ANALYSIS OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY - A CASE STUDY OF THE HINKA SMREKAR SCHOOL

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Abstract. Every person is constantly educated and perfects their knowledge in various fields from an early age. Involuntarily or with reason, they get involved in various social diversities. Thhey collaborate, change, build and succeed in realizing what they have acquired and learned over time. Thus, from birth, they are included in the society of their family, then in kindergarten, elementary school, high school, college, etc. When they grow up, they acquire competence, join an organization that requires them to demonstrate what they have learned so far. Thus, they start building a new system of their own operation/functioning again, which leads to the establishment of a kind of professional relationship between the organization and the new person. Based on his/her competences, this person is starting to get involved, cooperate and build first himself/herself, and then the organization. At the same time, both the person and the organization have a need for each other. When this limit is reached, and the person has become involved in the functioning of the organizational environment, relationships with other participating factors begin to be built, first internal (employees) and then external (customers, partners). This starts a circle of cooperation that must follow the organization. For successful operation, it is necessary that the new person cooperates with everyone involved in the organization. This is how the relationship begins to develop, roles begin to be distributed, action begins, the main goal and side goals are assigned, and, finally, everyone follows the whole organization. In one way or another, each of us finds ourselves in a certain cycle of events, which we then follow. Even in a learning organization, this cycle must begin and eventually be successfully completed. We conducted research on their learning organization. The teachers completed a questionnaire that helped us learn how they built their learning organization. We wanted to find out how they acquire new knowledge and how they participate in smaller or expanded activities. It was very important that we wanted to demonstrate whether they cooperated effectively and whether they were focused on the goals they had set in the annual work plan. Through the questionnaire, we wanted to find out whether they were guided, directed and motivated by the manager in achieving a certain goal. We also wanted to find out whether they followed innovative trends around the world and the promotion of sustainable development in education. In the seminar assignment, we also show what needs to be emphasized when participating in teams or assets.

Key words: learning community, motivation, improving knowledge, teamwork.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the seminar is to analyze the development of a professional learning organization at Hinko Smrekar Elementary School, what professional development actually is, and how employees function in the environment in which they are employed. The aim is to show the inclusion of employees in a learning organization, in our case Hinko Smrekar Elementary School.

The educational process is not a simple matter. It is a lifelong process. At every step to achieve the set goal, there are always obstacles, and at every step it is necessary to have the appropriate knowledge or competences to be able to take steps towards the set goal. Of course, in order to achieve good results and achieve the set goals at Hinko Smrekar Primary School, it was necessary to acquire and upgrade the already acquired knowledge.

2. Scientific and professional bases

The development of information and communication technology and other changes in the economy, society, economics, and education have affected all segments of our lives. In particular, the changes had an impact on educational institutions, which have to constantly adapt, quickly change their plans, operations and, especially, organizational forms, which parents and students felt strongly. All these changes affected principals, teachers, educators, and other professional workers. The principal, as a pedagogical leader, had to quickly change and reorganize the operation of the school, and the professionals in education had to change the forms and methods of education. Everyone had to respond quickly, educate, and organize, both at the individual level, as well as in the asset or team in which they are involved. Pedagogical management was really flexible and demanding. Has it always been this way? Did the professionals and the pedagogical leader have to learn so quickly, learn differently than they were used to, and did the pedagogical leader reorganize the learning process quickly, enable colleagues to receive training in the field of ICT, in the field of the profession and especially the transformation of the annual work plan of an individual subject. Certainly not. The very transition of the entire happenings in the world led to the fact that we people quickly accepted certain instructions and quickly responded to them to the best of our ability.

And it is Dimovski (2005) who says that every organization must first develop an understanding of organizational learning and management, so that the organization itself can run faster. This particular case is a good indication that the pedagogical leaders motivated their colleagues to the best of their ability during the Covid-19 period, that the colleagues followed them and quickly reacted to their request, instruction, action. The employees learned about the operation, received training, improved their knowledge, and offered it to their colleagues, thus giving the students a good lesson. But again, the question is whether it is always like this. We do not think so. Many people do not know how management works in their organization, and of course the manager is responsible for this. In order to find out how it is in reality, it is necessary to do a statistical analysis or processing of various data.

Hitt (1996) also says that every organization needs to learn more in order to follow new trends and to survive on the market. It is the same in education. Every school must have a plan for its work, how it will motivate workers and encourage them to study in order to follow new trends. Every school must have people who are ready to upgrade their competences. Pedagogical leaders must motivate their employees to professional development. By motivating them, they do much more, but it is necessary to motivate them in such a way that the professionals acquire their competences and connect them with the annual work plan of the school or with the goals that they set together.

Burke (2014) says that educational institutions are exposed to challenges so that it is almost necessary to include learning that will be an indicator of greater success. Learning takes place in the organization and all best-case practices are shared among employees.

Janežič, Dimovski and Hodošček (2019) say that the flexible structure of an organization is important because it helps it to change faster and more easily in all areas. Such a flexible organization in today's time, but also in the past, is when the school or employees

cooperate, motivate themselves and upgrade their knowledge and competences across the entire vertical or by assets horizontally.

"Argote, Mcevily and Reangan (2003) and later Argote (2011) defined the sub-processes of organizational learning, namely the creation, preservation and transfer of knowledge. Arygris and Shchon (1978) say that organizational learning is divided into single and double loop learning. The first can be understood as behavioral learning. It is used in the event that problems arise. In these cases, they respond in traditional ways and with familiar patterns. In the second case, organizations are always questioning basic assumptions and values and looking for ways to respond innovatively to the already existing problems.

"Senge (1990) defines a learning organization "as one in which people continuously improve their abilities to achieve the results they really want, cultivate new and extensible ways of thinking, are free to engage in joint efforts, and continuously learn how to learn together. Such an organization has a desire or a need to teach the ability to learn".

Senge (1990) also proposed a learning organization model that consists of systems of thinking, personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, and team learning. The emphasis is on team learning, which directs the team to unify the personal efforts of the members in order to achieve the desired result.

Daft and Marcis (2011) say that experimentation, change, improvement, and continuous learning are important in any organization. More troubleshooting is done here. It is also important that adaptations, leadership promotion, flexible organizational culture, participatory strategy, team organizational structure, employee empowerment, and open access to information are used.

Watkins and Marsick (1997) depict a learning organization through seven pillars, namely:
• promoting continuous learning opportunities,
• constant questions from employees and dialogue between them,
• cooperation between employees - teamwork,
• creating systems that will capture knowledge that will be shared among themselves,
• empower people,
• connection with the environment,
• prepare managers to present good practice examples to employees and thus provide support in learning in all areas.

Dimovski et al. (2015) say that one of the characteristics of a learning organization is the promotion of communication and cooperation between employees. Employees are given the opportunity to propose, identify a certain problem and then collaborate or solve it to the end with the help of other colleagues.

Dimovski et al. (2015) say that the modern model of the learning organization is based on the horizontal connection between employees, as leadership moves from controlling and managing limited resources to influencing networks of self-interested members inside and outside the organization. Managers have the task of leading the organization along the path of transformation, towards openness, based on knowledge, integration, experimentation, and limitlessness.

Garvin (2000) developed a test that can be used to check whether an educational institution is a learning organization. The test includes five questions that must be answered, namely: does the organization have a clearly defined learning agenda, is the organization open to accepting different or conflicting information, does the organization avoid repeating mistakes, does the organization lose critical knowledge that individual employees have when they leave, and whether the organization acts on the knowledge it has.

In order for an educational institution to become a learning organization, pedagogical leaders and pedagogical workers must constantly receive high-quality education and improve their knowledge and thus upgrade their competences. Thus, they will implement newer

approaches to learning and teaching, which they will use to work with students. Modern understanding shows that student learning comes from four characteristics in which the acquisition of knowledge and skills is at the very center of learning. These characteristics show that learning is constructive, self-regulated, situated and collaborative (Dumont et al., 2013).

Schneider and Steren (2013) say that a student must be independent in his/her work, that his/her prior knowledge must be taken into account, and that different knowledge structures are connected during learning. Teaching, on the other hand, must balance the acquisition of various skills, concepts, and metacognitive competences, thus helping the student to use the structures of the outside world in organizing knowledge structures in the mind. They also say that learning through hierarchical organization is the foundation of pieces of knowledge that build a complex structure of knowledge, through which students' ability to process information is limited. They also present that learning is an interwoven system of emotions, motivation, and cognitive processes, which helps to transfer structural knowledge that take some time and effort to learn. Such learning changes the role of professional workers and requires them to be flexible in all areas.

Given that the school is a learning space for all participants, it is very important that in this space the employees organize themselves into professional groups in which they "solve various dilemmas about learning, explore their beliefs and values, exchange experiences, reflect on their own practice and discuss and they assess alternative strengths to existing practices".

In this way, all participants learn from each other and spread knowledge in various fields, help each other, motivate themselves and also get to know the functioning of the entire institute (Krapše et al., 2019).

In the POGUM project, they talk about changes in traditional work in schools. Among them, they talk about "understanding entrepreneurship as a response to users' questions and needs, emphasis on process, changing attitudes regarding the role of participants in the learning process, reverse planning, redefining the understanding of intersubjectivity" (Krapše, 2021).

Hord (2009) says that all learning organizations differ in various characteristics. Most often, these are shared vision and values, shared responsibility, shared reflective inquiry, collaboration among organizational members, and the promotion of individual and group learning. The factors of successful learning organizations are also derived from this, since the collaborative culture of the school is very important for every learning organization. Cooperation itself requires conditions that make the organization successful.

Hopkins (2007) believes that cooperation is very important in every learning organization, but that the principal's role turns out to be the most important, because as the main factor and carrier of everything, he/she must be able to motivate colleagues, to work on professional development of learning, and above all be ready for mutual cooperation and innovation.

3. Case study: Primary school Hinka Smrekarja

In the research, we present the development of a professional learning community at the level of the educational institution, Hinko Smrekar Primary School. The analysis was carried out with the help of a questionnaire prepared at ZRSŠ/School for principals. Through the questions we tried to obtain the functioning and integration of different types of teams in our institution during the past school year. We tried to find out the differences and similarities in the efficiency of operation during the cooperation between the statutory teams at the institution level.

Before continuing with the discussion of the data, we can say that at the elementary school we have a vertically formed work group for the implementation of a specific task - expert teams (LDN, 2021/2022):
• team for welcoming school newcomers,
• team for monitoring the educational plan,
• teams for conducting camps,
• management team,
• the team for carrying out the national knowledge test,
• team for gifted students,
• team for additional professional assistance,
• self-evaluation team,
• digitization team.
In addition, we have various assets organized horizontally, namely:

Mentors of organizations
• council of mentors of the school community

Activity mentors
• cultural days
• natural history days
• technical days
• sports days

Mentors
• excursions
• extracurricular activities
• career guidance

Asset manager
• 1st class
• 2nd class
• 3rd grade
• 4th grade
• 5th grade
• Extended stay section
• Additional professional help
• Physics, Mathematics, Engineering and Technology, Computer Science
• Biology, Chemistry, Natural Sciences, Home Economics
• Sports
• Slovene
• Foreign languages (English, German, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese)
• Geography, History, Civic culture and ethics
• Fine arts and musical arts

The asset managers were determined by the principal at the introductory conference in August. All assets include teachers of a certain class or a certain group, based on the science they study.

All teams and active members meet several times a year and exchange experiences. Minutes are kept at each meeting, which are submitted to the principal in printed and electronic form.

In all teams at the school, the headmaster/mistress was directly or indirectly involved, who actively cooperated with all ideas, organizational matters and with motivational elements to encourage each individual at work.

At asset meetings, teachers discuss the following topics:
• Organization of competitions, celebrations.

- Creating a work plan for the new school year (annual work plan).
- Knowledge assessment criteria (we have a unified one for written assessment).
- Activity plan.
- Proposals, initiatives.
- Self-evaluation of the previous school year.

3.1 Data Collection

To obtain data about the learning community, we chose our school Hinko Smrekar. Qualitative research was used with the case study method, which took place at the selected school. The research describes the learning community through various teams and assets of Hinko Smrekar Primary School. We studied what kind of learning community the employees work in, without pre-determined claims and elements of study and the logical connection between them. We took into account the opinions, feelings and evaluation of the work involved in the teams/assets. Our task was also to find out how the employees understood the learning community and what importance they attached to it. We chose the case study in order to make an inquiry about how employees understood and participated in the institution where they worked. We included 5 teachers who participated directly or indirectly in horizontal activities and vertical teams at the school level. First of all, it should be noted that all employees reported that the questionnaire was very demanding.

With the help of the questionnaire, we wanted to obtain information about how the teams at our school were formed, what they were focused on, what was the effect of ensuring students' learning, what was the effective functioning of the teams, how they connected with each other and what role the principal played in all teams.

Classroom teachers, subject level teachers, teachers of additional professional help were also included in the questionnaire. The worksheet was sent by email. Each individual solved the worksheet themselves and emailed it back to us. The obtained data is based on the answers to the questions of the questionnaire to which the employees answered.

There are five sets of questions in the questionnaire. The first section is the co-creation of teams, the second section is Team Orientation and effects on the provision of student learning, the third section is the effective functioning of teams, the fourth section is the connection between teams, and the fifth section is questions on the role and support of the principal. Each section contains questions of a different type. Employees could answer briefly or in depth.

In the following part, the analysis of the obtained data will take place based on the questionnaire.

3.2 Analysis and interpretation of collected data

In the first part of the questionnaire, on the basis of which criteria the teams in the institute are formed, the employees answered that the teams were formed based on the competences of the individual professional worker, the scope of his/her work and the nature of the work or the field they teach. To the second question, whether we had the possibility to participate in the formation of teams and the choice of membership, they answered that the possibility to participate in individual teams was mostly given and that we have the possibility to choose, although some teams are determined by the principal. Regarding the appropriateness of the team formation process in our institute, they wrote that the formation was very appropriate, as each employee/team examined and co-designed the tasks on which teamwork was required and created various areas that contribute to innovation in their work environment.

In the second part of the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to write down what the teams were focused on and what the effects on ensuring students' learning were. In this

set of questions, the majority of teachers answered that those where teachers work together and bring help to fellow human beings into the work environment were more successful in pursuing the concretely defined activities to improve student learning, because practice counts the most in teaching. Others wrote that everyone involved had concretely defined activities to improve student learning among their annual goals. Some even wrote down various activities, projects, initiative implementation of learning assistance, cooperation at the international level and similarly. They also noted that during the exchange of opinions, individuals found a solution to their problems more easily than if they tackled the problem themselves or in a different way. Regarding how many departments have improved the learning process and the active participation of individual students as a result of the team's work, they wrote that they could not give concrete data, as they did not have a global picture of the team's/assets' work. But they could respond to the operation of the asset in which they were currently involved. The additional professional help teachers replied that the employees at the school cooperated very well and that this was the result of the increase in the number of active students. They reported that they obtained information from meetings, individual conversations and similarly. Some note that with the help of cooperation, exchange of information and Some note that with the help of cooperation, exchange of information and similarly. They reduce unexcused hours, the performance of homework has improved, social relations have improved, and concretely also learning a foreign language through cooperation with external partners and pdb.

In the third part of the question, the effective functioning of the teams, the participating respondents answered that they participated in the natural science asset, the 4th class asset, the 1st class asset, the additional professional help asset, the english asset and at the level of all the teams listed above (indirectly or directly).

They also say that communication is a very important part of the team and that it was multidirectional, open, fluid, respectful, constructive, and always had a positive attitude. In every direction, vertical or horizontal, they cooperated with each other, were connected, learned from each other, accepted weak qualities and encouraged strong ones, where they also stood out and took a leading role. Strong areas were determined through activities, cooperation and through the competences that the individual has in each area.

The fourth section, Connection between teams, showed us that they participated in regular meetings and also in less formal meetings, conferences, trainings, …

Knowledge was exchanged indirectly or directly. Some colleagues presented their knowledge in an individual field to the entire collective at the conference, others shared their knowledge by assets, in pairs, over drinks and similarly. Of course, knowledge also influenced students and parents in a very positive way. For example, the headmistress shared her knowledge in various fields with them at conferences, at activities, in pairs or individually. She always guided us, motivated us, encouraged us and sometimes asked us to self-reflect, which helped us to analyze our work (how successful or unsuccessful we are).

The last set of questions, Role and support of the principal, showed that the principal plays a big role in the formation of teams at our school. The employees report that encouragement and motivation from the principal is very important, as she herself formed the entire team or assets. She furiously monitored and directed or controlled the operation of the assets. She wanted everyone to know that the minutes were sent to her in an e-form and in hard copy. She expected all of this to finally be realized. Some report that the professional discussion was not conducted, while others report that she always asked for analysis, opinions, functioning and work done in the asset at the meeting of smaller assets. The biggest challenge we faced in the institution when planning and monitoring the work of the teams was disagreement with the implementation and format of some activity days, disagreement with the opinion of the headmistress, who was always right.

3.3 Conclusions and recommendations for improvement

We have already written in the introductory part that it is very important that all of us involved in upbringing and education in some way must think about leadership, guidance, motivation, the introduction of innovation, good learning environments, Information Technology and thus follow the trends of sustainable development in education.

After the case was settled, we also held a joint conversation and exchanged opinions. All the workers reported that the questionnaire was very demanding and that a really in-depth answer was expected from them, for which it was necessary to think concretely. The questions are more or less open-ended and they were asked to give a professional answer or attitude towards the work they are currently doing. Most of them confirmed that they had not thought about it until now, but that the work they did by assets or teams went naturally (as they have been used to for many years), without someone controlling or thoroughly directing them.

We talked about whether they consider their organization to be a learning organization. Most of them said that their institution is a learning organization, because as professionals they also received professional education and improve their knowledge. They said that the knowledge was aimed at the goals and traditional tasks that they had written in their annual work plans. They share knowledge with each other at conferences, in small activities, at parent meetings, which have a special theme, and thus also realize the knowledge in the classroom.

They reported that everyone was following the principal and the vision they had set about the fact that recently they had been specially trained in the field of Information Technology, interculturality, formative monitoring, in the language field and on topics about violence. All topics are very current, and all employees are involved in them.

The research has shown that all respondents know how their school functions and that it is a learning organization in which they follow the modern model of the learning community, which we stated in the theoretical part, and which was described in more depth by Professor Dimovski in his work.

Based on the prepared research, we believe that every learning organization can have a good pedagogical leader who will first of all take care of open and direct communication, good organization in individual teams and the inclusion of all participants in different areas by designing teams/activities based on their competence, the work they perform and on the basis of personal beliefs, cooperation and readiness.

When designing a learning organization, we must think about the fact that pedagogical leaders and pedagogical workers must constantly be involved in training and that the content, knowledge and competences they acquire are then successfully shared with colleagues and other participants, and that they must motivate and encourage employees to mutual cooperation and sharing of knowledge in the important triangle - teacher, school, home environment.

It is also important that each member involved in the learning organization must think about all individual organizational activities at the school level, must inquire, identify, share their ideas, initiatives, suggestions, sometimes also criticism, so that they can become part of the learning organization. Everyone must think and participate in the organization of various activities, sharing information, communicating and cooperating in a team. Each individual must learn to listen to others, improve functional abilities and learn to regulate the faster flow of information.

It is also important that in teamwork, each participant must demonstrate knowledge, strengthen their personal qualities in the areas of tolerance, communication, decision-making, team, and psycho-social areas.

We can conclude that the research was small in order to determine whether the development of the professional learning organization at Hinko Smrekar Elementary School has gone well so far, but this clue and research can help us improve the learning environment, include all participants in cooperation, communication, give various suggestions, initiatives and sometimes criticism.

In any case, it is necessary to improve and upgrade what was not established at the school level, and that was the involvement of parents in various activities, activities and PDB.

We believe that this deficit has been an obstacle to good cooperation in the triangle. For us, a good learning organization is when knowledge is exchanged and enriched from all sides and not just from one or two. Everyone must always be involved, not only in the asset, but also in the wider environment, just as the state requires of us. Cooperation with parents and institutions is very important, so that teams and assets and expertise can function better than before.

There is always an obstacle to the improvement of professional competences, and this is money, which pedagogical leaders cannot cash in for a long time if they want to be good managers, because they must necessarily take care of the other factors in which the employees and others are involved; here there is, of course, the building and the building land and the costs, which are constantly increasing. However, support from institutions has been very low recently.

Another downside is that parents, as the third member of the collaborative triangle, began to put pressure on each other in all school functioning activities.

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Attachment 1: The questionnaire was prepared at the Institute of the Republic of Slovenia, School for Principals

WORKSHEET: DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY - LEVEL VIS

Consider the functioning and integration of different types of teams in your institution during the past school year. When recording the answers in the table, present the differences and/or similarities of the performance efficiency and cooperation between legally defined teams and teams agreed at the institution level.

Profesionalna učeča se skupnost – raven VIZ	Število in oblike zakonsko določenih timov (aktivi, oddelčni učiteljski zbori…) Trije aktivi v posameznem razredu
	Število in oblike na ravni zavoda dogovorjenih timov

(SO)OBLIKOVANJE TIMOV Na podlagi katerih kriterijev se oblikujejo timi v zavodu oz. kako se določa članstvo v posameznem timu? Ali imate možnost sodelovanja pri oblikovanju timov in izbire članstva? Ocenite ustreznost procesa oblikovanja timov v vašem zavodu.

USMERJENOST TIMOV IN UČINKI NA ZAGOTAVLJANJE UČENJA UČENCEV Kateri timi imajo med letnimi cilji konkretno opredeljene aktivnosti za izboljšanje učenja učencev (ciljev o napredku in povratne informacije vsakega posameznega učenca)? V koliko oddelkih se je izboljšal proces učenja in aktivno sodelovanje posameznih učencev kot posledica delovanja timov (navedite katerih)? Kako to veste? Kateri podatki podpirajo vaše ugotovitve?.

UČINKOVITO DELOVANJE TIMOV

Navedite število in oblike timov, v katerih ste sodelovali tako, da si dela niste razdelili, temveč ste skupaj soustvarjali in se dopolnjevali. Vsak posameznik je prispeval na področjih, kjer je močan proaktivno in zavzeto. Opredelite, kako so bila v takšnih primerih prepoznana močna področja posameznika v timu in kako je potekala komunikacija.

POVEZOVANJE MED TIMI

Kako oz. na kakšen način se v vašem zavodu timi povezujejo med seboj? Kako se med timi izmenjuje znanje, novo razviti pristopi učenja in poučevanja ter primeri prakse?

VLOGA IN PODPORA RAVNATELJA

Kakšno vlogo pri oblikovanju timov je imel ravnatelj? Kako je ravnatelj spodbujal in spremljal delovanje timov? Je vaš ravnatelj želel poznati načrtovane aktivnosti timov za izboljšanje učenja učencev ter njihove učinke? Ali je bila izvedena strokovna razprava o učinkih delovanja timov na ravni zavoda? S kakšnimi izzivi ste se soočali v vašem zavodu pri načrtovanju in spremljanju dela timov?