

# Professional relationships supporting teacher professional development

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## Roundtable Session

**Title:** Professional relationships supporting teacher professional development

**General abstract of the presentation** *(max. 150 words)*

presenting the outline of your (planned) research project or study and including the problem(s), question(s), dilemma's, and/or challenge(s) that you wish to discuss during your roundtable session

In a case study in five Dutch primary schools teachers reported that they are reluctant to speak their minds, propose new ideas and give feedback to colleagues (Hulsbos et al., 2016). The study indicated that there is a lack of professional relatedness in these schools, a type of relationship between colleagues that is based on trust, mutual respect and a shared vision. The authors argue that professional relatedness supports teacher professional development (TPD) through supporting social learning. To further explore the concept of professional relatedness in Dutch schools and its relationship to TPD a PhD project has been initiated. The aim of the PhD project is, amongst others, to develop an instrument and intervention specifically designed for Dutch schools to study and enhance professional relatedness and TPD. The main questions for this roundtable session focus on the development of the instrument and intervention.

## Detailed abstract

1. **What is the background of your (planned) research project, study or general problem that you wish to discuss? More specifically, how is your study or problem founded by theory and/or how does it originate from practice?** *(max. 200 words)*

Teachers play a vital role in the improvement of education, emphasizing the importance of teacher professional development (TPD). Martens (2010) notes that the professional development and innovative ability of teachers in the Netherlands is insufficient. This may be the result of the school as a poor context for supporting collaboration between teachers (Prince, 2014).

Learning together is one of the key activities that assist professionals in overcoming obstacles and engaging in reflective activity (Marsick & Volpe, 1999). There is a large body of scientific literature and theory available on the value of social learning for TPD. Examples are professional learning communities (Sleegers et al., 2013) communities of practice (Wenger, Trayner & De Laat, 2011) and co-creation (Ehlen, 2014). These theories emphasize the essential role of social-psychological relationships in the school for TPD (Evers et al., 2011).

A study by Hulsbos, van Langevelde & Evers (2016) showed that although teachers value their colleagues and even form friendship-like relationships, they also reported that they are reluctant to speak their minds, propose new ideas and give feedback to colleagues (Hulsbos et al., 2016). There seems to be a lack of professional relatedness in schools, a type of relationship that is based on trust, mutual respect and a shared vision. We argue that these type of relationships are support TPD.

2. **Describe the general outline of your (planned) research project or study, and/or problem that you wish to discuss as much as possible, i.e. the research questions, research design, methods, timeline,...** *(max. 300 words)*

A PhD project has been initiated to further explore the concept of professional relatedness in Dutch schools. The theoretical link between professional relatedness and TPD seems present, following the literature on social learning noted above. Presumably, when teachers experience positive safe relationships this will foster to learn with and from colleagues. But it seems that little research has been done in this light. It is unclear which characteristics of collegial relationships are important for TPD. And it is interesting to study what supports the sense of professional relatedness in order to create a positive condition for TPD.

The PhD project consists of four consecutive studies. The first study is a case study in five primary schools, which focused on observing relationships between teachers in schools. That first study showed that there seems to be a lack of professional relatedness, and this lack of relatedness hinders professional development. The second study constitutes a literature review on the concept of professional relatedness and its relationship to TPD through social learning activities. The third study will focus on developing an instrument for measuring professional relatedness. In the fourth and last study an intervention for enhancing professional relatedness will be developed and tested. The roundtable session at EAPRIL 2016 is a valuable setting to discuss the design of the third and fourth study of this project.

3. **How is practice involved in your (planned) research project or study, and which kind of dissemination, implementation or other ways of sharing your research output are you thinking of in order to contribute to the improvement of educational practice and learning?** (max. 150 words)

The main research focus is grounded in a problem observed in practice in Dutch elementary schools. In several interviews, as part of the study of Hulsbos et al. (2016), the problem of a lack of professional relatedness in schools was observed. After this study, the problem was repeatedly mentioned in conversations with multiple other practitioners and school leaders. Therefore, the aim of this PhD project is to develop an instrument and intervention specifically designed for schools that will allow them to study and enhance professional relatedness.

4. **Which question(s), problem(s) or challenge(s) would you like to present for discussion to the conference delegates? Limit yourself to 2 or 3 questions/problems/challenges, in order to be able to discuss them in-depth.**

What is a suitable instrument for measuring professional relatedness?

What kind of quantitative instrument is suitable?

What kind of qualitative instrument is suitable?

What type of intervention can enhance professional relatedness?

## 5. List of references

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