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# Teachers Contributions to Learning Communities in Higher Education in the Netherlands

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**Abstract:** *Background and aims:* The research reported in this article is about the involvement of teachers in Learning Communities at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, in the Social work department. The present study builds on two previous studies. Firstly, a theoretical study on belonging and COVID-19. Secondly, an empirical study of the views of students at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Department of Social Work on "do they feel they belong to this University of Applied Sciences and Social Work in particular? *Methods:* Central to the study are the results of an OECD questionnaire focusing on teachers' pedagogical skills during, among other things, their work in learning communities and other student-related activities. Secondly, a COVID-19 questionnaire from the Municipal Health service (GGD) was used. Data were collected from 41% of teachers during a workshop on 12 April 2022. *Results:* First of all, this study shows that teachers suffered substantially from COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns. This affected their work substantially (59% negative) and also their private lives (47%). Second, this study demonstrates that teachers should be more concerned countering disruptive student behavior. Moreover, this study shows that teachers should focus more on the pedagogical skills that form the pillars of a learning community. These outcomes were achieved with Two-Factor Anova without Replication. *Conclusions:* Windesheim, University of Applied Science, Social Work, has taken the first step by introducing the concept of Learning Communities. To ensure that students actually feel at home in this department of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, theoretical and practical efforts will have to be made to ensure that students and possibly teachers feel that belonging is seamlessly connected to Learning Communities. This research shows that this can only be done if there is rock-solid work on the pedagogical skills with which the Learning Communities are propped up. Excelling in this will increase the chances of students completing the Social Work program and possibly even a decrease in the dropout rate of students enrolled in this program.

**Keywords:** University, Learning Community, COVID-19, Belonging, Pedagogical Skills, Teachers

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## 1. Introduction

This article is about how Social Work teachers at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences in Almere are committed to their students doing their best to belong to learning communities. The desire to belong to a group -i.e. to one or more groups- is a well-established social-psychological fact for humans.

"Joining groups satisfies our need to belong, gain information and understanding through social comparison, define our sense of self and social identity, and achieve goals that might elude us if we worked alone. Groups are also

practically significant, for much of the world's work is done by groups rather than by individuals .... College students often feel homesick and lonely when they first start college, but not if they belong to a cohesive, socially satisfying group. People who are accepted members of a group tend to feel happier and more satisfied. But should they be rejected by a group, they feel unhappy, helpless, and depressed. [1]."

This research focuses on teachers working for first-year Social Work students. This article was first preceded by a constructed theoretical model: Belonging a Key Concept to Explain Success in Higher Education in the Netherlands [2]. Based on the theoretical model, we then conducted an empirical survey of students on belonging at Windesheim, Social Work:

"Belonging, Attachment and COVID-19 in Higher Education in the Netherlands: Results and Recommendations." [3]. The underlying premise of this article and related previous works is that a sense of belonging is crucial for student learning success. Therefore, this article focuses on the question: "How do teachers create an environment in which students have a sense of belonging, in short, of feeling at home at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and its learning communities?" This viewpoint is substantiated by the OECD's research on belonging and how to achieve it [9]. It should be noted that the contribution of fellow students and extended family to belonging is hardly included in the main question statement. The organization of the present article is as follows: firstly, it will examine learning communities and the pedagogical skills that are related to them.

Secondly, findings on the effect of COVID-19 on teachers and their role in contributing to student engagement will be presented.

Before turning to the research findings of belonging teachers' interventions, we first focus on student recruitment and selection. These approaches contain the first building blocks of belonging for students. Ideally, the Windesheim organization should make it clear to its students, "You belong to us and we are going to take care of you" [4].

## 2. Student Enrolment

Many steps precede student enrolment in Social Work at Windesheim. This is also referred to in the literature as expectation management by which the tone is set. The marketing of Windesheim is conducted through YouTube, posters at bus stops, website, open days, trial days and a formal introduction week.

The following is known about these recruitment campaigns and their short- and long-term effects [5]. The Key Performance Indicators Registrations of Social Work Windesheim 2021-2022 yield as the best predictions of student registrations in order of importance: a) brochure, b) online open day, c) video on demand, d) last minute information provided by students and e) online trial class or joining a trial class.

For Windesheim as a whole, there are the following entry and exit dates of students and, separately, dropout dates in general and in the first year. But also the share that Windesheim University of Applied Sciences has in the Dutch market of Universities of Applied Sciences. In 2022-2023, a total of 488,500 students were studying in the Netherlands at Universities of Applied Sciences [12]. There are a total of 36 government-funded colleges in the Netherlands.

**Table 1.** Key figures Windesheim, 2021 annual report Executive Board (Inge Grimm).

Target Audience		2021	2020	2019	2018	2017
Students	Inflow	8.889	9.290	8.994	8.370	7.964
	Population	27.507	26.987	24.773	23.427	22.695
	Number of college graduates	4.170	3.716	3.645	3.742	3.247
	Number of dropouts	4.477	3.807	4.131	3.965	3.728
	Dropout 1st year	24%	25%	31%	32%	30%
Market Share	Inflow	5,7%	5,8%	5,6%	5,3%	5,3%
	Registrations	5,4%	5,4%	5,3%	5,0%	4,9%

For Windesheim as a whole, from 2017 the number of students increases by 11.6% until 2021. The student dropout rate decreases 30% to 24%. And the number of registrations increases from 4.9% to 5.4%.

We also took another look at the advertisements of Social Work Windesheim. Most images show students of color (especially of original African descent). Our impression is that students of color in Social Work are in the majority while their teachers are predominantly white [3].



**Figure 1.** Students of Social Work Windesheim Almere (source <https://www.windesheim.nl/opleidingen/voltijd/bachelor/social-work-almere>).

Now that data have been presented on the realization of expectations management, the switch can be made to the data collected by the authors on Social Work teachers and their efforts to mentor students, transfer knowledge and function in learning communities.

## 3. Characteristics of the Sample and Survey Questions

During a workshop on 12 April 2022, data were collected from teachers on their contribution to students' belonging at Windesheim, Social Work - with disruption by COVID-19 and associated lockdowns.

Social Work Windesheim employed 39 teachers at the time this study was conducted (structurally ill or absent teachers were not included). Of these 39 teachers, 29 are women (76.3%) and 10 are men (23.7%). Present at the workshop were 18 (46.1%) of the 39 teachers. One of the teachers present did not complete the questionnaires and another left early. So the data collected refer to 16 teachers (41% of 39).

This sample of teachers during this workshop can be considered a representative sample from the population of

teachers at Social Work, of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences. Separately, the total number of teachers present at this in-service training day on April 12, 2022 was randomly assigned to two different workshops, including ours. General information was also gathered about the teachers present during our workshop. These are listed below.

- 1) A total of 8 teachers (50%) work 71-90% of the work week; 4 teachers (25%) work more than 90% of the work week and lastly, 4 teachers (25%) work 50-70% of the work week.
- 2) These 16 teachers have worked at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences for 5.33 years.
- 3) These 16 teachers have been working in education for 7.78 years.
- 4) These lecturers have been working in other positions for 12.06 years.
- 5) These teachers have worked in other jobs in education for 3.13 years, 44% not at all.
- 6) Out of 16 employees, three (18.75%) have no teaching qualification.

This study uses two questionnaires, that of the GGD -also called municipal health service- on COVID-19 [2, 3] and the OECD questionnaire [2, 3]. Much of the data relates to teachers' work in learning communities. In total, there are 12 learning communities in the first year of Social Work.

Teaching activities at Windesheim Social Work include lecturing, project work, managing learning communities and teaching study skills (only in year 1). In total, 40% of working time is spent on these activities. In short, preparing these activities takes up 60% of the working time.

## 4. Definition of Teachers of Belonging (Post-Its)

Prior to workshop, all teachers (39) were asked what they understood by belonging. Each teacher here expressed her/his opinion through one or more post-its. Teachers use a wide variety of descriptions about what they think belonging means for students. As a preliminary note, the sum of all these descriptions gives a general picture of what is meant by "belonging" by teachers.

The fundamental concepts underlying the post-its are: a) make sure you are seen (listening attentively), b) being yourself (accepting somebody as she/he is), c) sharing personal experiences with students, d) having confidence in students' performance (responding positively to students and looking for everyone's talents), and f) contacting students who are absent (if a student cancels an activity, send an e-mail and if there is no response, contact the student yourself).

A number of teachers mentioned more than one post-it. They shared an extensive commentary with the researchers on what they mean by belonging. Some examples are listed below. *Example 1.* Emailing students when I haven't seen them for a while to ask how they are doing. Knowing names. Being accessible, responding immediately to mail. Having an eye for the student in the classroom, inviting students from my

learning team for individual introductory meetings. *Example 2.* Greet students in the hallway, engage in casual conversation, inquire about the well-being of students in class, assess the impact of COVID-19 on them, send a message if a student is unwell, and make an effort to meet with students at least once every three weeks.

*Example 3.* Knowing what is going on in someone's life and acting from equality.

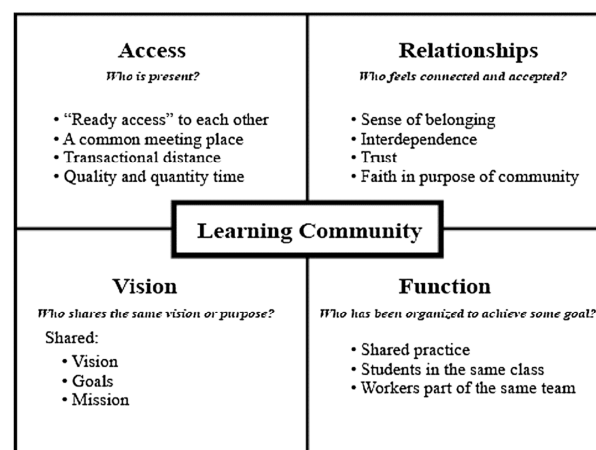
## 5. Learning Communities, Belonging, and Pedagogy

According to the University of Groningen, a learning community meets the following definition:

"A Learning Community is a group of 12-18 first year students which are put together to increase the involvement between students, but also between student and staff. A Learning Community aims to realize a good performance, to create cohesion within the program, to stimulate the sense of community among students and to stimulate students to get in touch with the working field<sup>1</sup>."

The chapter "Community defined by Relationships" includes a literature search on what is meant by learning communities [6].

"However, our review of the literature found what seem to be common relational characteristics of learning communities: (1) sense of belonging, (2) interdependence or reliance among the members, (3) trust among members, and (4) faith or trust in the shared purpose of the community, see figure 2."



**Figure 2.** The defining characteristics of learning communities, representing different ways of defining the boundaries of a community.

The following statement by West et al. [6] exemplifies the present study. After all, belonging and learning communities are glued together in that view.

"Being engaged in a learning community often requires more than being present either physically or virtually. Often researchers define learning communities by their relational or emotional boundaries: the emotional ties that bind and unify

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.rug.nl/frw/education/learning-communities?lang=en>

members of the community. Frequently a learning community is identified by how close or connected the members feel to each other emotionally and whether they feel they can trust, depend on, share knowledge with, rely on, have fun with, and enjoy high quality relationships with each other. In this way, affect is an important aspect of determining a learning community. Often administrators or policymakers attempt to force the formation of a community by having the members associate with each other, but the sense of community is not discernible if the members do not build the necessary relational ties. In virtual communities, students may feel present and feel that others are likewise discernibly involved in the community, but still perceive a lack of emotional trust or connection."

How does Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Social Work, perceive learning communities? It can be stated that Windesheim Social Work focuses on further developing the conceptualization of Learning Communities. Windesheim Social Work is doing this based on the work of Professor Dr. Louise Stoll [7]. Stoll [8] uses the term "professional learning communities". Professional refers to teachers and not students, as if professionalism is not expected of students. In the world outside of pedagogy, this course of action is called top-down practice. This argument leans on the statements of the OECD authors.

"The authors of an OECD report called for significant change in teachers' practice and development, arguing that education today demands "high-level knowledge workers who constantly advance their own professional knowledge as well as that of their profession". Being able to make the best use of evidence to enhance teacher practice is fundamental to realizing this ideal. But that's not all: an expectation of collective responsibility underlies the quote. This is about knowledge work for the good of colleagues – not acting as a lone ranger or becoming an individual star. The international picture is also one of increasing collaboration between teachers within and across schools [6]."

About professional learning communities, Stoll [8] says the following:

"Learning with and from others is a natural way to learn. Metaphors can help us think about learning in different ways. One metaphor is acquisition; learning is about acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills. Social constructivism, the underpinning social learning theory, proposes that the learner, drawing on their prior knowledge and experience, makes meaning of new information or problems through talk – sharing, challenging, negotiating and justifying ideas (Vygotsky) [13, 8]."

Furthermore, Stoll [8] wonders how to breathe life into professional learning communities. She calls this "bringing evidence to life." How she envisions this is briefly outlined below in the following phrasings:

"Enquiry and testing out research ideas is: a) 'The way we do things (teachers develop expertise through analyzing their interactions with students and being open to evidence of the impact they have)', b) Challenging thinking is actively encouraged (cultural norms are such that it's expected that

colleagues will act as each other's critical friends, challenging assumptions and thinking), c) Learning conversations are commonplace (in professional learning communities, the learning goal is more overt as people engage in learning conversations that challenge their thinking about how they have been tackling an issue), and d) People think about the best ways to exchange knowledge (knowledge needs bringing to life in ways that will help others to engage with the ideas, locate them within their context and in relation to prior experiences and learning, make meaning, and construct new knowledge from them)"

The work of the OECD [9] leans on older work by Stoll [7]. Hence the powerful quote below.

"This leads to the question: "What teacher training courses are needed to prepare graduates to be able to teach in a 21st century classroom?" One of the key challenges for the teaching profession is to strengthen the "technical core" of its professional practices which requires the development of educational ecosystems that support the creation, accumulation and diffusion of this professional knowledge. Such ecosystems need to draw on four sources: a) innovation and knowledge inspired by science (research and evaluation), b) innovation inspired by firms (entrepreneurial development of new products and services), c) innovation and knowledge inspired by practitioners (teachers, school heads), and d) innovation inspired by users (students, parents, communities)."

One of Dliman Salim students defined the ideal learning community in a portfolio assignment in 2022 as follows:

"My ideal learning community is one where everyone can learn at ease. Where no one feels anxious to say anything or take a particular stand. Where differences are not excluded, but rather embraced. In short, I think it is important that everyone can be themselves and people grow together to ultimately be the best they can be."

## 6. COVID-19 and Experiences of Teachers

The COVID-19 questionnaire from the Netherlands Municipal Health Service (GGD) was answered by 17 teachers. The starting question is:

"What did you experience during the corona period?" The answers are given below.

Experiences during COVID-19 (corona period) [more answers possible]:

- 1) I have been in quarantine (13: 17 = 76%).
- 2) I have had corona (12:17 = 71%).
- 3) Someone important to me has had corona (12:17 = 71%).
- 4) Someone important to me has been in hospital because of corona (2:17 = 12%).
- 5) Someone important to me has been in hospital because of something other than corona (2:17 = 12%).
- 6) Someone important to me died from something other than corona (2:17 = 12%).

- 7) I have been in hospital due to something other than corona (1:17 = 6%).  
 8) Less work or income for one of my parents (1:17 = 6%).  
 9) I have been in hospital because of corona (0%).  
 10) Someone important to me died from corona (0%).  
 11) None of these answers (2:17 = 12%).

Overall, 15 of the 17 teachers (88%) had experience with COVID-19. Furthermore, the COVID-19 questionnaire has two subsets of questions:

*Subset 1* = Social contacts and leisure. These are questions about being alone and/or belonging to a group (example questions are: I feel I get along well with people in my environment, I don't feel alone, and I don't have a strong bond with anyone anymore).

*Subset 2* = Impact of COVID-19 on general well-being. The starting question is: "How have the corona measures affected the below parts of your life, e.g. lockdown, closing schools, digital teaching, etc."

*Results subset 1* (social contacts and leisure): total 8 questions with 5 answer options completely incorrect, previously incorrect, not correct/not incorrect, previously correct, and completely correct. Being a positive answer (agree) to the question: answers completely incorrect, previously incorrect and not correct/not incorrect. This operation yields the following results:

**Table 2.** Social contacts and Leisure.

Subset 1: social contacts and leisure	% agree
I feel I get along well with people around me (No. 1)	94
I can find company when I want to (No. 8)	89
I don't feel alone (No. 3)	83
I miss having company (No. 2)	42
I feel disconnected from others (No. 7)	42
I feel I belong to a group of friends (No. 4)	24
I no longer have a strong bond with anyone (No. 5)	12
I feel nobody wants to deal with me (No. 6)	6

The above responses on social contacts and leisure (i.e. miss company, disconnected from others etc.) contrast sharply with the satisfaction scores on work. The satisfaction score with work at Windesheim is 8.2 on average. The teacher was also asked how she/he was rated by the supervisor last year. This yielded the following results: Excellent = 4 and Good = 13. Low, Good and Unsatisfactory = 0.

*Results subset 2* (impact of COVID-19 on general well-being). The starting question is: "How have the corona

measures affected the below parts of your life, e.g. lockdown, closing schools, digital teaching, etc." Altogether it involves 6 questions with answer categories: Very negative, Pretty negative, Not positive/not negative, Pretty positive and Very positive. In the reporting on these 6 questions, very negative, quite negative, quite negative, and not positive/not negative are called negative.

The results are listed below in order of high to low impact.

**Table 3.** Impact of COVID-19 on general well-being.

Subset 2: Impact of COVID-19 on general well-being	% Negative
Your school performance (No. 6)	59
Your life in general (No. 1)	47
How well you feel (e.g. how you handle emotions and stress) (No. 3)	42
The relationship with your family (No. 4)	36
Your health (No. 2)	36
Relationship with your friends (No. 5)	36

Many teachers have been affected by COVID-19. This ranges from having been quarantined themselves (76%) to having had COVID-19 themselves (71%). Furthermore, COVID-19 has had a substantial impact on social contacts and free time of teachers. Missing company and feeling alone are striking indicators of this. In addition, COVID-19 has had quite an impact on teachers' general well-being. Noteworthy is the finding that COVID-19 has negatively affected school performance (59%).

## 7. How Teachers Make Students Feel They Belong to Windesheim University of Applied Sciences (Social Work)

The commitment of teachers at Social Work Windesheim to ensure that first-year students feel a sense of belonging was measured through an OECD questionnaire [9] based on the work of Professor Dr. Louise Stoll [8].

### 7.1. Pedagogical Concepts

This questionnaire uses eight pedagogical concepts (Q1-Q8) that will be presented below in order of significance. That order of significance is derived from an analysis with two-factor Anova without repetition, see below.

**Table 4.** Two factorial Anova without replication of Q1 up to Q8.

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Rows	60,46875	15	4,03125	3,58618	5,329E-05	1,762656
Columns	70,21875	7	10,03125	8,923749	1,362E-08	2,098005
Error	118,0313	105	1,124107			
Total	248,7188	127				

The questions associated with the pedagogical concepts are listed below in order of importance. Average values have been used. This is allowed because the Anova shows that the concepts are independent of each other.

Q8. How often do you use the following approaches to assign final (semester/ term) grades in the grade you teach?" Total 5 questions. Categories are never or almost never, some lessons, many lessons, every lesson or almost every lesson).

Negative is never or almost never, and some lessons. Positive is many lessons, every lesson or almost every lesson (Q8 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 3,44$ ;  $\sigma = 1,36$ ). The results of the five questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) I compare students' performance to that of other students in the course (15 NO = 93,7%).
- 2) I consider student achievement level in regard to standard criteria, irrespective of performance of other students in the course (13 NO = 81,2%).
- 3) I consider students' individual improvement in performance since the beginning of the semester/term (11 NO = 68,7%).
- 4) I consider the degree to which the students participate in the course (9 NO = 56,2%).
- 5) I recognize students' effort even if performance does not improve (7 NO = 43,8%).

Q7. How often do you use the followings methods of assessing the students learning?" Total 4 questions and 4 categories per question (never or almost never, some lessons, many lessons, and every lessons or almost every lesson). Negative is never or almost never, and some lessons. Positive is many lessons, and every lessons or almost every lesson (Q7 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 2,81$ ;  $\sigma = 0,83$ ). The results of the four questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) I collect data from classroom assignments or homework (16 NO = 100%).
- 2) I have individual students answer questions in front of the class (13 NO = 81,2%).
- 3) I let students judge their own progress (10 NO = 62,5%).
- 4) I observe students when working on particular tasks and provide immediate feedback (6 NO = 37,5%).

From the responses from Q8 and Q7, it can be inferred that comparative measurement among students is almost non-existent.

Q5. How often do each of the following activities happen in your classes throughout the school year?" 5 questions with 5 categories (Never or nearly ever, and in about one quarter of lessons = negative. Not negative or positive = in about one-half of lessons. Positive = in about three quarter of lessons, and in almost every lesson (Q5 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 2,63$ ;  $\sigma = 1,50$ ). The results of the five questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) Students hold a debate and argue for a particular point of view which may not be their own (13 negative = 81,3%; not positive or negative = 1 (6,3%).
- 2) I give different work to the students that have difficulties learning and/or to those who can advance faster (10 negative = 62,5%; not negative or positive 4 = 25%).
- 3) Students work in groups based upon their abilities (10 negative (62,5%) and 3 not negative or positive = 18,8%).
- 4) Students work on projects that require at least one week to complete (6 negative = 37,5%; not negative/ not positive 3 = 18,8%).
- 5) Students work in small groups to come up with a joint solution to a problem or task (3 negative = 18,7%; 5 not negative or positive 5 = 31,3%).

Q2. Did you have the opportunity of dealing with the following topics during your in- and pre-service training and professional development?" The question categories are Not at all, A little, Somewhat, A lot, and Very much. The categories Not at all, A little, and Somewhat are combined = negative; A lot and Very much = positive (Q2 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 2,56$ ;  $\sigma = 1,21$ ). The results of the five questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) Classroom management (10 negative = 62,5%).
- 2) Child development (10 negative = 56,3%).
- 3) Developing social and emotional skills in children (9 negative = 56,3%).
- 4) Methods of teaching that involve group activities (8 negative = 50%).
- 5) Student-teacher interaction (4 negative = 25%).

Q3. How often does this happen in your lessons?" 6 questions and 4 answers (never or almost never, some lessons, many lessons and every lesson or almost every lesson). Negative is never or almost never, and some lessons. Positive is many lessons, and every lesson or almost every lesson. (Q3 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 2,50$ ;  $\sigma = 1,26$ ). The results of the six questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) Students discuss materials from a textbook (14 negative = 87,5%).
- 2) Students present something to the rest of the class (12 negative = 75%).
- 3) A whole class discussion takes place in which I participate (6 negative = 37,5%).
- 4) Students are given opportunities to explain their ideas (4 negative = 25%).
- 5) A small group discussion between students takes place (2 negative = 12,5%).
- 6) I discuss questions that students ask (2 negative = 12,5%).

Q6. In your teaching, to what extent can you do the following?" Total 7 questions and 4 categories per question (not at all, and to some extend = negative. Positive is quite a bit, and a lot). (Q6 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 1,94$ ;  $\sigma = 1,44$ ). The results of the seven questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) Motivate students who show low interest in school work (7 negative = 43,8%).
- 2) Get students to follow classroom rules (7 negative = 43,7%).
- 3) Control disruptive behavior in the classroom (5 negative = 31,2%).
- 4) Get students to believe they can do well in school work (4 negative = 25%).
- 5) Help my students to value learning (4 negative = 25%).
- 6) Make expectations about student behavior clear (2 negative = 12,5%).
- 7) Help students think critically (2 negative = 12,5%).

From the previous answers to the questions belonging to the pedagogical concepts Q5, Q2, Q3 and Q6, it can be inferred that the teachers of Windesheim University of Social Work put little energy into their students' group activities and associated group dynamics, such as result-oriented work in small groups,

class management development and promotion of social-emotional skills.

Q1. Were any of the following subjects included in either your teacher education or subsequent professional development? The question categories are Yes or NO. (Q1 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 1,63$ ;  $\sigma = 1,09$ ). The results of the four questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) How to involve parents in the educational process (13 NO = 81,3%).
- 2) How to deal with difficult students (class obstructions, breaking rules, lack of attention, etc.) (6 NO = 37,5%).
- 3) How to manage a classroom (4 NO = 25%).
- 4) How to have students work in groups to learn (3 NO = 18,8%).

Q4. How often do you assign the following activities to your students?" 3 questions and 6 categories per question (never or almost never, once a year or less, 2-4 times a year, 5-9 times a year, 1-3 times a month and once a week or more). Negative = never or almost never, once a year or less, and 2-4 times a year. Positive = 5-9 times a year, 1-3 times a month and once a week or more. (Q4 (NO).  $\bar{X} = 0,88$ ;  $\sigma = 0,89$ ). The results of the three questions ordered by the percentage of 'NO' from high to low are below.

- 1) Preparing and giving a talk/presentation together (8 negative = 50%).
- 2) Conducting a longer project (over several weeks) in teams such as writing a document, inventing something, etc. (5 negative = 31,3%).
- 3) Doing some short task (10 minutes to 2 hours) in teams such as exercises or problems (1 negative = 6,3%).

The two factorial Anova without replication (see table 4) also shows that there are teachers who contribute little (high

mean NO) and a considerable (low mean NO) to endorsing belonging in learning communities.

**Table 5.** Teachers ranked according to their negative contribution to belonging by first-year Windesheim Social Work students.

Teacher No.	Average (NO)	Standaard deviation (NO)
No. 06	3,25	1,04
No. 05	3,25	1,49
No. 13	3,00	1,20
No. 09	3,00	1,51
No. 12	2,88	1,64
No. 10	2,75	1,49
No. 15	2,38	0,47
No. 08	2,25	1,28
No. 04	2,25	1,67
No. 07	2,13	1,46
No. 11	2,13	1,55
No. 16	1,88	0,83
No. 03	1,88	1,55
No. 02	1,75	0,71
No. 14	1,25	1,04
No. 01	0,75	0,89

## 7.2. Social-Emotional Wellbeing

The OECD questionnaire [7] also measures teachers' promotion of students' socio-emotional well-being. The initial question is: "In which way, if any, have the development of students (social and emotional skills) been promoted in your school?" Answers are yes and no.

According to the two-factor analysis without replication, the questions on social-emotional well-being and teachers' contribution to it can be ranked from low to high. Low is a high percentage of NO per question/teacher and many is a low percentage of NO per question/teacher.

**Table 6.** Two-factor Anova without replication of the eight questions measuring teachers' contribution to students' pedagogical well-being.

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5,466667	7	0,780952	3,748571	0,001099	2,092381
Within Groups	23,33333	112	0,208333			
Total	28,8	119				

The outcomes of the eight questions that operationalize concept "promotion of students' social-emotional well-being" by teachers are listed below in order of importance. Namely, from important to insignificant.

- 1) Teachers are requested to promote the development of students' social and emotional skills as part of their work (or during their classes). 2 NO (13%).
- 2) The development of social and emotional skills is one of the objectives included in the [school educational plan]. 3 NO (19%).
- 3) We have separate classes or school activities dedicated specifically to the development of these skills. 4 NO (25%).
- 4) As part of special classes aimed specifically at developing these skills. 4 NO (25%).
- 5) By how we implement our school's disciplinary rules. 10 NO (63%).
- 6) By means of our general school practices. 8 NO (50%).

7) By organizing extracurricular activities. 7 NO (44%).

8) By providing feedback and advice to parents about their children's social and emotional skills. 13 NO (81%).

The same applies to teachers. In short, the two factorial Anova without repetition shows that there are teachers who contribute little and much to students' socio-emotional well-being.

## 7.3. Frequency of Different Types of Learning-Disruptive Behavior

The initial question is: In your school, to what extent is the learning of students hindered by the following phenomena. Possible answers are not at all, very little, to some extent, and a lot. Not at all and very little is no hinder and to some extent and a lot is hinder. These 13 questions were also subjected to a two factorial Anova without replication. The results are presented below.



**Table 7.** Two-factor Anova without replication of the thirteen questions measuring types of learning-disruptive behavior of students.

ANOVA						
Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Rows	7,057692	15	0,470513	3,004093	0,000256	1,72227
Columns	16,26923	12	1,355769	8,656207	6,54E-13	1,806288
Error	28,19231	180	0,156624			
Total	51,51923	207				

Below are the results of the 13 questions ordered from high to low frequency of disruptive behavior (hinder) by students during learning processes.

- 1) Students arriving late for school: 13 hinder (81%).
- 2) Students skipping lessons: 13 hinder (81%).
- 3) Lack of encouragement for students: 12 hinder (75%).
- 4) Student truancy: 11 hinder (69%).
- 5) Teachers having to teach students of heterogeneous ability levels within the same class: 11 hinder (69%).
- 6) Teachers having to teach students of diverse ethnic backgrounds (i.e., language, culture) within the same class: 11 hinder (69%).
- 7) Students lacking respect for teachers: 6 hinder (38%).
- 8) Disruption of classes by students: 5 hinder (31%).
- 9) Poor student-teacher relations: 4 hinder (25%).
- 10) Teachers' low expectations of students: 3 hinder (19%).
- 11) Student use of alcohol or illegal drugs: 2 hinder (13%).
- 12) Students intimidating or bullying other students: 2 hinder (13%).
- 13) Student involvement with major illegal activity: 1 hinder (6%).

The same is true for teachers. In short, the two-factor Anova without repetition shows that there are teachers who observe few and many disruptive behaviors from students during the learning processes.

## 8. Discussion

Learning communities and belonging are seamlessly linked. Windesheim, Social Work, draws on the work of Stoll [7, 8] when setting up learning communities. So until now, we have used the terms "learning community" and "belonging" (this applies to both students and teachers) separately. Tying these together requires an intellectual and practical exercise. Otherwise, the trend we outlined in article two [3] will continue. The trend is that more and more students drop out if they do not feel they do not belong to Windesheim University of Applied Sciences and the Social Work department. Furthermore, it seems wise for learning communities to define pedagogical skills for both students and teachers that are then also maintained. The following statement deserves a closer look because it explains Learning Communities and Belonging among students in their connection well.

"Learning Communities<sup>2</sup> involve people learning together in groups and socially constructing knowledge. This positions learning as a social process - rather than an individual activity

– through which learners must interact, analyse, negotiate, communicate and share with others who may have different views and backgrounds.

Watkins [10] tells us that a community is a collective with certain hallmarks:

- 1) Agency: members decide, review.
- 2) It is where belongingness develops.
- 3) Cohesion amongst members emerges.
- 4) Diversity is embraced rather than seen as a difficult.

Learning communities, therefore, are an important part of student learning but also helps develop a sense of connectedness to their cohort/department/faculty/institution, where they feel valued and respected. Thomas (2012) also reminds us that belonging is intrinsically linked to success, offering us this refined definition of what success means:

"It has become increasingly clear that success means helping all students to become more engaged and more effective learners in higher education, thus improving their academic outcomes and their progression opportunities after graduation (or when they exit higher education)." (Thomas, [11]."

When realizing learning community, the country of origin of students must also be taken into account. Motives for this can be found in the following statement.

"Feeling part of the college community depends on the extent to which students identify and share values with peers and staff. Students prefer to interact with peers from similar racial, ethnic, or cultural backgrounds as their own. He characterizes such behaviour as automated because familiarity with each other's background makes interactions more natural, as thinking and behaviour become less conscious and less effortful [14]."

## 9. Conclusions

This research is about learning communities of first-year Social Work students at Windesheim University of Applied Sciences. This study answers a number of questions. First is the question: what pedagogical skills do teachers deploy to support student learning communities [15]? The second question is: do teachers also commit to students' socio-emotional well-being? Moreover, is disruptive student behavior during learning in learning communities visible to teachers? The findings show crystal clear that pedagogical skills of teachers are a must. This study was conducted after the end of two COVID-19 lockdowns [2]. Hence, the extent to which these Windesheim teachers suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic is portrayed separately.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/changemakers/changemakers-projects/learning-community-belonging>



Windesheim University's views (in particular Social Work) on setting up professional learning communities are based on the work of Stoll [7, 8]. Stoll [8] wonders how to breathe life into professional learning communities. She calls this "bringing evidence to life." How she envisions this is briefly outlined below in the following phrasings:

"Enquiry and testing out research ideas is: a) 'The way we do things (teachers develop expertise through analyzing their interactions with students and being open to evidence of the impact they have)', b) Challenging thinking is actively encouraged (cultural norms are such that it's expected that colleagues will act as each other's critical friends, challenging assumptions and thinking), c) Learning conversations are commonplace (in professional learning communities, the learning goal is more overt as people engage in learning conversations that challenge their thinking about how they have been tackling an issue), and d) People think about the best ways to exchange knowledge (knowledge needs bringing to life in ways that will help others to engage with the ideas, locate them within their context and in relation to prior experiences and learning, make meaning, and construct new knowledge from them)."

The work of the OECD [9] leans on older work by Stoll [7]. Hence the powerful quote below.

"This leads to the question: 'What teacher training courses are needed to prepare graduates to be able to teach in a 21st century classroom? One of the key challenges for the teaching profession is to strengthen the 'technical core' of its professional practices which requires the development of educational ecosystems that support the creation, accumulation and diffusion of this professional knowledge. Such ecosystems need to draw on four sources: a) innovation and knowledge inspired by science (research and evaluation), b) innovation inspired by firms (entrepreneurial development of new products and services), c) innovation and knowledge inspired by practitioners (teachers, school heads), and d) innovation inspired by users (students, parents, communities)."

In practice, a parallel development has taken place. Stoll [7], [8] focuses on the pedagogical requirements that can be placed on a professional learning community, such as those of Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Social Work.

These pedagogical requirements were then developed by the OECD [9] into concrete questionnaires used in this study.

### 9.1. Impact COVID-19

15 out of 17 teachers (88%) had experiences with COVID-19.

These COVID-19 experiences have consequences (impact) on social contacts and leisure time. Over two-fifths of teachers said they missed company from others (undoubtedly including colleagues) and did not feel more connected to others. Second, COVID-19 has had a disruptive effect on performance at school (59%), life in general (47%), and dealing with emotions and stress (42%). In short, it can be said that COVID-19 and its associated lockdowns have had a substantial impact on teachers' business and personal prosperity.

### 9.2. Pedagogical Skills in Learning Communities

#### 9.2.1. Hinder

Before addressing pedagogical skills, it seems useful to consider whether teachers observe disruptive student behavior in classes, lectures, project work groups and learning communities. The analysis of these 13 questions categorized by hinder and not hinder were processed with two factorial Anova without replication. The results are highly significant (p-value rows: 0.000256 and F-crit: 1.72227; P-value (columns) 6.54E-13 and F-crit 1.806288).

Two conclusions can be drawn from the Anova analyses: a) teachers perceive a lot of disruptive student behavior, and b) there is a good number of teachers who do not perceive any of this.

#### 9.2.2. Pedagogical Skills

The eight pedagogical skills all consist of multiple questions. Those questions were processed with Anova (two factor without replication). The results are significant. This applies to the ranking of the pedagogical concepts, from very important to not important. Furthermore, the Anova results show that teachers do not apply pedagogical skills very well, if at all. All results are shown in the following table. Some questions are shown for each pedagogical skill.

*Table 8. Pedagogical skills ranked by importance.*

Kind of pedagogical skill	Questionnaires
How often do you use the following approaches to assign final (semester/ term) grades in the grade you teach? ( $\bar{X} = 3,44$ ; $\sigma = 1,36$ ).	I compare students' performance to that of other students in the course (15 NO = 93,7%). I consider student achievement level in regard to standard criteria, irrespective of performance of other students in the course (13 NO = 81,2%). I consider students' individual improvement in performance since the beginning of the semester/term (11 NO = 68,7%).
How often do you use the followings methods of assessing the students learning? ( $\bar{X} = 2,81$ ; $\sigma = 0,83$ ).	I collect data from classroom assignments or homework (16 NO = 100%). I have individual students answer questions in front of the class (13 NO = 81,2%). I let students judge their own progress (10 NO = 62,5%). Students hold a debate and argue for a particular point of view which may not be their own (13 negative = 81,3%; not positive or negative = 1 (6,3%).
How often do each of the following activities happen in your classes throughout the school year?" ( $\bar{X} = 2,63$ ; $\sigma = 1,50$ ).	I give different work to the students that have difficulties learning and/or to those who can advance faster (10 negative = 62,5%; not negative or positive 4 = 25%). Students work in groups based upon their abilities (10 negative (62,5%) and 3 not negative or positive = 18,8%).

Kind of pedagogical skill	Questionnaires
Did you have the opportunity of dealing with the following topics during your in- and pre-service training and professional development? ( $\bar{X} = 2,56$ ; $\sigma = 1,21$ )	Classroom management (10 negative = 62,5%). Child development (10 negative = 56,3%). Developing social and emotional skills in children (9 negative = 56,3%).
How often does this happen in your lessons? ( $\bar{X} = 2,50$ ; $\sigma = 1,26$ ).	Students discuss materials from a textbook (14 negative = 87,5%). Students present something to the rest of the class (12 negative = 75%). A whole class discussion takes place in which I participate (6 negative = 37,5%).
In your teaching, to what extent can you do the following? ( $\bar{X} = 1,94$ ; $\sigma = 1,44$ ).	Motivate students who show low interest in school work (7 negative = 43,8%). Get students to follow classroom rules (7 negative = 43,7%). Control disruptive behavior in the classroom (5 negative = 31,2%). How to involve parents in the educational process (13 NO = 81,3%).
Were any of the following subjects included in either your teacher education or subsequent professional development? ( $\bar{X} = 1,63$ ; $\sigma = 1,09$ ).	How to deal with difficult students (class obstructions, breaking rules, lack of attention, etc.) (6 NO = 37,5%). How to manage a classroom (4 NO = 25%). Preparing and giving a talk/presentation together (8 negative = 50%).
How often do you assign the following activities to your students? ( $\bar{X} = 0,88$ ; $\sigma = 0,89$ ).	Conducting a longer project (over several weeks) in teams such as writing a document, inventing something, etc. (5 negative = 31,3%). Doing some short task (10 minutes to 2 hours) in teams such as exercises or problems (1 negative = 6,3%).

**Table 9.** Teachers ranked according to their negative contribution to belonging by first-year Windesheim Social Work students.

Teacher No.	Average (NO)	Standaard deviation (NO)
No. 06	3,25	1,04
No. 05	3,25	1,49
No. 13	3,00	1,20
No. 09	3,00	1,51
No. 12	2,88	1,64
No. 10	2,75	1,49
No. 15	2,38	0,47
No. 08	2,25	1,28
No. 04	2,25	1,67
No. 07	2,13	1,46
No. 11	2,13	1,55
No. 16	1,88	0,83
No. 03	1,88	1,55
No. 02	1,75	0,71
No. 14	1,25	1,04
No. 01	0,75	0,89

The earlier mentioned two factorial Anova without replication also shows that there are teachers who contribute

**Table 10.** Two-factor Anova without replication of the eight questions measuring teachers' contribution to students' pedagogical well-being.

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P-value	F crit
Between Groups	5,466667	7	0,780952	3,748571	0,001099	2,092381
Within Groups	23,33333	112	0,208333			
Total	28,8	119				

It is concluded that teachers are committed to students' social-emotional well-being according to this OECD questionnaire [9].

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little (high mean NO) and a considerable (low mean NO) to endorsing belonging in learning communities.

Table 8 shows that Social Work Windesheim still needs to make considerable efforts to make the learning communities function well. This applies to top-down work in a learning community (e.g., by making teachers' interventions align with students' curricula) and also bottom-up (e.g., by encouraging students' natural habitus of talking to each other about the lesson material). Furthermore, Table 9 shows that there are teachers who apply these pedagogical skills and those who do not.

### 9.2.3. Social-Emotional Wellbeing

The OECD questionnaire [7] also measures teachers' promotion of students' socio-emotional well-being. The key question is: "In which way, if any, have the development of students (social and emotional skills) been promoted in your school?" Answers are yes and no.

According to the two-factor analysis without replication, the questions on social-emotional well-being and teachers' contribution to it can be ranked from 13% NO to 25% NO.

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