development of organisations. Instead, insiders and outsiders are entering into processes based on active participation. Across borders between organisations and systems, various external experts or stakeholders, and the internal 'owners' of a problem, can jointly participate in a mutual process of the construction of knowledge. In this chapter, however, we only focus on career guidance researchers as 'outsiders'. Nevertheless, it is important to note that in the process of constructing new knowledge, 'outsiders' could also be other stakeholders in career guidance, for instance local companies, parents, etc. Moreover, to make the mutual construction of knowledge possible, it is necessary to develop the arenas for a common formulation of the problems to be solved, along with common spaces for communication, reflexion and learning. This can result in new tools and methods being brought into play. These tools and methods can be jointly evaluated and new developments can, at this point, result from this.

In the words of Klev and Levin (2016a, p. 71), ‘Basically, change is planned, but planning does not mean management and control of pre-programmed results. In our understanding, planning actually means the organization of processes for learning and development’.

RESEARCH CIRCLES – A CO-GENERATIVE METHOD

One professional space with the potential for creating co-generative learning processes is the research circle. The two Danish cases presented in the following section are based on a research and development project grounded in research circles. Research circles are founded in participatory action research (Persson, 2009; Poulsen, Skovhus, & Thomsen, 2018; Hecksher, Thomsen, & Nordentoft, 2014).

Research circles emerged in Swedish universities in the 1970s as a way of developing and exchanging knowledge among labour market researchers and trade union representatives. The aim of such a relationship between researchers and practitioners, where no one form of knowledge was preferred or valued over another, was to bring about real societal change (Persson, 2009). The research circle concept aims to ‘promote participation in the development of schools and universities by teachers seeking to resolve a problem which they themselves formulate’ (Persson, 2009, p. 10).

Ideally, a research circle consists of approximately 5–8 members and a circle leader. Even though the leader has the overall responsibility for the common research process and is often a researcher him- or herself, all members of the circle share the responsibility for the process and the creation of new knowledge (Hecksher et al., 2014; Persson, 2009). It is in the interplay between different forms of knowledge – the practical experience of the professionals and the theoretical knowledge of the researchers – that the research circle supports the generation of new knowledge and new perspectives on different problems. The work in the research circle is built upon dialogue, communication and that the different competences of the participants are used actively and are expressed.

Thus, research circles can be seen as spaces for reflection on actions (Persson, 2009; Poulsen et al., 2018) that offer time and space to the participants to investigate their own practice. However, it is important that a research circle also produces knowledge that reaches beyond the participants. The production of knowledge is a joint process where each participant contributes with findings and data from his/her own practice, and everybody plays a part in the interpretation, understanding, and explanation. Hence, the participants become co-researchers and researchers in their own practice. The produced knowledge creates a new understanding of the problems that the research circle investigates, and ‘creates in that way also a potential for new possible actions’ (Hecksher et al., 2014, p. 4; Persson, 2009).

The question of such learning processes in research circles is the central focus of our analysis and discussion of the two following cases. The cases are derived from

a Danish participatory action research project on career learning in the final years of compulsory school. The cases represent two examples of relatively successful collaboration between research and practice in both professional and organisational development and learning. However, we would first like to add some words about the context of the cases – the status of career guidance and career education in Danish schools – and how the cases were collected.

CAREER GUIDANCE IN DANISH SCHOOLS

In Denmark, career guidance in schools is changing, a transformation driven by both political reforms and new perspectives on the role of the career guidance professional and career guidance (see Jensen, Chapter 8, this volume). Recent reforms of comprehensive school (Folkeskoleloven [Law on comprehensive school], 2017) and of career guidance (Kommunal indsats for unge under 25 [Municipal effort for young people under 25], 2018) have emphasised the roles and responsibilities of the teachers and of curricular subjects on career and career education in school. This created strong political expectations for closer cooperation between career guidance, schools, parents, local companies, upper secondary schools, etc.

However, the expertise in careers and career guidance among teachers is, broadly speaking, extremely limited. It is not an integrated part of teachers' education, nor has it been the focus of professional development for teachers for many years (Poulsen et al., 2016). This is not a unique feature in the Danish school system, as similar developments are taking place in Norway (NOU 2016:7, 2016; Haug, 2017), and in Sweden (Lovén, 2015; Lovén, Chapter 7, this volume; Sveriges Riksdag, 2018).

Traditionally, a distinction between career guidance and career education in school has been accentuated both theoretically and in practice. However, as Skovhus (2018, p. 70, our translation) puts it: 'The borders between career education and career guidance are in practice indistinct and can even be very fluid and overlapping'. Career guidance in Danish schools originates from the pedagogical sphere, where teachers and not vocational psychologists delivered both career education and career guidance (Plant, 2009). Today, the most common professional background for youth guidance counsellors in Denmark is also teaching. Thus, career guidance is seen as much as (or even as more of) a pedagogical project as (than) a psychological project (Løve, 2009). Broadly speaking, this is the case in all of the Nordic countries (Euroguidance, 2018).

Moreover, the fact that learning approaches in career education and guidance have been prevalent in the last few years in both career guidance practice and research in many Nordic countries merely stresses the notion that Nordic career guidance is based in a pedagogical paradigm (Skovhus, 2018; Haug, 2017; Poulsen et al., 2016; Lovén, 2015).

Insights and Outlooks – A Participatory Action Research and Development Project

Given the many developments in career guidance, Local Government Denmark and the Danish Teachers' Union initiated a skills upgrade through a participatory action research and development project entitled 'Insights and Outlooks. Career learning in the final years of compulsory school'. The focus of the project was how students in the final years of compulsory school (grades 7 to 9; ages 13 to 16) could obtain more knowledge about and experience with vocational education and training, upper secondary schools, occupations and the labour market through experience-based learning.

The goal was to have teachers and career guidance professionals in compulsory school work together with VET schools, upper secondary schools, local business and other players in order to get the students to both experience and sense different educational and vocational opportunities. Moreover, it was to encourage them to systematically reflect upon these experiences in connection with the subjects in school and the students' insights about themselves (Poulsen et al., 2016).

The overall project consisted of 13 local projects from across Denmark. The common denominator for all the projects was career learning theory that defined the process of making qualified choices as a matter of learning (Law, 1999). To support the teachers' and career guidance professionals' work in the project, two representatives from each local project participated in a research circle together with representatives from 3–4 other local projects. Three research circles were formed, each led by an experienced researcher. The research circles operated in parallel with the local projects during the project period of one and a half years.

The purpose of the research circles was to assist the local projects to maintain a focus on career learning theory. They were a collaboration between research and practice which explored and discussed both theory and practice through examining empirical observations and data from the projects. This could entail aspects that were surprising, challenging, problematic, especially successful, etc. The goal was, through a collaborative exploration of these practices, to create new knowledge about how to widen and qualify students' reflections on education and working life and themselves, thus widening the students' perspectives on possible future careers.

Compiling the Cases

The two cases are based on interviews with research circle participants, 'black box' interviews (where research circle participants 'interviewed' themselves in front of a camera, reflecting on three questions posed by the researchers, with the researcher not present) and reports and evaluations from the two projects. These data have been compiled into two cases by one of the researchers in the project, who is also one of the authors of this article. For more insight into the research process, see Poulsen et al. (2016).

CASES

Case 1: The Southwest School

As a part of the project ‘Insights and Outlooks – career learning in the final years of compulsory school’, the Southwest School has been working with an annual project week for grades 7, 8 and 9, where the classes took place at VET schools, and where the classes visited companies and worked with reflections on the experiences. Simultaneously, the project activities were followed and discussed in research circles together with representatives from four other project schools and a researcher.

At the end of the work in the research circles, the representative from the Southwest School expressed that her participation in the research circle had been decisive for her understanding of career learning theory. She indicated that the next important step was to make sure that the local project moves from having been her project to the project of all her teacher colleagues – that they together would be able to create a common understanding of concepts and activities. She also pointed out that, right from the first circle meeting onwards she and her colleagues have felt a great deal of optimism when they returned from the circle meetings, because they believe that seeing the very different projects in which they are involved and receiving some input is really exciting and helps to see the matter in another light, so that they do not give up.

When re-interviewing the participant 18 months later, she reported that an annual project week had been incorporated at the school as a regularly occurring event to which the teachers gave a positive reaction. All the planning and preparation of the week are placed with the former research circle participants – the other teachers take no part in it. It appears from the interview that the teachers, indeed the whole school, have completely changed their views on the career learning efforts in grades 7, 8 and 9. It also appears that this change of view primarily manifests itself in the annual project week, and that not much has changed in the day-to-day work. In the interview, the former research circle participant indicates that the school is a traditional educational establishment whereby you have your classes and do not create many projects across subjects.

Case 2: The Eastern Schools

In the project ‘Insights and Outlooks’, three local schools – the eastern schools – worked together with local VET schools, upper secondary schools, and a large local company. At first all the teachers in grades 7, 8 and 9 and the participating teachers in VET and upper secondary school and representatives from the local company were trained in career learning theory. Following this, the schools and the company – and later the schools and the VET and upper secondary school – co-constructed a course based on school subjects and career learning theory.

At the end of the work in the research circle, representatives from the eastern schools indicated that taking part in research circles had been a good way to unite practice, theory and research, not least when there is a desire to bring research results out into the school, because then it is important that teachers have the opportunity to get close to the research. They stated that the research circle had left room for their own reflection and learning and helped them to hold on to the theories and the development of their project, not least because of the ongoing common exchange of ideas and discussion about the development of each other's projects. They further indicated that it has been helpful to create a common language based on the discussions in the research circle – a common language for all the teachers in grades 7, 8 and 9.

In a re-interview 18 months later, one of the research circle participants described how they have locally chosen to uphold a common forum of cooperation. This forum encompasses teachers from the different schools, a Youth Guidance counsellor, representatives from a local company, representatives from VET and upper secondary schools and the local education authority that meet once every second month. The meetings are based on common exchange of experience and reflection on career learning activities. According to the interviewee, the meetings are inspired by the way the research circle worked with reflection and learning. The meetings have been maintained on the initiative of the schoolteachers, who see this forum as central to retaining the focus on career learning in grades 7, 8 and 9.

ANALYSIS

Learning Processes in Co-generative Learning: From Single-Loop to Double-Loop

In the following sections, we discuss the learning perspectives in co-generative learning more thoroughly based on both theory and the two cases. As mentioned above, examination, discussion and reflection are key concepts in co-generative learning. Furthermore, if the learning process is organised as a research circle, the participants typically take empirical data with them to each meeting – data that they believe warrant further attention. In this respect, co-generative learning resembles classic action research approaches where the outcome of a situation creates surprise and cause for exploration – why did the outcome turn out this way? (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Argyris, 1995; Irgens, 2016).

Basically, this aspect of co-generative learning is similar to a process of single-loop learning, as described by Argyris and Schön (1978), Argyris (1995) as well as Brandi and Elkjær (2014) where a given mismatch between outcome and expectation in a (learning) process is tested and explored and adapted or improved so that the next action creates a match, an expected outcome. However, three conditions make the learning processes in co-generative learning more complex. (1) The 'mismatch' of the learning process is not considered a mistake that requires correction. (2) The precondition for learning is to be part of a community and to see knowledge as

something that is created together. (3) There is a presupposition of the meeting and intertwining of research knowledge and practice to create a new, third local theory that develops both research and practice. In the following section we will explore these three conditions more thoroughly.

Firstly, the notion of ‘mismatch’ is not viewed as a mistake. Perhaps it shows new perspectives and new understandings. Moreover, the exploration of the mismatch enables the professionals to not only understand the concrete mismatch, but also to understand why a mismatch occurred between our expectations and imaginations and what really happened. This means the ability to question our imaginations and reflect on whether the conditions for our professional actions might be understood in a different way. Thus, the learning process becomes a double-loop learning where we question our assumptions, values and convictions (Argyris, 1995).

In the research circle as the frame for co-generative learning, the work with and the provocation of ‘trouble’ or ‘disorder’ (Irgens, 2016, p. 166, our translation) is systemised. The trouble or disorder in the career-learning practice of each of the participants is sought by asking the question, ‘What has surprised me in this empirical data that I have brought to the research circle?’. The starting point for the qualification of the participants’ work and the development of their knowledge is, in other words, in practice; although the research and theory dimensions are also important, and we will return to this shortly, it is experience in and from practice, which drives co-generative learning.

Communities as Basis for Co-Generative Learning

Secondly, when talking about the complexity of the learning process in co-generative learning, an insight into the potential of a mismatch based on double-loop learning is difficult to reach in an individual learning process (Argyris, 1995). This shows one of the potentials of co-generative learning – the involvement of the other participants in a co-generative process in the exploration of and reflection on the practice problems that the community chooses to discuss. Moreover, in research circles, a fundamental assumption is that it is precisely the community, the reflections, challenges and co-research of the other participants in the circle, that contribute to learning and changes in practice (Persson, 2009; Thomsen, Skovhus, & Buhl, 2017; Poulsen et al., 2018).

The research circle participants from the two cases point to this potential for the development of their individual projects and learning when they discussed the significance of their involvement in the research circles. In addition, the research circle participant from the Southwest School touched upon the significance of the community in developing the skills to question basic assumptions. This research circle participant does not see the ‘interruption’ from the challenging of basic assumptions by the other participants in the circle as troublesome or difficult, but instead considers it as something that provides her with encouragement and inspiration. To this research circle participant, an experience of empowerment accompanies the

challenging of basic assumptions. In this manner, the research circle emerges as a real community of co-generative learning that supports (concrete) action in practice.

To Argyris (1995, p. 26) ‘the individual [is] key to organisational learning because it is the thinking and acting of individual practitioners that produces learning. This, in turn, means that keys to learning are the reasoning processes that human beings use to design, invent, produce, and evaluate their actions’.

From the experiences of the work within research circles described in the two cases (and in other research on co-generative learning such as Klev & Levin, 2016a, 2016b; Elden & Levin, 1991, and in research into the research circle method, such as Poulsen et al., 2018; Thomsen, Skovhus, & Buhl, 2017), we find cause for questioning this understanding of the individual as the key to organisational learning. Or at least we could substantially add to this understanding with an understanding of the dynamics between individual and community in the production of learning – a dynamic that it is meaningless to separate.

Gherardi (2011, pp. 43, 45) explains that knowledge is ‘something that people do together. Knowing and doing are therefore inextricably entangled’ and that ‘knowledge is [...] social, and it is assembled knowledge. The social interaction of actors is a crucial element in understanding the acts of meaning production by knowledgeable subjects ...’.

The common process of the development and challenging of knowledge in co-generative learning is exactly this: a process. And the knowledge that is created has to be understood processually, just like the status of this knowledge in relation to the organisations involved in co-generative learning must be understood processually. The concept of co-generative learning transcends notions of transfer and implementation, understood as transferring (or implementing) something from one place to another. The co-generative process is not about taking something produced in one place, for instance in research, and carrying it into another practice. Rather, in co-generative learning new knowledge is produced in the relation between research and practice; knowledge that ideally is new to everybody. Both the knowledge of ‘insiders’ (practice) and ‘outsiders’ (research) are developed or recreated and emerge as new knowledge that would not appear without this meeting between knowledge forms (Elden & Levin, 1999; Klev & Levin, 2016b).

In the cases, the knowledge of the research circles is produced in a field of tension between practical experience from different local organisations (the participating schools, companies, guidance centres, etc.), the context and the conditions for these practices, and the common creation of meaning from these practices in a continuum between the theories and research that are presented and discussed at the circle meetings and the joint reflections on and challenges of basic assumptions from the participants in the circle.

Obviously, a research circle specifically, and processes of co-generative learning generally, consist of individual professionals, but in an understanding of practice as completely embedded in communities, and in an understanding of communities as conditions for the creation of meaning, knowledge production, knowledge

acquisition, and communities are impossible to separate (Gherardi, 2011; Brandi & Elkjær, 2014).

The Role of Theorising in Co-Generative Learning

The third factor that indicates that the learning processes in co-generative learning are more complex than single-loop learning is the role of theories and research in co-generative learning. If we once again return to the research circles in the cases, the theories that formed the basis for the work and reflection in the research circles were career-learning theories (Law, 1999).

Even though the research circle participants point to the development of ideas and reflection on practice together with others as especially profitable to them, Ertsas and Irgens (2016) indicate that professional development only based on reflection on practice experience of oneself and one's peers is likely to lack critical perspectives. Moreover, it can be considered that it will have difficulties in challenging the basic assumptions of the professionals – the gesture that characterises double-loop learning (Ertsas & Irgens, 2016; Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999; Collinson, Cook, & Conley, 2006). By introducing general theory and research, however, it is possible to supply a third perspective to reflections on profession and practice.

On the other hand, the risk of depending solely on a theoretical perspective in reflecting on professional practice is that relevant experiences from practice are not voiced and are subordinated to the assertions of theory. Ertsas and Irgens (2016) seek to overcome this challenge by recognising both general theory and practice experience as expressions of different degrees of theorisation, called T3 and T1 respectively. Conceived as a continuum and not a hierarchy, T1 is seen as 'non-articulated theory that comes into play in the practitioner and which comes into view through action'. T3 is the 'theoretician's theory' with a 'reflective function'. Between T3 and T1, they place a meso level, T2, 'T2 is a teacher's, or a group of teachers', attempted articulation of the theory that is embedded in her/his practice, T1' (Ertsas & Irgens, 2016, pp. 335–337).

If T2 is compared with Argyris' notion of 'theories of action' – the theories and concepts that an organisation claims it bases their work on – and T1 with the notion of 'theories-in-use' – the often unspoken imaginations and concepts that actually rule our actions in practice and which can be deduced from practice (Argyris, 1995), the risk that a movement that only takes place between T1 and T2 is primarily in the nature of single-loop learning is quite clear. With the introduction of T3 as a third place to stand, T1 and T2 are supplied with a starting point for looking at critically and exploring basic assumptions in practice. At the same time, the reflective movement cannot be subordinated to the general assertions of the theories; the general theories of T3 also have to be accessible for feedback and perspectives from the domain of experience from practice in T1.

In the two cases, the participation in a co-generative learning process through the research circle seems to have supported this dual movement between T1 and T3 and

to have created a strong foundation for the development of professionals, for the creation of a much stronger and well-established T2. Both individuals in the cases talk about the relation between career-learning theory and practice in the work of the circles as critical to the development of their local projects and to the development of their own competence in career-learning. With Ertsas and Irgens (2016), however, it is important to stress that these processes do not come into being by themselves or by having formal structures. Instead, you have to prioritise including both the reflective practice perspective and reflections on general theory.

In this way, co-generative learning processes have the potential to become rooms for professional theorising and thereby illustrate Ertsas' and Irgens' (2016) point, namely that theory and practice in professional learning must be understood as a continuous interaction between different degrees of theorisation. Moreover, it could show that the work on theorisation in the movement between T1, T2 and T3 really is professional development. Or, as Ertsas and Irgens (2016, pp. 339–340) propose, 'teachers must be challenged to formulate their theories by means of T3 as well as T1, thus developing the ability to theorize by drawing on relevant generic knowledge related to the profession, as well as on their own practical experiences'.

According to Elder and Levin (1991), co-generative learning *is* the creation of a standpoint that benefits from both general theories and practical learning. The process of co-generative learning takes place when 'insiders become more theoretical about their practice and outsiders more practical about their theory' (p. 130). Thus, the process of co-generative learning focuses, as with Ertsas and Irgens, on connecting the frameworks of practitioners (insiders) and researchers (outsiders) to a third, shared framework. This framework can be understood as a local theory (or with Ertsas and Irgens' 'professional theorising') for change and learning in practice.

DISCUSSION

Co-Generative Learning and Organisational Change

However, it is worth questioning whether this development of an understanding of profession through a co-generative learning arena ends in being privatised within the individual participants in the research circles and their own practice. Alternatively, it should be considered if this potential double-loop learning also makes an impression more broadly in the participants' organisations in the long term. As Irgens (2016, p. 164, our translation) puts it: 'Organisational learning leads to the knowledge resulting from learning becoming independent of the individuals who originally learned, it does something with the organisation. Something happens with collective response patterns, common forms of understanding and organisational memory that enable the organisation to handle challenges in new and hopefully better ways'.

The two cases point in different directions concerning a durable organisational change in creating an enhanced connection between school subjects and the world of work. In the first case, the former research circle participant seems to be the only

professional who deals with this question. Admittedly, the interviewee in the case points out that the school's approach to working with career-learning has changed, but it seems primarily to be in the shape that Argyris calls 'theories of action', that is not really connected with 'theories-in-use'. As it is, all other teachers seem not to have changed their practice.

It looks quite different at the school in the second case. Here, they have decided to follow the project with classes in career-learning for all teachers through the use of an external expert. They have appointed a career-learning consultant that schools and teachers can use as a point of reference when they are in doubt or need help to create career-learning activities. Moreover, they have created a forum for cooperation on career-learning across institutions and professions with teachers as drivers that meet regularly, mirroring the working method of the research circle, inviting representatives from VET schools and upper secondary schools, career counsellors, representatives from local companies and the local education authorities to join the common reflections on career-learning practice, informed by relevant theory.

Collinson, Cook, and Conley (2006) point to six variables that seem to support organisational learning, and components such as prioritising learning for all members of the organisation, sharing and exchanging knowledge and experience, creating an explorative and reflective culture and creating good communities, relations and networks are highlighted as central. These are all components that are prioritised at the eastern schools.

The cases show that development through co-generative learning processes do not inherently guarantee organisational learning and organisational change. The research circles support the professional development of the participants to a high degree, and create a foundation for continuous reflection and double-loop learning among the participants, and thereby enhance the competences in relation to career-learning activities in school.

However, the translation and dissemination of this competence enhancement into learning for the entire organisation demands more than the concrete work in the research circles. The outcome of the cases seems to confirm the necessity of systematic and fine-meshed work that supports sharing, exchanging and reflecting on practice together and the exploration of one's own assumptions and those of the organisation. A central point could be to explore and carry out experiments on how this perspective could, to a greater extent, be part of co-generative learning processes. This is not least because the potential for this connection between professional development through co-generative learning and organisational learning seems to be present. In continuation of discussions of organisational cultures, it could be asked whether organisational changes take place through knowledge/education or experience from practice (Irgens, 2016).

Co-generative learning processes through research circles insist on both; to see the acquisition of knowledge and practical experience as two sides of the same coin. It is through the acquisition of knowledge in the work with career-learning theories in the research circle that the professional understanding of the participants

regarding career-learning changes for the professionals in the cases. Moreover, it is as ambassadors for this change that the participants ideally work in their own organisation by creating practical experiences that can convince the rest of the organisation to make changes.

In the first part of the chapter, we described how participatory action research has played a large role in developing the public and private sector in the Nordic countries. In many ways, this Danish project on career-learning serves as a good example of this, in that the objective of the project was legitimised democratically through the owners of the project: the municipal employer's organisation and the teachers' union. In this way, the project illustrates a particularly Nordic way of democratically driving the development of practice. However, the project also shows a potential challenge when working with participatory action research: that the democratic involvement of practitioners (or citizens or other actors) must not be limited to the research circle process. To avoid traditional top-down implementation of otherwise democratic and inclusive research and development projects, such projects must be firmly rooted in similar democratic and inclusive co-generative structures in the organisation. Thus, a consequence of the Nordic tradition for participatory action research has to be that research circles do not become a limited and specialised field of development, but must be part of a more general process of democratisation. It is in such processes that the organisational learning potentials of participatory action research are really evoked.

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