# System Monitoring Note 1 Austria

## The Lerndesigner-Network in Transition

Tanja Westfall-Greiter,
National Center for Learning Schools
for the Ministry of Education, Art and
Culture

bm:uk  **Bundesministerium für**
**Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur**

**Zentrum für lernende Schulen**
NMS-Entwicklungsbegleitung

# Contents

# 1. The Change Agent Initiative "*Lerndesigner*-Network" in Austria's Lower Secondary School Reform

## Context

As reported in Austria's *System Note* for Phase 3 of the OECD's Innovative Learning Environments project, a new teacher leadership role, "*Lerndesigner*", was initiated in the Austrian school system as part of the lower secondary school reform, *Neue Mittelschule* (NMS). *Lerndesigners* are teacher leaders with specific expertise in areas of curriculum and instructional development ("*Lerndesign*") related to the reform goals of equity and excellence. Ideally *Lerndesigners* act as change agents in a shared leadership dynamic with school principals and other teacher leaders (subject coordinators, school development teams, etc.). The rationale for working with, qualifying and networking change agents was clear and focused: effective school reform occurs on the school level and change agents require networking and communities of practice in the context of school reform (Schley et al 2009).

The effectiveness of *Lerndesigners* as change agents in a teacher leadership role depends to a significant degree on the culture and leadership in their schools. Although school autonomy is relatively restricted in Austria (Schratz & Westfall-Greiter 2010), the mental model behind the NMS reform pilot was one of diversity rather than uniformity. This diversity reflects the general tendency of schools to think and act locally, rooted in the federalist structure of compulsory education in Austria. For the NMS, which was mandated in April of 2012, general regulations, curricula and standards are centralized at the federal level while school administration, inspection and development are governed on the state provincial (*Bundesland)* level. Players in school development include local town councils, district school inspectors, school inspectors as well as *Pädagogische Hochschulen* which provide federally funded school development services and continuing education for teachers. Budgets for school-specific staff development are also allocated to and administered by the *Pädagogische Hochschulen*.

Typically Austrian schools have a flat hierarchy and school culture is dominated by the autonomy-parity pattern (Lortie 1975). As a result, the teacher leadership role of the *Lerndesigner* was a massive system intervention which continues to be met with some resistance in each new generation of NMS. Nonetheless, the *Lerndesigners* were and are important change agents for school reform. Each *Lerndesigner* creates his or her own role in the context of his or her school through processes of role-taking and role-making. The *Lerndesigners* are also not alone. As a result of educational reform efforts throughout the system, several new teacher leadership roles have emerged since 2008 which have had an impact on the social architecture of the schools. In the NMS these include contact persons or coordinators with specific agendas required by the Ministry (eLearning, gender issues, culture and arts programming, standards and school quality) as well as school development team members and learning coaches or NMS coordinators required on the *Bundesland* or school level. Compensation for the roles varies according to whether it is regulated by union agreements and/or legislation.

Of these teacher leaders, *Lerndesigners* are the most visible, in part due to their two-year qualification program comprising national networking events and symposia, but also due to their name. "*Lerndesign*" was a new word that received some media attention early on and has become part of NMS everyday vocabulary on all system levels.

## From Pilot to Implementation

With the NMS mandate of April 2012, the reform pilot came to an end and a new phase of reform implementation began with the 2012/13 school year. The National Center for Learning Schools ("CLS") was established by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Arts for the purpose of guiding system development during the implementation. Two central objectives of the CLS include sustaining and fostering school networks and communities of practice as well as continuing to develop and support

*Lerndesigners* as change agents through qualification programs, symposia and networking. The broad guiding question for CLS is, "How can we sustain and spread innovation in the implementation phase?"

As the timeline below shows, four generations of pilot schools began under piloting conditions. The NMS implementation began in 2012/13, in the middle of Generation 4's program. The transition from pilot to implementation seems to have been relatively easy for this generation, whereas Generations 1 – 3 struggled to adapt the new imposed changes more or less willingly. Generation 5 began with the implementation, which means there was clarity and stability for their development from the beginning.
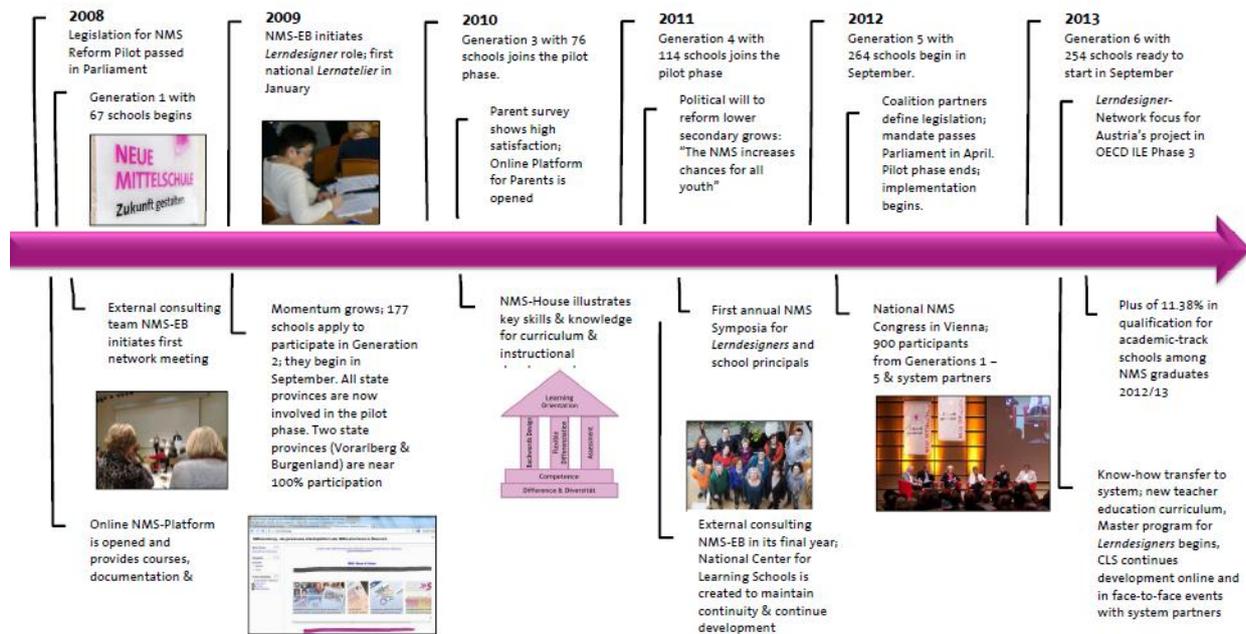


| | G1 | G2 | G3 | G4 | G5 | G6 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 | 2013/14 |
| Vienna | - | 22 | 2 | - | 47 | 49 |
| Lower Austria | - | 45 | 3 | 28 | 72 | 49 |
| Burgenland | 9 | 19 | - | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| Styria | 30 | 5 | 2 | 16 | 55 | 60 |
| Carinthia | 4 | 19 | 13 | 9 | 6 | 4 |
| Upper Austria | 1 | 21 | 26 | 29 | 49 | 52 |
| Salzburg | - | 10 | 5 | - | 13 | 15 |
| Tirol | - | 8 | 25 | 24 | 17 | 24 |
| Vorarlberg | 23 | 28 | - | - | 1 | - |
| Total | 67 | 177 | 76 | 114 | 264 | 254 |

The NMS Generations by *Bundesland*

## The Virtual Environment

Beyond face-to-face events, communication and feedback occur online, a strategy which has been developed closely with Thomas Nárosy of Education Group, a private company contracted by the Ministry to provide digital infrastructure and system development initiatives in the field of eLearning,

digital media and digital competence. The NMS development is supported by an online platform, www.nmsvernetzung.at comprising some 200 eduMoodle courses which is operated by the National Center for Virtual Teacher Education (Onlinecampus VPH) in cooperation with CLS. In addition, the NMS Online Library, www.nmsbibliothek.at, was implemented in autumn 2012 and serves as a portal for NMS-related resources, including dissemination of the newest resources for curriculum and instructional developed by CLS, a biweekly newsletter for school principals and insights into the NMS experience through personal anecdotes and a series of online events and publications called "NMS Insights" (*NMS-Einsichten*) conducted by Onlinecampus VPH.

The "Meta-Course", the virtual networking and learning space for all *Lerndesigners,* is located at www.nmsvernetzung.at. This space is closed to visitors so that *Lerndesigners* can safely exchange ideas and receive feedback on their development work. The goals with this designated digital space were to:

- Connect *Lerndesigners* across generations
- Promote exchange, learning and development
- Foster identity
- Provide a location for materials
- Enable direct communication between the national development team and *Lerndesigners*
- Provide up-to-date information
- Conduct intraschool PLC work

Both the platform and the portal have grown so rapidly that they have become difficult to manage and navigate. As this *Monitoring Note* is being written, the Online Library Team at CLS is redesigning the library to make it more navigable, useful and manageable.

The advantages of the Meta-Course for *Lerndesigners* were already clear in the pilot phase. It enables communication, exchange, regular contact, access to expertise and support as well as relationship-building.

## The Qualification Program for *Lerndesigners*

*Lerndesigners* attend a two-year national qualification program, which enables them to gain theoretical and practical insights in the six areas of the NMS-House, to develop with one another the knowledge and skills necessary for them to be effective in their own schools as teachers and teacher leaders, and to network with other *Lerndesigners*. The qualification program focuses on equity and excellence in curriculum and instructional development and evolved during the pilot phase in response to pilot schools' needs. It comprises six development areas deemed essential for fostering change in the learning culture realized by each teacher in each subject in each lesson of the NMS:



- mindfulness of learning (Schratz 2009)
- difference and diversity
- competence orientation
- "backwards design" curriculum development (Wiggins & McTighe 2005, 2007, Tomlinson & McTighe 2009)
- differentiated instruction (Tomlinson 2003, 2010)
- assessment

These development areas are represented in the so-called "NMS-House".

The two-year qualification program consists of 12 ECTS credits and occurs parallel to the implementation of the school reform at their schools sites. The program consists of national and regional *Lernateliers* for networking and qualification purposes as well as self-study which is coordinated online and includes practice-based tasks for exploration in school-based Professional Learning Communities. To structure and
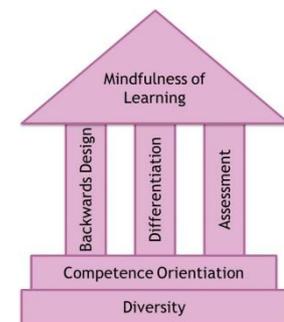
strengthen shared leadership, school principals are invited with their *Lerndesigners* to one national *Lernatelier* per year. Inviting these "dynamic development duos", as they come to be called, to work together in a learning atelier has been recognized as key for the *Lerndesigners* to become effective change agents at the sites.

As of the 2012/13 school year, this program is a joint effort between CLS on the national level (responsible for national *Lernateliers*) and the *Pädagogische Hochschulen* (responsible for regional *Lernateliers*). The new structure of the qualification program called for prototyping on several levels because no such joint program existed as a model. To foster the evolution of the program and support the transition to the PH, the Ministry provided financial start-up incentives to the PHs for program development. Five PHs agreed to participate in the prototyping phase. Program directors and their teams of trainers and online tutors meet in a national coordination meeting with CLS twice a year. The curriculum, which had been developed with system partners in 2011/12, was the common basis for program development. Each program director had to find solutions for offering the program within the structures of their institutions. In addition, CLS established an online module on the Onlinecampus VPH, another eduMoodle platform for all PHs, for this new generation. Technical solutions for managing groups within groups had to be found with partners at the Onlinecampus VPH so that each PH could manage its group separately and nationwide exchange could still take place for this generation in one and the same course module.

Several other challenges arose during this prototyping stage:

- Boundaries between national CLS and regional PH work were only loosely defined,
- Lack of clarity regarding responsibilities and roles of CLS and the PHs inhibited development activity,
- Lack of curricular coherence on the regional PH-level created differences at national *Lernateliers* (CLS), which has led to a greater need for coordination and alignment,
- The online module on the Onlinecampus VPH was handled additively rather than integratively, which increased the complexity of the virtual environment for all.

For the remaining implementation phase, this complexity will grow further as each new generation will have its own VPH-course module.
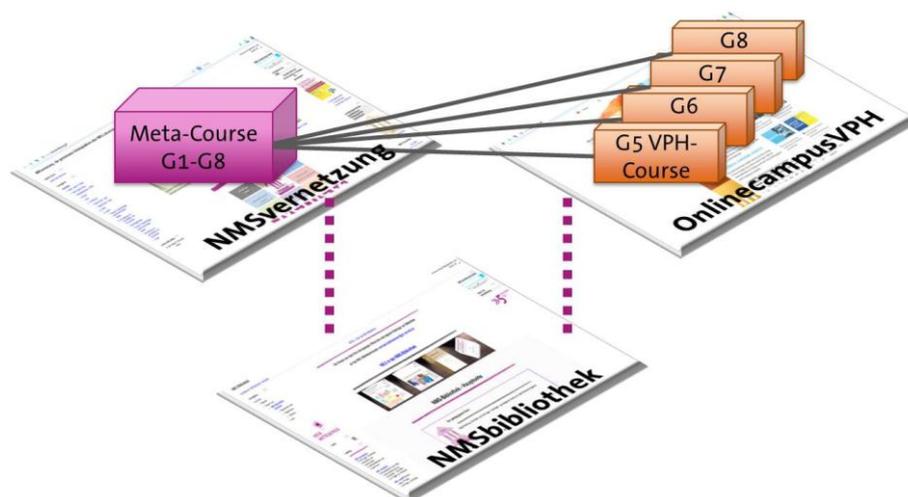


*Lerndesigners'* Digital Environment

The program package from this first year of the joint program is currently being compiled and polished so that it can be provided to other PH offering the qualification program in future. In June 2013 a two-day meeting with program directors focused on this package, which includes the course program as well as a documentation of learnings from this first year of prototyping. We addressed the issues above and were

able to clarify responsibilities and roles and define an overall strategy for reducing the effect of scattering. This includes:

- Ensuring that each *Lerndesigner* in each new generation registers in both the Meta-Course and their VPH-Course at the first nationwide learning atelier in their program
- Communicating clearly and consistently the function of the Meta-Course (nationwide networking & updates across generations) and the VPH-Course (certification program) in all learning ateliers and online activities
- Anchoring the online library as the resource center for both the Meta-Course and the VPH-Courses by one-time uploading of content materials and linking them in the respective course
- Anchoring the Meta-Course as a place for cross-generational networking, exchanging and learning
- Anchoring the VPH-Course as a place for earning certification
- Closing the VPH-Course at the end of the 2-year qualification program so that the *Lerndesigners* remain only in the Meta-Course as their "home base"

Alignment with the curriculum was also addressed. The cooperative development strategy and networking of program directors has already led to improved alignment. The alternating regional and national *Lernateliers* also have had a positive impact on alignment, because the *Lerndesigners* themselves noticed differences. There was general agreement at the meeting that the curriculum not be modified on the regional level, in particular because any such change affects the role of the *Lerndesigners*.

The qualification of Generation 6 beginning in the 2013/14 school year is expected to run relatively smoothly because five of the six PH offering the qualification are doing so for the second time. The new PH program is directed by a member of CLS who is familiar with the NMS-EB development and was able to engage fully in the exchange and decision-making processes at the June meeting. In addition, the virtual environment is being standardized and woven together to decrease complexity and improve navigation and user-friendliness.

The growing body of online learning materials will also be useful if they are effectively packaged for the qualification program. Currently, the CLS provides handbooks in three forms:

- *Orientierungshilfen* (Orientation Guidelines) focused on NMS regulations and directives developed in cooperation with school inspectorates
- *Praxiseinblicke* (Practice Insights) developed by CLS members in cooperation with practitioners to explore new practices in subject teaching
- *Werkstätte* (Workshops) developed by CLS to guide teachers through each of the 6 development areas in the NMS-House

In addition, the CLS will begin development of webinars ("eLectures") and courses related to the NMS-House for Onlinecampus VPH in 2013/14, and databases for easy uploading of *Lerndesigns* (curricular designs) and assessment rubrics developed by practitioners are in the planning stage.

## Goals for ILE Phase 3, Level 2 Participation

The fundamental aim of the *Lerndesigner*-Network is to foster the development of effective learning environments at each school, driven by the principle of school-specific reform (Marzano 2003) and focused on the goals of equity and excellence. The strategy lies in qualifying, networking and maintaining contact among these teacher leaders. The focus of this *Monitoring Note* is on the *Lerndesigner*-Network as a professional learning community as well as a community of practice. Specific questions addressed here are:
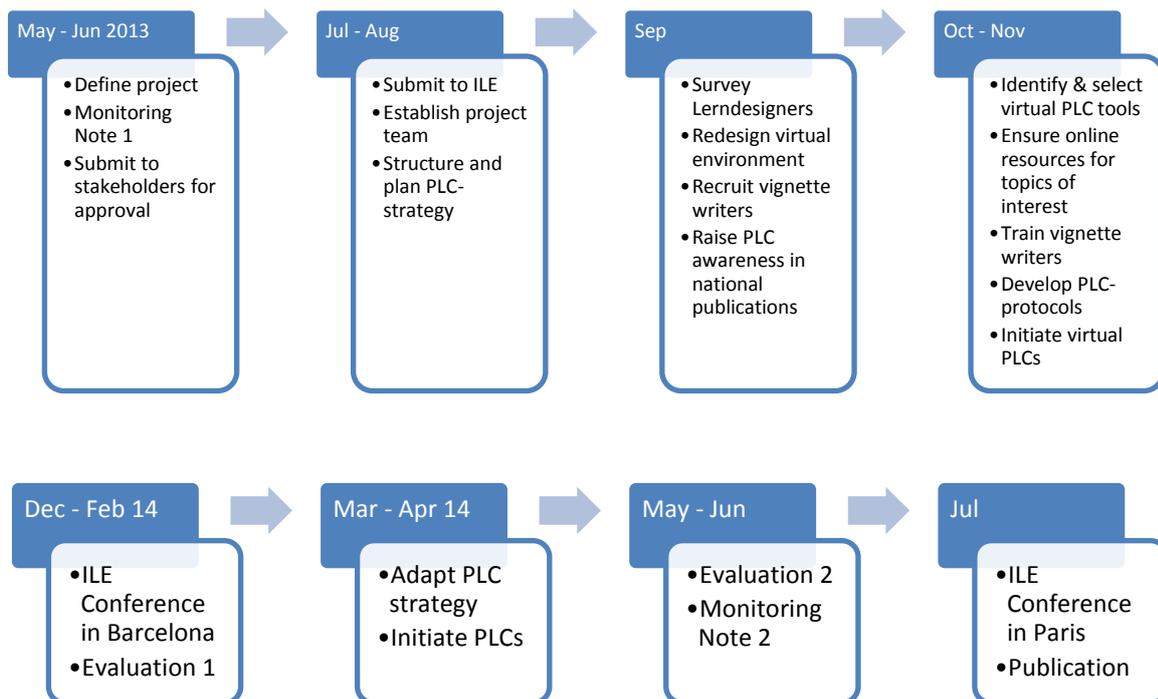
- How can *Lerndesigners* be kept up-to-date in order to sustain development at their schools?
- How can they remain connected to the *Lerndesigner*-Network as a community of practice on the national level?

- How can they be encouraged to participate actively and fully in nationwide development processes?

Awareness about the need to focus school leadership on student achievement and foster a culture of learning throughout the school is growing. Austria's most recent *National Education Report 2012* highlights and analyzes barriers to equity and equal access to education in the system. Hattie's *Visible Learning* study, which just appeared in German translation in April 2013, supports and concretizes many of the issues addressed in the *National Education Report 2012* and also reinforces the six development areas in the qualification program. The CLS has been leveraging both publications in recent months.

DuFour (2002) argues that the central task of school leaders is to foster the disposition and structure of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). The goal of this Level 2 project in ILE Phase 3 is to examine the effectiveness of the networking tools and strategies thus far in creating an intraschool PLC environment. Little research has been done on intraschool PLCs (Jackson & Temperley 2007). In this case, *Lerndesigners* are in contact both face-to-face at networking events, *Lernateliers*, seminars and symposia, as well as digitally in an online community. In cooperation with Thomas Nárosy and colleagues at eduGroup and the Onlinecampus VPH – all structures in the system architecture initiated and supported by the Ministry – the Center for Learning Schools would like to 1) explore the impact of digital networking on the *Lerndesigner*-Network, 2) initiate and foster online intraschool professional learning communities as a nationwide innovation strategy, and 3) evaluate the impact of these efforts on the community of practice.

The project timeline is driven by ILE Phase 3:

| May - Jun 2013 | Jul - Aug | Sep | Oct - Nov |
|---|---|---|---|
| • Define project<br>• Monitoring Note 1<br>• Submit to stakeholders for approval | • Submit to ILE<br>• Establish project team<br>• Structure and plan PLC-strategy | • Survey Lerndesigners<br>• Redesign virtual environment<br>• Recruit vignette writers<br>• Raise PLC awareness in national publications | • Identify & select virtual PLC tools<br>• Ensure online resources for topics of interest<br>• Train vignette writers<br>• Develop PLC-protocols<br>• Initiate virtual PLCs |

| Dec - Feb 14 | Mar - Apr 14 | May - Jun | Jul |
|---|---|---|---|
| • ILE Conference in Barcelona<br>• Evaluation 1 | • Adapt PLC strategy<br>• Initiate PLCs | • Evaluation 2<br>• Monitoring Note 2 | • ILE Conference in Paris<br>• Publication |

## Terminology

Several terms for communities and networks are used interchangeably. For the purpose of this project, the following terms are used specifically as follows:

- A *network* is a group which connects people through various ties; it is not necessarily a community.

- A *community of practice* is a group that provides members with the opportunity to develop themselves personally and professionally. Members share and are committed to a specific profession and learn by sharing information and experience with one another (Lave & Wenger 1991).
- An *online community* is a group whose members are committed to keeping a virtual community alive by participating in its activities.
- *Professional Learning Community* (PLC) refers to a specific school development strategy in which teaching professionals work together in a structured, regular manner to foster their own learning with the goal of increasing their own effectiveness and thereby improving student achievement (DuFour & Eaker 1998).

In the case of the *Lerndesigner*-Network, the common denominator among all of the above forms of community is the *Lerndesigner* role. The *Lerndesigner*-Network could be understood as a community of practice insofar as the members are connected through the same professional domain, but the commitment to learning from each other varies from person to person. It is probably more accurate to claim that within the *Lerndesigner*-Network there are several communities of practice, often established through shared generation-specific experiences in the qualification program. The *Lerndesigner*-Network is also an online community, whereby only a relatively small number of *Lerndesigners* actively participate in its activities, which currently are driven by these members. A significant number participate passively in that they read postings and download materials and forum contributions. PLCs as a school development strategy have been initiated on the school level by *Lerndesigners* as part of their qualification program, but regular structured PLC sessions have only taken place during face-to-face events and have yet to occur across generations and schools in the virtual environment.

# 2. Status Quo of the *Lerndesigner*-Network

## Impact of the Qualification Program

The structural changes and formalization occurring in the qualification program are having an impact on the *Lerndesigner*-Network. Generation 5 is not as well integrated in the Meta-Course because their virtual home is the VPH-Course. As a result, their development activity is not visible for other generations. Further, the technical solution for enable PH groups within this course means that visually they do not perceive the work and presence of the other groups, further reducing their sense of "we" to their local group within Generation 5. In addition to stronger local group identities, less alignment with the qualification curriculum due to program differences at the PH-level. These local thumbprints have increased the diversity of content in the program (positive) while simultaneously reducing shared understandings and common denominators in this generation (negative). The primary concern here, however, is the impact of curricular changes on the teacher leadership role: new content areas add to the *Lerndesigners'* agenda, particularly in state provinces providing compensation because the qualification program is directly linked to the function.

These points were addressed at the meeting with program directors in June 2013. Because the program directors are integrated in nationwide development processes, the scattering effect was seen by all as counterproductive and there was clear consensus regarding the strategy to ensure that the Meta-Course remains strongly anchored as the place for cross-generational nationwide networking. The impact of curricular differences became clear as well. The curriculum cannot and should not expand content areas because of its impact on the *Lerndesigner* role; all agreed that the *Lerndesigners* have enough on their agenda with curricular and instructional development. New awareness of other teacher leadership roles in the social architecture of the NMS and of the need for continuing education programs to focus on central issues outside of the *Lerndesigners'* agenda emerged.

## Activities and Trends in the Online Community

In the current school year, much has changed in the NMS reform project. The new legislation and related directives regarding the school form have been difficult for some NMS pilot schools to accept because they are either contrary to the practices they developed in the pilot phase or seen as counterproductive. As a result, the Meta-Course served as a place for releasing frustration. Forum activity was characterized by resistance to changes in the law, particularly in regard to aspects of assessment, and protest due to the increased workload. Some *Lerndesigners* used the online platform to express their frustration and rally for protest. CLS staff responded as constructively as possible, gently reminding the community that the CLS does not have a lobby function and that mandates are the result of political compromise.

In addition, the new attention to assessment practices created a surge in development work, which was leveraged in *Lernateliers* and symposia for all NMS generations in the winter semester. Several *Lerndesigners* designed new tests, assessment tasks and rubrics, which CLS staff and other *Lerndesigners* responded to with feedback. Recently, some *Lerndesigners* from Generation 5 have been submitting *Lerndesigns* with differentiation strategies to the Meta-Course rather than uploading them to their Virtual Campus Course, which has made their work visible to the older generations.

Overall several patterns can be identified in the virtual activity of this school year. Some *Lerndesigners* have formed small communities of practice. Others have taken on specific roles in the online community: as mentors, provokers, protesters, coaches, contributors. Others grew weary of the high-tension forum entries in the heat of the first confrontation with the new legal requirements of the school mandate and retreated to lurking. Recently, a cluster of innovators and early adoptors have suggested that the forums be cleared and a fresh start be made in the coming school year.

Because for the first time a new generation of *Lerndesigners* is not using this course as the primary space for their qualification program, the development dynamic on the whole has subsided. There is also a lack of attention from all sides to these "old" generations in the Meta-Course. PLC work is not occurring online and updates are inconsistent in the Meta-Course because the NMS Online Library has become the central clearinghouse for resources related to new developments. In short, the greater complexity of the virtual environment has led to greater complexity in information as well as a scattering of the *Lerndesigner* network and content they need for their work.

## Impact of Lack of Role Definition

While a profile for the role of the *Lerndesigner* is distributed to school principals, the actual nomination for the role is not formalized, in large part due to the fact that the function is not yet fully securely anchored in the system. As a result, teachers come to this teacher leader role more or less informed, more or less personally motivated and more or less with the mandate of the whole school. Nonetheless fluctuation is relatively low (under 10% according to a survey in 2012 of generations 1-4), possibly indicating that the selection process itself is most effective when handled according to a school's specific needs and culture.

Solutions for paying *Lerndesigners* for their work differ by state province (*Bundesland*) and school. The willingness of school principals and local authorities to ensure payment varies significantly and the Federal Ministry can only do so to a limited extent without the agreement of teacher unions. Range of local solutions for how to compensate *Lerndesigners* has led to more or less satisfaction and commitment. The Styrian government compensates *Lerndesigners* with one overtime teaching hour per week. In Lower Austria, the provincial government provides funding for compensating *Lerndesigners* with two teaching hours per week for their work. In both state provinces there is a relatively low fluctuation among Lerndesigners; in Lower Austria, Lerndesigners are recruited for working with local school clusters in teams of school developers.

## "Firewalls" to Implementation and Alignment

At the ILE Conference in Santiago, Andreas Schleicher noted a pattern across countries which he described as a "firewall between policy making and policy design". The firewall metaphor has directed attention of CLS staff toward this field of tension in the NMS development and created awareness for the CLS' heretofore unarticulated function of brokerage agency for evidence-informed development. Informal processes of localization and decentralization are common in Austria's federalist system. The highly politicized nature of the NMS reform may have intensified these processes. The greatest challenge on the national level is currently the alignment of policy and development efforts on all system levels. Implementation efforts on the *Bundesland* level are more or less in alignment with developments on the national level, despite formal consensus processes with the inspectorates of the School Boards. Some local directives prove counterproductive to the long-term goals of improved student achievement, equity and access to education, and there are compliance issues regarding the use of mandated resources. As a result, need for commitment to national policy and directives was emphasized at the National NMS Coordination Meeting with all stakeholders in May 2013.

In addition, the much-anticipated teacher education reform is currently in Parliament and the curricula will be revamped in the coming year, which has led to some temporary instability. This issue will become acute over the coming years; 76% of all NMS teachers will be retiring in the next decade, which raises questions of sustainability further exacerbated by a response lag in teacher education. In a recent kick-off meeting with Generation 7 schools in Salzburg, two out of ten school principals announced that they would be retiring before their school even starts implementation, a point to be considered in the implementation phase for the last three generations as it will occur in the midst of the retirement wave. Parallel to the reform of teacher education, negotiations with teacher unions are being conducted; the results will either strengthen or weaken the teacher education reform as well as the new teacher leadership roles which have emerged.

Overall, evidence-oriented policy and practice is difficult to foster in this highly volatile period of intensive reform in the Austrian education system. This further exacerbates the phenomenon of decision-making as a largely non-rational process affected by a variety of factors, including risk, opportunity, availability, emotional and personal disposition as well as social milieus and norms. The NMS are further challenged by the demands of two other new initiatives: standards-based self-evaluation and the school quality initiative (SQA). These efforts have yet to be thoroughly linked and made compatible, so that they are perceived by schools as separate demands.

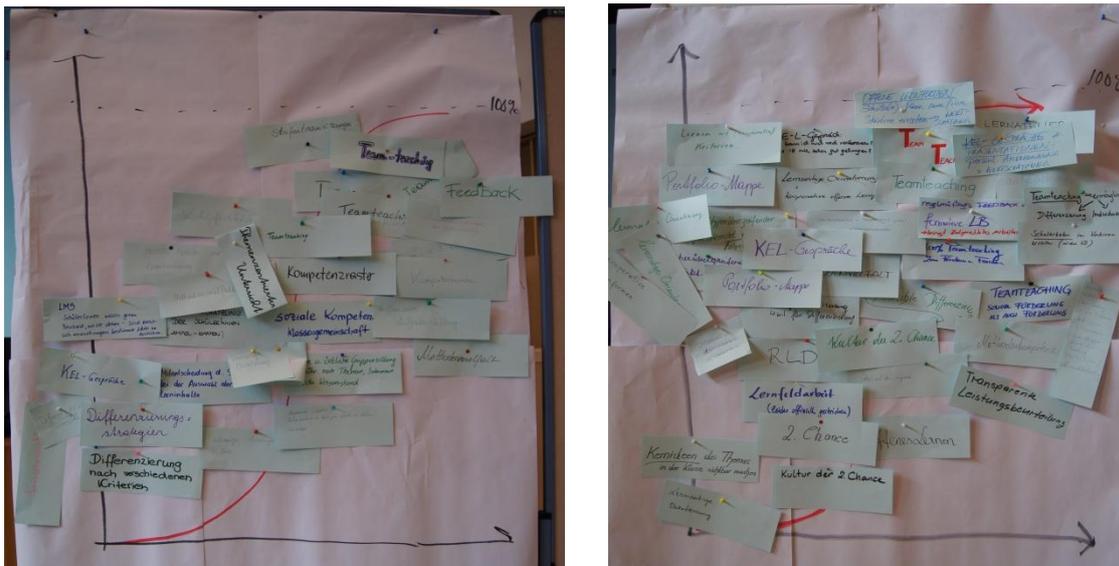# The Innovation Strategy

## Diffusion of Innovation

Innovation must be so widely adopted that it is able to sustain itself and become part of the "way we do things around here". Rogers' analysis of the speed and spread of adoption is still relevant today. He was interested in the point at which an innovation reaches critical mass within the rate of adoption and categorized adoptors on a classic S-curve as follows: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards (1962, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diffusion_of_innovations_-CITEREFRogers1962p. 150). In the context of NMS implementation this critical mass is achieved on paper through the implementation schedule, but real adoption of the reform and the six development areas of the NMS-House as self-sustaining productive innovation drivers across the system is expected to follow the S-curve:
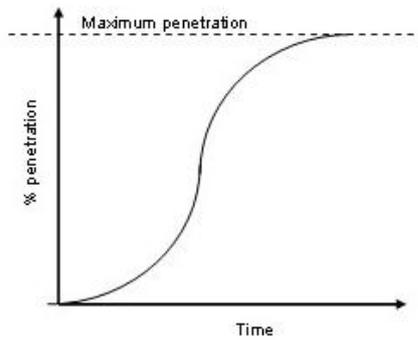
The speed of spread of innovation in the NMS is dependent to a large degree on alignment and compliance with policy and directives on all system levels.

## High-Potential Innovations in Generation 4

In the final national *Lernatelier* with Generation 4 in May 2013, the *Lerndesigners* were asked to analyze innovation beyond the NMS-House at their sites. Each listed all innovations that had been initiated on their sites and then identified the one innovation they personally expected to be most effective in its impact on student learning. This "high-potential innovation" was written on a card and pinned to the S-curve as a status-quo assessment of its spread in the school. The results were photographed:



**G4 High-Potential Innovations on the S-Curve, May 2013**

The CLS then clustered the innovations and analyzed them according to frequency:

| Category | Innovation | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Teaching | Team-Teaching | 11 |
| Teaching | Differentiation | 9 |
| Teaching | Formative assessment | 9 |
| Teaching | Mindfulness of learning | 7 |
| Learning | New learning instruments (portfolios, skills inventories, etc.) | 6 |
| Curriculum | Curricula (cross-curricular projects and courses) | 6 |
| Assessment | 2nd Chance Culture | 5 |

| Assessment | Student-Parent-Teacher Conferences | 5 |
|---|---|---|
| Learning | Learning Methods | 5 |
| Instruction | Instructional forms (open learning, atelier, cooperative learning) | 5 |
| School | Teaching teams | 4 |
| Teaching | Backwards design | 4 |
| School | Teamwork (class teams) | 4 |

**G4 High-Potential Innovation Clusters, May 2013**

It is interesting to note that few of these innovations arise from efforts on the school-level. Rather, they indicate the spread of innovations from other schools or the school system in general. Team-teaching, a requirement in the NMS legislation, was the most frequently identified high-potential innovation and its spread (relatively high in the S-curve) is related to the fact that it is mandated. The same is true for student-parent-teacher conferences, which are also mandated and in most cases take place mid-year. Some added conditions for effectiveness to team-teaching, such as individualization and differentiation. Although *Lerndesigners* were asked to focus on innovations over and beyond the NMS-House, several noted these elements (flexible differentiation, assessment, mindfulness of learning, backwards design); in most cases, these were placed lower on the S-curve. Innovations arising on the school level seem to focus on learning methods and instruments as well as instructional forms.

Curricular innovations arose during the pilot phase in which this generation began. The pilot models included the development of school-specific cross-curricular courses (Lernfelder, Fächenflächer). In some cases these are no longer part of the development work because the NMS legislation is more restrictive in terms of curricular innovation but also because local authorities reduced innovation in this area. Teamwork refers to changes in the social architecture of the school; small teaching teams are assigned to a class and work together across subjects. Curricular innovations such as cross-curricular projects are probably related to this new architecture. It is important to note here that these teams remain stable throughout the four years of lower secondary, a potential weakness in the structure if the class teams are ineffective. Grade-level organization of teachers does not exist in the Austrian school system.

The results of this analysis raise interesting questions regarding the speed and spread of innovation on the school level. It seems that mandates have impact on both, which indicates the importance of evidence-informed policy making. Team-teaching is a good example: the team *per se* is not the most effective factor but rather their instructional practice that has a strong impact on student learning. In other words, putting two ineffective teachers together will not lead to effective teaching. For this reason, the CLS agenda includes team teaching in the 2013/14 school year linked to the most-researched instructional factor, formative assessment, which is the cross-generational development focus for the first semester.

# 4. Next Steps

## Redesign of Digital Spaces

The virtual environment will be redesigned to make it more navigable, user-friendly and manageable.

## Survey

The analysis of the status quo in Chapter 2 is in partly based on assumptions and guess-making. The first step in this Phase-3 project will be to conduct a questionnaire in the Meta-Course with all five generations of *Lerndesigners*. The goals of the questionnaire are to find out:

- how, when and why they use the Meta-Course,
- what they perceive to need most for their work at their schools,

- levels of interest in PLC-work in the Meta-Course.

## Virtual Inter-School PLCs across Generations

Virtual PLCs across generations in the Meta-Course for *Lerndesigners* will be initiated in the fall semester of 2013. Five topics will be identified from the survey and protocols developed for a series of 5 PLCs. These will be recommended to the *Lerndesigners* along with tools for scheduling and conducting online PLC meetings. The PLCs can voluntarily invite outside experts to sessions based on their own needs. Background for PLC work is already available online in workshop materials from the qualification program, but these might need to be supplemented.

## Vignettes as an Evaluation Method

As Lorna Earl pointed out during a symposium at ICSEI 2013 in Santiago, in a time of innovation there is a need to first describe what occurs in innovations and evaluate them before making decisions on the system level about spread and speed of an innovation. The question posed in the ILE project as to how learners experience the learning trajectory of an environment is part of an emerging pattern echoing Michael Schratz' attempt to steer attention to learning by coining "*lernseits*" in the German-speaking world, Hattie's (2008) plea for making invisible learning visible through self-evaluation, and Tomlinson's (2008) call to "disaggregate 'the student'" in the context of differentiated instruction. In order to assess the effectiveness of any practice in education, whether from the inside or outside, information about learning results via standards testing is simply not enough – or rather, too little too late.

In this regard, we are currently experimenting with vignettes as an evaluation tool both for external evaluation and assessment of innovation as well as for internal self-evaluation on the part of the teacher. Learning experiences in the *Lerndesigner*-Network have already been researched by CLS staff member Michael Kahlhammer (2013) using the vignette research methodology developed at the University of Innsbruck. Kahlhammer published the following vignette and reading in an article focused on dimensions of professional learning communities as a development strategy in the NMS learning ateliers.

> *Vignette*
>
> *In a light-flooded seminar room there are various tables around which the participants have grouped themselves. Metaphor posters are hanging around the room: Soaring Eagle, Crazy Horse, Lame Duck, Pecking Hen, Dancing Wolf. Herbert, an older participant, is sitting at a table in the middle of the room and listening to the facilitator. He folds and unfolds his hands while listening. When asked to choose a metaphor that best suits his school at the moment, Herbert looks around perplexed. He hesitates and remains seated while others are already up and moving from poster to poster. "Not so easy," he murmurs and stands up.*
>
> *Slowly he looks around with wrinkled forehead and goes to "Crazy Horse," reads the description on the poster and shakes his head. He puts his hands in his pockets, pulls his head back and looks around questioningly. He goes to the next station, shakes his head and moves on. At the next station, "Soaring Eagle," he raises his eyebrows and begins to nod, but he doesn't remain standing there. The facilitators announce it is time to make a decision. Herbert pauses and remains still. Slowly he turns his head to look behind him and squints. Then he turns abruptly and goes to "Soaring Eagle." Nodding, he says to himself, "That could happen, depending on how you see it." His posture relaxes.*
>
> *During the following exchange with the others who have chosen this metaphor, Herbert talks a lot, hands in pockets or arms crossed in front of him. "A lot of the older colleagues are already emigrating in their minds, but they're not hindering. That could be a chance for us," he explains. "Step by step and with both feet on the ground – that's important for me." The discussion revolves around freedom and scope for development, steadiness and the comment "if you have nothing to lose." During the exchange Herbert often leans forward and confirms others' comments with a nod or a smile. When most of the others have already gone, he stands quietly contemplative in front of the poster. Together with a few others he tries to find keywords to summarize their discussion and writes them around the poster.*

### Reading

*How does learning reveal itself in this vignette? Herbert does not stand up with everyone else. He remains seated, seems to be perplexed. With the words "not so easy" he expresses his irritation, something that is dissonant. What isn't working for him? Wherein lies the challenge he seems to be sensing? Irritation and dissonance initiate a reflective process. Is it the slow and deliberate emergence of learning that has been „set in motion, in which the knower becomes, consciously or not, the not-knower" (Schratz et. al., 2012, p. 25)? Herbert reacts to the Soaring Eagle, raises his eyebrows and nods. A moment of recognition? Is his body language revealing an awareness of his own experience before his intellect is aware of it and can begin to analyse? Herbert moves on and pauses. The call to make a decision brings him to a standstill, as if he is suspended in air. Which sound will be louder for him? The harmonious one or the dissonant one indicating that something is resisting? Which experience will be spoken to, which will lead to an insight, a reflection, learning? Learning seems to be initiated by an interruption and disorientation, involves tolerating dissonance. Professionalism reveals itself in the "way one deals with inner resistance" (ibid., p. 24). Herbert seems to recognize what is right, what is best for him. His body relaxes. He gains a new awareness. He seems to have found a personal frame in which he can capture and grasp his own self-knowledge (Burow 2011, p. 113).*

*In the ensuing exchange with colleagues, Herbert's behavior changes. He seems to open up and engages fully in the dialogue. The need to share and exchange is palpable. Commonalities and shared resonance are confirmed by nods. Herbert often smiles to re-enforce what others have said. They are able to "connect knowledge distributed across many and work out common ground"(ibid., p. 133). The essence of their experiences becomes clearer, doors open to the new and the contradictory as Herbert emphasizes "step-by-step with both feet on the ground" in front of the soaring eagle.*

To explore how *Lerndesigners* experience the learning trajectory of online PLC-work, we plan to adapt and apply the vignette methodology as an evaluation method for innovative learning environments. The vignette methodology was initially developed to conduct foundational research into the experience of learning in a nation-wide grant-funded research project at the University of Innsbruck (Schratz et al 2012; Westfall-Greiter & Schwarz 2012). The research was presented for the first time to an international audience at the ICSEI Conference 2013 in Chile. In the symposium, Michael Schratz, Tanja Westfall-Greiter and Johanna F. Schwarz presented and explored the methodology with discussants Lorna Earl and Louise Stoll. Both discussants read a vignette through their particular lens of system development. Lorna Earl's central question was, "How can this research be used to support practitioners?" She raised important questions on several levels:

- Is the experience in this vignette a regular pattern?
- What would others (the principal, the student's classmates, the inspector) say?
- How can the reader open up to the vignette?
- How can vignettes be used to unpack what is going on in schools?
- How can we research lifeworld sensitively to gain insights into adult learning?

This last question is of particular relevance to the *Lerndesigner*-Network in Level 2 of ILE Phase 3. As Lorna Earl noted at the symposium, innovation is highly contextualized, small-scale and messy. The need to understand what is going on when an innovation has been tried is essential, as is understanding its impact – in particular before it is scaled up or spread. High-quality tools are needed for this endeavour. The vignette model seems to be a viable alternative for describing without judging and can enable exploration of "what I think I understand" and help to reveal layers of meaning.

Louise Stoll also emphasized the power of vignettes as a research tool and emphasized the implications for leadership of a school culture oriented to the experiences of teaching and learning. A fundamental question is how leaders can create and foster conditions for trusting *and* challenging. Vignettes could be a an integral part of such a culture, "the way we do things around here."

For the purpose of this project, we will evaluate the PLC experiences by training one participant in each PLC in vignette writing, who will co-experience and protocol the PLC sessions to capture experiential

data, which then serve as the basis for writing vignettes. These vignettes will be collected and analyzed by the CLS project team using methods for vignette reading developed at the University of Innsbruck. Researchers versed in the vignette methodology will also provide support. An analysis of vignettes as an evaluation tool for innovative learning environments will be included in Austria's Monitoring Note 2 before the ILE Conference in Paris 2014.

## Selected Literature

Burow, O.-A. (2011). *Positive Pädagogik: Sieben Wege zu Lernfreude und Schulglück*. Weinheim: Beltz.

DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement.* Solution Tree.

DuFour, R. (2002). The Learning-Centered Principal. In: *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 59/8, p. 12-15.

Hattie, J. (2012). *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact on Learning*. London & New York: Routledge.

Jackson, D. & Temperley, J. (2007). From professional learning community to networked learning community. In: Stoll, L. & Seashore Louis, K. (Eds.) *Professional Learning Communities: Divergence, Depth and Dilemmas*. Maidenhead: Open University Press. pp. 45-61.

Kahlhammer, M. (2012.) „Mittendrin, statt nur dabei". Vignetten als Klangschalen des Lernens zur Professionalisierung im Rahmen von Lernateliers. *Erziehung und Unterricht*. 9/10. pp. 902-907.

Lave, J & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lortie, D. C. (1975). *Schoolteacher. A Sociological Study*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What Works in Schools: Translating Research into Action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Schratz, M. (2009). '*Lernseits' v*on Unterricht: Alte Muster, neue Lebenswelten – was für Schulen? *Lernende Schule*, 12(46-47), pp. 16-21.

Schratz M, Schwarz, J.F. & Westfall-Greiter, T. (2012). *Lernen als bildende Erfahrung: Vignetten in der Praxisforschung*. Innsbruck: Studienverlag.

Schratz, M. & Westfall-Greiter, T. (2010). School-based curriculum development in Austria. In: E. Hau-fai Law & N. Nieveen (Eds.): Schools as Curriculum Agencies. Asian and European Perspectives on School-Based Curriculum Development. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers. pp. 167-177.

Schley, W., Schratz, M., Hofbauer, C. & Westfall-Greiter, T. (2009). Das Konzept der NMS-Entwicklungsbegleitung als Transformationsprozess. *Erziehung und Unterricht* 7/8, pp. 686-696.

Schrittesser, I. (2004). Professional Communities. Beiträge der Gruppendynamik zur Entwicklung professionalisierten Handelns. In: Hackl, B. & Neuweg, G. H. (Eds.): *Zur Professionalisierung pädagogischen Handelns*. Münster: LIT, pp. 131-150.

Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium. (2011). Teacher Leader Model Standards. URL: http://www.teacherleaderstandards.org/downloads/TLS_Brochure_sm.pdf.

Tomlinson, C.A. (2003). *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Tomlinson, C. A. & Imbeau, M. (2010). *Leading and Managing a Differentiated Classroom*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Wiggins, G. & McTighe, J. (2005). Understanding by Design. 2nd Ed. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Westfall-Greiter, T. & Hofbauer, C. (2010). Shared Leadership setzt Teacher Leaders voraus: Lerndesigner/innen im Feld der Neuen Mittelschule. *Journal für Schulentwicklung*, 4, pp. 8-14.

Westfall-Greiter, T. & Schwarz, J.F. (2012). Planning for the unplannable: Responding to (un)articulated calls in the classroom. *Phenomenology and Practice*, 6/2, pp. 121-135. URL: http://www.phandpr.org/index.php/pandp/article/view/116.

## Online references

Official website of the NMS: www.neuemittelschule.at

NMS Platform: www.nmsvernetzung.at

NMS Parents' Platform: www.nmseltern.at

Virtual Campus: www.virtuelle-ph.at/

Center for Learning Research at the University of Innsbruck: www.lernforschung.at , Grant-funded learning research project at NMS: http://www.lernforschung.at/?cont=prodetail&id=%2031