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Evaluation of the Relational Competence Project 2012-16

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Evaluation of the Relational Competence Project 2012-16

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This version of the evaluation report is translated by the author February-March 2017 from the Danish version published September, 2016. Quotes from respondents in the evaluation and from literature in the background sections are translated from the original Danish versions without this being explicitly marked all around the text.
However, when research literature can be found both in Danish and English versions the similar quotes from the English version have been used (e.g. Nordenboe et al., 2008). Due to this, and to readability in English, their might be small differences if comparing with the original Danish text.
Titles for publications only published in Danish are kept in Danish in the reference list, but if the title is used in the text in the report it is in a translated version.
Abstract

The relational competence project was initiated in 2012 by a broad group of stakeholders, referring to both research and to concrete experiences of a need for development in schools and teacher education. The evaluation of the project has been based on a retrospective survey with answers and reflections from all stakeholder-groups. This was supplemented with interviews and analysis of project documents. The evaluation is, overall, positive in relation to the participants perceived personal professional outcomes. The development as a professional teacher and as part of a professional community were aspects highlighted, and the same were new insight into the importance of relations and the concrete tools and approaches tried with students in schools. Some of the challenges emphasised was about the so-called “inner exercises”. It seems that systematic enactments with these exercises was perceived as extremely beneficial for some participants, but as a challenge for others. This can be summed up saying that those specific approaches making the project strong, also might be what causes challenges for some participants. The character of being a co-creation project with cooperation across stakeholder-groups and institutions furthermore seems to have been crucial for project success. For the student teachers, in particular the sustained enactments and reflections over time through the four years of education have been important. The participation at the 4th and last year was voluntary – and some student teachers furthermore used the project aspects to frame their inquiries for the final bachelor-project. Those students have experienced the highest level of professional outcomes. Relational competence has in their bachelor-inquiries been used in a very wide range of pedagogical and subject matter contexts, emphasizing relational competence as a generic perspective, not only relevant in certain subjects. Looking forward the recommendation is to continue the work with relational competence as an explicit focus in teacher education, preferable in continuing cooperation also with schools and the other external stakeholders involved.

1 About the Relational Competence Project and shortly about the evaluation

The Relational Competence project (RC-project) 2012-16 was an example of a longitudinal cooperative project running over time and with participation from both professional staff from schools, pre-service teacher education and research. The stakeholders were:

- The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children
- VIA University College
  - faculty leadership representatives and professors from Teacher Education in Aarhus
  - two classes from pre-service teacher education, one with specialisation in Danish and one with specialisation in Mathematics
  - a research and development group from VIAs Faculty of Education and Social Studies
- Danish School of Education (DPU), Aarhus University
- Four public schools in the Aarhus area
- Three public schools in the Randers area

The evaluation of the project was, as it will be presented in the methodology below, based on empirical data collected and analysed in the period from April to September 2016. But the RC-project has furthermore been repeatedly formatively evaluated during the project period, and a range of “artefacts” - ranging from teaching materials to research documents - generated in the full project period from 2012 to 2016 have been incorporated in the evaluation.

The evaluator did not participate in the RC-project, but is affiliated to VIA University College as senior associate professor, and the evaluation was commissioned by VIA.

The phrasing at the front-page of this report: ".. it might be that those specific approaches making the project strong, also is what causes challenges for some participants ..?" is formulated by the evaluator inspired by insights from the evaluation. This will be further elaborated in the result section.
1.1 Development with multiple perspectives and levels.

Seen from a teacher educational perspective the RC-project is interesting as an example of a longitudinal cooperative project crossing sectors. But most importantly the project is highly interesting for teacher education due to the "content" being cooperated about, i.e. the systematic work on supporting (student) teachers' development of relational competencies, with the aim of a more systematic and qualified focus on relational work in the teachers' classrooms.

Relational competence is targeted in the Danish curricular documents for teacher education, for example the intended outcomes for School Practice Placements as a subject in teacher education organised under the three headlines: 1) Didactics, 2) Classroom management, and 3) Relations. An overall aim is that: "...the student teacher can positively cooperate with school students, parents, colleagues and other resource persons, and reflect upon the influence of relations in both teaching and in school students' learning and well-being".

In relation to cross-sectorial cooperation it is in the political agreement behind the latest teacher education reform ("LU13") phrased like this: "The knowledge base for teacher education must both include research based knowledge and practitioner knowledge. In relation to practitioner knowledge there seems to be a potential for more school in teacher education", through more interaction involving both teacher educators and school teachers. Not just cooperation about the student teachers' school practice placements, but also for example cooperation about subject didactics and educational development".

Furthermore, it is in Skibsted and Matthiesen (2016) emphasized, referring among others to Juul and Jensen (2002), Nordenbo (2008) and Aagaard (2014), that research has documented relational competence as a crucial focus area when educating teachers. It is problematized that the knowledge base has not until now been sufficiently strong, and that both the meaning of the conceptualization "relational competence", and how such competencies are developed in practice are unclear. Cooperation with external stakeholders from schools etc., with relational work in the centre of the cooperation and with a focus on the knowledge base, research and theory is considered central.

A more general need for development of the Danish teacher education has been highlighted in repeated dimittend surveys and from advisory boards and external evaluations (e.g. Andersen & Hansen, 2016). Overall, there is satisfaction concerning the newly educated teachers' subject matter knowledge and their pedagogical competencies for planning, conducting and evaluating teaching. But challenges are emphasized in relation to the novice teachers' competencies for cooperating with parents, handling conflicts in class and to some degree related to classroom management. Furthermore, a tendency for the novice teachers' vulnerability and lack of resilience at the personal level has been highlighted. A school leader for example emphasized in an advisory board survey that: "Relational competence and classroom management are challenging for the newly educated teachers and at the same time crucial for the school students" (Jensen, 2016).

Teaching, and pedagogical practice in general, concern in a broad sense interpersonal and communicative actions. The teacher's relational work is mainly about student-teacher interactions in the classroom: "Relations do create the concrete preconditions determent for what the school students learn, both about the subject matter and about themselves in relation to schooling" (Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016), but relations also play a role in collegial cooperation and cooperation with parents. So, seen from a school perspective, relational competence is a crucial development-area both in relation to the existing practice at the schools, and in relation to competencies much in demand among the newly educated teachers.

The leader of teacher education in VIA has described the 4-years relational competence project as consisting of the following levels (Jensen, 2016):

- A teacher-educator level focusing on professional development and how to frame and approach the work with relational competencies in teacher education
- A teacher-education level focusing on the student teachers’ development of relational competences
- A school level focusing on how education and professional practitioners in schools can cooperate with the aim of school students developing relational competencies

The relational competence project has over the four years been proceeding following a repeated rhythm with course days varying in content, approach and participant group. Some course days have only been
attended by VIA professors and teachers. Here they did for example try out themselves the concrete exercises which they subsequently had to facilitate at joint course days with participating student teachers. Other course days were only attended by the student teachers, and finally, there were course days attended by all groups of stakeholders.

1.2 Cooperation among various (groups of) stakeholders

The RC-project was planned and initiated in close cooperation between various (groups of) stakeholders. In this section the roles and responsibilities of these stakeholders is elaborated.

The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children has been responsible for the teaching of the student teachers, and have furthermore planned and facilitated activities for pedagogical staff from the participating schools and for the professors from teacher education. They have also been responsible for the internal formative assessments and the iterative development of the project activities based on these evaluations. So, 2-3 facilitators from this society had the main responsibility for teaching and facilitation, but with more participants from the society in some of the meetings and seminars along the project period.

Representatives from VIA University College, Teacher Education in Aarhus, have likewise been part of the planning and iterative development of the project. The project has furthermore been followed by participants from VIAs research and development unit with a particular focus on continuing development of teacher education pedagogy in the field of relational competencies and in a more generic sense focusing on possibilities and challenges in cooperation between the college, schools, research and external organizations.

Two classes of student teachers specialized in respectively Danish and Mathematics and enrolled in teacher education in 2012 have been part of the project. The full classes and their professors from Danish, Mathematics and Pedagogical subjects participated in the first 3 years of the project. Participation at the 4th year was voluntary. So around 50 student teachers and 14 VIA professors were part of the project from the initiation. Participation at the 4th year will be elaborated below (who and how many).

Furthermore, pedagogical staff, teachers and school leaders, from schools in the Aarhus-area and the Randers-area have participated in planning and iterative development of the project. All in all, 7 schools and 16 teachers have participated, some of them however only in part of the project activities.

Two researchers from Danish School of Education (DPU), Aarhus University have followed, documented and researched the project activities, with a particular focus on the student teachers’ development of relational competencies. They have continuingly disseminated results both internally and externally, highlighting enactments, reflections and changes.

1.3 The approach to working with Relational Competence

The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children has in several years been working with an approach to relational competence developed through dialogue and personal development, and with a pedagogical/psychological foundation. Among other things the society has been in charge of both national and international courses.

Working actively with awareness, presence and empathy have been central elements in the approach taken in the RC-project. The rhythm with course days and seminars with concrete exercises is mentioned above. The rationale for working with these concrete exercises have been that training relational competencies and strengthening awareness and presence of mind among VIA professors and student teachers themselves have been seen as a precondition for them being able to promote these competencies among students.
So, it has been quite central in the project that the participants by working with these concrete exercises grew to be confident in relation to their own reactions and role in relations (Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016).

Helle Jensen, psychologist from The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children emphasizes in an interview the development of the (students) teachers’ and the professors’ personal-professional competencies as a central aim: “As a fundamental basis a relation has three parties. In a school context this is the teacher, the child and the interpersonal contact, and it is the teacher holding the responsibility for the quality of the relation, this cannot be the child’s responsibility [...]. When you are inquiring into a relation [...] also when problems have occurred [...] what can the teacher do about it [...] insight into you own reactions are crucial [...] for example how do I react when under pressure.”.

She argues that this has been the background for focusing on concrete inner and outer exercises: “From the outset we worked with contact to our body, our breathing and the contact to each other”. As it will be elaborated in the findings below many participants have reported positively about this exact approach, but there have also been critical voices. Helle Jensen emphasized also in the interview that this has not been without challenges in particular in the beginning of the project period.

In relation to a more specific definition of what relational competence is Juul and Jensen (2002, p. 128) refer to: “the ability to “see” the individual child on its own terms and to attune own behavior accordingly without giving up responsibility for the quality of the relation, as well as the ability to be authentic in the contact with the child”. Nordenbo et al. (2008) emphasize in an international review of research in teacher competencies that: “the teacher must possess the competence to enter into a social relation in respect for the individual pupil”.

They identify relational competence as one of the three main teacher competencies crucial for student learning and highlight that: “The good relations between teacher and pupil are based on the teacher showing respect, tolerance, empathy and interest towards the pupil. The teacher’s view of pupils is that they all have the potential to learn.” (Nordenbo et al., 2008, p. 71). Both definitions include some focus on awareness, presence and empathy.

Based on the experiences and research in the RC-project Else Skibsted and Mette Vedsgaard Christensen (in Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016) present a more detailed conceptualization of relational competence. They emphasize that relations basically cannot be studied out of a concrete context, and point to four elements as central in relational work:

1) ‘Appreciation’ and respect for the other person’s world of experience
2) ‘Change of perspective’, to be able to view the world from the other party’s perspective
3) ‘Empathy’, to identify with, recognize and understand others’ feelings
4) ‘Attention and presence of mind’, to be present both in relation to the person you are with and in relation to yourself.

These four elements placed in a model with ‘context’ in the center of the model has also been presented in an internationally published paper (Jensen, Skibsted & Christensen, 2015, p. 208).

2 Design of the evaluation and methodology

2.1 How and why?

The evaluation was as mentioned initiated spring 2016, towards the end of the project period. In connection with initiating the evaluation a range of internal and external documents and artefacts from the project were used to create an overview and to inform the design of the evaluation (e.g. Herskind, Laursen, & Nielsen, 2014; Jensen, 2015; Jensen et al, 2015; Matthiesen & Skibsted, 2016). The RC-project is as mirrored in the contextualization above characterized by a relatively complex organization, and by the demand for cooperation between a range of stakeholders.

‘Co-creation’ (Agger & Tortzen, 2015; Scharmer, 2009; Ulrich, 2016) has not been an explicit focus in the research in the project focus, but in the description of the project ‘participant orientation’ and ‘mutual beneficence for both practitioners and researchers’ are issues repeatedly mentioned. This perspective is
also explicit in various internal and external presentations from the project, e.g. Jensen (2016), with the title: “The value of common profession-related research, development and innovation . . .”, and in various publications from the project:

“So, focusing on co-creation as one of the perspectives in the evaluation must be seen as well-founded in the aims and intentions formulated by the project partners.

A key-point in emphasizing this particular focus in the design of the evaluation is furthermore, that many new insights and ways of thinking may have arisen exactly in the interplay among stakeholders in this longitudinal 4-years project. This way of thinking as a project-evaluator is inspired by an evaluation approach focusing on “innovative evaluations creating influence and application” (Dinesen & Kølsen, 2010).

It will in longitudinal cooperative and complex projects like the RC-project often be appropriate that “the evaluation is an integrated part of the evaluated actions” (Dinesen & Kølsen, 2010). This has not been possible due to the evaluation being initiated rather late, and therefore the evaluator has mainly been able to approach the project in retrospective. But this thinking about evaluating has anyway been considered by including the comprehensive materials describing and summing up on the processes, outcomes and insights developed along the project as supplemental empirical data in the evaluation, albeit it is not written with the purpose of evaluation.

The overall focus in the evaluation has in popular terms been the pluralist approach from `realistic evaluation`: “What is it that works for whom and in what conditions?” (Pawson & Tiley, 1997). So, the aim has been to understand and condensate the perceived outcomes from various stakeholders, and their perspectives on the project and experiences from interactions and cooperation. It has not been an aim to evaluate if and to what degree these stakeholders might have developed relational competence. The research from Aarhus University focusing in particular on the student teachers’ development of relation competence by participating in the project along the project period will however be referred to (Herskind et al., 2014; Nielsen & Laursen in Skibsted and Matthiesen, 2016).

The intention has been to acknowledge point of views from the various stakeholders, and for example have all participants been invited as respondents in a survey. As it has already been explained a part of the project has been the concrete teaching of two classes of student teachers primarily carried out by the The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children. This teaching has continuously been formatively evaluated and the aim of the present evaluation has not been to evaluate teaching per se, where some are the teachers and other are students. All participants have been seen as stakeholders cooperating in a co-creation project.

The 1. step in the evaluation consisted of collecting and thoroughly examining all the various documents, research papers, artefacts, teaching materials etc. from the project, to condensate key-points seen from an evaluation perspective, and to identify aspects for further empirical inquiries in step 2. These first analyses revealed that most of the research from VIA and from Aarhus University was based on rich qualitative data. This kind of data was well-founded and aligned to the respective research questions, but from an evaluation perspective there seemed to lack more quantitative empirical material involving all the diverse participants and stakeholders. With this rationale, it was decided to include a survey in step 2. This was supplemented with some initial interviews (more under methods below).

1 In the Danish report both the English term “co-creation” and the Danish term “samskabelse” is used. The reason for this will be elaborated in the last section of the report. Shortly stated is “co-creation” used in English in central project documents with a specific reference (Scharmer, 2009). Co-creation is neither in Danish nor in English a well-defined conceptualization, and co-creation is in the Scharmer reference used a little different from how “samskabelse” is often used in a Danish context. It is however not considered meaningful to keep the “co-creation/samskabelse” notion here as it is in the Danish report.
Step 3 in the evaluation consisted of a follow-up interview with a focus-groups with representatives from various groups of stakeholders to discuss the first condensations of findings from the survey. The aim was to deepen the understanding and raise further perspectives from the findings – and another methodological aim was to verify the condensations through member-checking (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

2.1.1 Time schedule

25. April – 18. May  
Step 1: Analyses of existing materials  
Design and piloting the questionnaire, including sparring with the project-group.  
A short presentation of the evaluation design at a seminar May 2nd 2016, where all groups of stakeholders were present, e.g. to secure a high answering %.

Step 2: Questionnaire was distributed by e-mail  
A reminder was sent by email halfway in the answering period and once again two weeks before deadline for answers.

1. July – 1. September  
Data-analysis. Condensation, coding and categorizing the open-ended reflections.  
Frequency and cross tabulations.

1. September  
Step 3: Focus-group interview with a group of representatives for the stakeholders.  
First version of findings was presented and discussed.

22 September  
Deadline for the report. Presentation with PowerPoint-slides in both Danish and English at a larger conference about relational competence, with international participation, at VIA University College, September 22nd, 2016.

2.2 Empirical data and data-analysis

The questionnaire was designed with both closed and Likert-scaled categories, e.g. the level of perceived outcomes in some specific areas and questions for focused open-ended reflections. The answers in the closed categories were analysed by frequency and cross-tabulations. The open-reflections were analysed by data-based content analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). Categories were developed in an iterative process and all reflections were finally coded (with an inter-coder). The presentation of results below includes both the quantified open reflections, cross tabulated also with the background and closed categories, and some quotes to exemplify and illustrate the character of the open reflections.

A central background category was stakeholder-group. Some of these were sub-divided according to level of involvement in the project. For example, there is a sub-group of the student teachers who decided to make their final bachelor project in the frames of the project and this group could be hypothesised to have a deeper involvement in the project. The involvement of participants from teacher education and from schools have likewise been differentiated. Sub-dividing those two groups did however not turn out to be meaningful due to the lower number of informants.

Interviews with student teachers has been as individual interviews using the same interview-guide (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). These interviews have been carried out by associate professor from VIA Ove Nielsen. All the other interviews have been carried out by the evaluator likewise following an interview-guide. Both as single interviews and groups interview, e.g. the final “verifying” interview with a group of stakeholders. All interviews have been transcribed verbatim and quotes are used in the findings below.

2.2.1 Answering percent, no-answer analysis etc.

The questionnaire was distributed to 89 participants, i.e. all the participants from the four years which could be identified. Of these 63 respondents finished the full questionnaire, giving an answering percent at 70%. The distributions of answers ended out with 30 student teachers, 13 teachers, 8 professors from VIA working with research and development, 6 professors from VIA teaching, 3 school leaders, 2 participants from The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children and 1 from Aarhus University. This distribution equals to a fair degree the distribution in the common groups of participants.
Answers from student teachers are likewise equally distributed on respectively those specialized in Danish and those specialized in Mathematics. Student teachers who volunteered to continue in the project in the 4th and last year are however slightly over-represented: 69% of the answers were from student teachers participating in the project at the 4th year, and 31% from student teachers not continuing after the 3rd year. The distribution in the full groups of participants is that 51% participated at the 4th year, and 49% did not. Likewise, are student teachers choosing to make their final bachelor project in the frames of the RC-project slightly over represented among the respondents (see more about these sub-groups of student teachers below). This can give some (minor) biases, as there is some difference in the answers for these sub-groups of student teachers.

The answers from teachers and school leaders are all from those school most involved in the project. It was not possible to get answers form schools only involved for a shorter period of time. One school leader emailed that he would prefer not to answer as his school was part of the project only shortly, and he had no clear picture of the project. And some of the teachers were not working at the respective schools anymore.

2.3 Participating student teachers

The first analyses made in the evaluation dealt with the largest stakeholder group: the student teachers. As stated this is the stakeholder group where it turned out to be most meaningful to subdivide the group. When starting the project, it was decided that two classes of new student teachers would be involved respectively a class with Danish (DA) as the first specialisation and a class with Mathematics (MATH). The student teachers were, when starting at the University College August 2012 presented to the project and the obligatory participation. In one of the final meetings in the project, with all stakeholder groups present May 2nd, 2016 this was in retrospective a little humoristic referred to like this by a leader from teacher education: “Welcome to you as new student teachers and welcome as participants in a development project[,] you have been given a present that you were not aware that you wished for”. She at the same occasion emphasized, that many of the student teachers at this point was somewhat unsecure: “What does it actually mean this relational competence?”.

One of the student teachers, now nearly finished at teacher at teacher education at the meeting May 2nd, 2016 supplemented: “... you are chosen [...] how to handle conflicts, create professional relations with school students [...] first you were a little disappointed [...] why isn't this a part of all teacher education already [...] additionally a little surprised and nervous [...] what are we now thrown into [...] who am I going to dance with the next time”. This student teacher at the meeting summed up with the words: “now I am able to see the value [...] and the fellow student teachers from this year-group do envy us”.

So, over the first 3 years it was the full two classes of student teachers who as an obligatory part of the education participated in the RC-project. On the fourth and last year of their teacher education it was presented as a voluntary offer to continue. The student teachers now had to sign up for the project activities themselves and this was an extracurricular activity. Those who signed up was in their school placement period on this 4th year offered extra supervision focused on relational competence, and beside this there were some seminar days with a continual focus on their personal-professional development. Furthermore, some of these student teachers did choose to have a particular focus on relational competence in their final BA-Ed project. Here they were also offered supervision targeting this particular focus.

In the DA-class 24 student teachers started, 18 females and 6 men. In the MATH-class 25 student teachers started, 12 were females and 13 men. All in all, 51% of these student teachers signed up to continue at the 4th year, meaning they decided to have this as an extra-curricular activity beside the other study-activities on the last year of their education. Divided between the two classes this cover 16 student teachers, 67%, from the DA-class, and 9 student teachers, 36%, from the MATH-class. So, the DA-class is over-represented. Of these student teachers 19 additionally chose to focus on relational competence in their BA Ed-project, 11 from the original DA-class and 8 from the original MATH-class. Summing up the over-representation from the original DA-class was nearly” equalised”, as nearly all the student teachers from the original MATH-class signing up for the 4th year chose this focus in their BA Ed-project.
Summing up, 39% of the student teachers participating from the start of the project, 13 females and 6 men, chose to inquire into various aspects of relational competence as a main perspective in their BA Ed-project. If comparing with the original gender-distribution across the two classes this distribution are nearly the same. So, no obvious gender-skewness.

In relation to the number (39%) of students continuing to do so – is this a high or a low degree? It is difficult to find relevant projects for comparison. However, giving the local context where student teachers in general have the possibility for focusing on quite a broad number of both subject specific and general pedagogical aspects in their BA Ed, I would interpret this as a rather large percentage of student teachers apparently being interested in pursuing aspects of relational competence further. Furthermore, it is remarkably that relational competence in the student teachers’ projects have been connected to and put into perspective with rather broad examples of for example pedagogical perspectives related to teaching English, Danish, Physics/Chemistry, Music, Sports, Material design, Social Science and students with special needs. This is an important conclusion, as the skewness in student teachers from respectively MATH and DA volunteering to participate at the 4th year might lead to the conclusion that relational competence is perceived as more relevant as a perspective in some subjects in teacher education than others. The data from the RC-project does not contribute with a clear reason for why more students from the DA than the MATH class did chose to continue on the 4th year. The reason might simply be that there over the 3 years in the project were several shifts in professors in the MATH class while the DA class were taught by some of the same professors also themselves participating actively in the project. The importance of continuity and “sticking to the issues at a daily basis” in the DA class was referred to by the stakeholders in the project.

So, the broad range of (subject-specific) pedagogical perspectives being focused on by the student teachers in their BA Ed-projects do disconfirm that relational competence is an issue for some subjects more than others.

There is as it is argued above neither signs pointing to gender being important. When analysing the answers from the questionnaire some differences however appeared in the answers about perceived outcomes from the student teachers participating the first 3 years, those who chose to continue at the 4th year, and those who also chose to focus on relational competence in their BA Ed (more below). So, it seems that those differences in level of participation and involvement in the project was determent more than e.g. subject specialization or gender. Therefore, it is representations and cross tabulations with this sub-division which is discussed below in the results and not cross tabulations e.g. divided by gender. Behind this sub-division are however also some implicit differences between the DA and MATH classes, which will be addressed in the student teachers’ reflections on the project.

And once again it must be emphasized that the evaluation, referring to the aim of the RC-project, have had an equal interest in the other stakeholder-groups, like teachers and school leaders. It has just been necessary to understand the findings to use some words to explain these differences in the group of student teachers. The other stakeholder groups do either consist too few persons and/or their answer did have too little variation for a subdivision to be meaningful.

### Results

The description of findings from the evaluation is starting from the survey-results, but the other parts of the empirical material like interviews are repeatedly used to elaborate on central points. The sections will all include some summing up on points and perspectives. These conclusions will in section 4 be condensed and used in some forward pointing perspectives. Results will be illustrated using frequency and cross tabulations from both the closed categories and the categorized and coded open reflections, supplemented with quotes from the open reflections, interviews and observations.

In the questionnaire, the respondents were first asked to reflect upon their overall perceived outcomes from being a part of the project, and also what they would emphasize as not so profitable – the challenges they have experienced in the project. The next questions funnelled into elements of the perceived personal-professional outcomes and their experiences of outcomes connected to specifically defined areas (closed categories). The intention with this suite of questions was to gain an insight into and at the same
time acknowledge the various participant perspectives formulated by the respondents before the more specific questions. The presentations of results do, however, start from the closed category where they were asked to grade the perceived professional outcomes before presenting the participants first reflections in section 3.3. This is followed by the rating of some given areas of competencies.

The last section 3.5 - before perspectives looking forward – is about the particular focus on cooperation and co-creation.

### 3.1 Perceived professional outcomes

In figure 1 the answers summed from all groups of stakeholders rating their personal professional outcomes on a 5-punkt Likert-scale are represented. It is illustrated that 70% of the respondents did answer “high” or “very high”. 22% marked “medium”, and respectively 6% and 2% answered "low" or "very low".

![Figure 1. Question in survey: “How do you rate you overall professional outcomes from participating in the project”. Answers summed from all groups of stakeholders.](image)

Over all, the results shown in figure 1 illustrates a rather positive evaluation of the personal professional outcomes.

Here follow some quotes to further illustrate the character of these outcomes. Below this will also be presented in a categorized, coded and quantified format.

“I have in four years trained, exercised, reflected upon how I see myself as a teaching professional. Therefore, I have already now a clear picture of myself in a professional role both in contacts with students and their parents, but also in cooperation with colleagues” (Student Teacher).

“A strengthened cohesion and community in my class. Furthermore, has my approach to dialogue and relations with others been remarkably changed along participating in this project. I have much more surplus in mental resources in my dialogues with others” (Teacher).

“The project has been a unique opportunity for sustained reflections on a crucial field in teacher education” (participant in VIAs Research & Development).

“It is hard to imagine how teacher education would have been without the relational competence project, but I have the experience of having a sustained awareness and more knowledge than the co-students not in the project” (Student Teacher).
“The project has given me a lot of knowledge about how it is to work on and collaborate with a large educational institution, and knowledge about how a group of young and novice student teachers best can be met and taught” (participant from The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children).

“The tools I have with me further on have made me a better teacher, who have the ability to embrace and include more young people, because I have the tools to “be it in an act” in the classroom. And I have grown to be much better at creating and sustaining relation between med and other and in between the school students” (Student Teacher).

“Insight into student teachers’ work with relational competence with an approach where the student teacher need to have his/her own practice related to “the pentagram”2. The different interests meet about the same project” (School Leader).

To further evaluate how the answers in figure 1 are spread on the various groups of stakeholders the representation in figure 2 show the answers cross-tabulated with the Likert-scaled answers from “very low” to “very high”. As it appears the relatively few respondents who have marked a low or very low level of outcomes are student teachers or VIA professors not in research. School leaders and VIA professors in research are like the other respondents spread on the other three answering possibilities. All teachers, participants from Life wisdom in children and from Aarhus University did answer “high” or “very high”.

![Figure 2](image-url)  "How do you rate your overall professional outcomes from participating in the project". Cross-tabulation of Likert-scaled answers and stakeholder groups. Shown In % of all answers.

The systematic analysis of the respondents’ open reflections connected to their answers follows in section 4.2, but first a little more about the sub-groups of student teachers.

### 3.1.1 Personal professional outcomes crossed with student teachers’ participation at 4th year of the project

The answers from student teachers are in figure 3 divided on respectively the student teachers who chose to continue at the 4th year of the project and those that did not.

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2 A model used in project training, see (Jensen et al., 2016, p. 28)
Figure 3. “How do you rate you overall professional outcomes from participating in the project?” The student teachers participating at the 4th year to the right, and those that did not to the left. Shown in % of the summed answers for each of the two groups.

As illustrated in figure 3 those student teachers, who participated also at the 4th year, in average did rate their personal professional outcomes higher than those that only participated the first three years. The interpretation can either be that the participation at the 4th year had some impact at the overall experience of personal professional outcomes, or that those students, who chose to continue participation as an extracurricular activity at the 4th year, were students that already had the highest level of perceived outcomes from the first three years.

As it will be elaborated below, among other things based on interviews with some student teachers, both things actually seem to be the case. There appears to have been a progressive development in the student teachers’ participation patterns over the years in the project, including how they worked with relational competence and took part as project partners. Such a development has also been emphasized in the research in the project (e.g. Nielsen & Laursen in Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016).

All the student teachers answering a very high degree of personal professional outcomes are student teachers participating at the 4th year (figure 3). But is needs to be noticed that there also among those participating at the 4th year are a few, 6 %, marking a low degree of outcomes (figure 3). Opposite there are among the students not participating at the 4th year “only” 20% marking a very low degree of personal professional outcomes, 60% did report a medium degree of outcomes and 20% a high degree of perceived outcomes (figure 3).

The rating of perceived personal professional outcomes has also been cross-tabulated with a division of the student teachers on those that made their final BA Ed-project connected to the RC-project and those that did not. This cross-tabulation is illustrated in the representation in figure 4.

Here the extended perceived outcomes among those being most involved in the project are even more clear, and/or that those students experiencing the RC-project as most meaningful did chose to pursue those theoretical and practical conceptualisations further in their inquiries for the bachelor.
Among those student teachers making the BA Ed project framed by the project all answers were in the tree most positive categories. The main part did answer to a high degree or a very high degree. These answers equal 56% of all the student teachers answering the questionnaire (figure 4), or actually 88% of the answers from the student teachers making their BA Ed in the project.

Opposite to this the main part of the answers from the rest of the student teachers are in the category “medium”. This equal 16% of all the answers (figure 4), or 44% of answers from this “green” group in figure 4. These answers are however divided on all five Likert-scale categories.

Comparing figure 4 and figure 3 it must however be noted, that those 4% from the “green” group, not making their bachelor in the project, but still marking a very high degree of outcomes have to be student teachers participating at the 4th year. The 19 student teachers making the BA Ed in the project is a subgroup of those continuing at the 4th year, and it is illustrated in figure 3 that none of those student teachers only participating 3 years did mark a very high degree of outcomes.

Reasons, reflections and argumentations from the student teachers answering a low or very low degree of outcomes are included in the next section. Here first some perspectives based on interview with 3 of the student teachers making their BA Ed in the frames of the project and including a main focus on relational competencies. So, these informants are sampled from the groups of student teachers being most involved in the project. Across the interview some overall themes were identified:

The first theme is “Internalisation”. There are several indications that the autonomous continuous work with relational competence in an investigation/a project of their own (the BA Ed-project) had a positive effect on the student teachers’ learning – and not at least an impact on their feeling of competence, and agency (Bandura 1997) in relation to taking own initiatives, where the insights gained in the RC-project were applied in new contexts. One of the student teachers reflects like this on relational competence as a theme: “My reason for having a focus on relational competence in my BA Ed-project is that I think it has been incredible interesting this relational competence project …”. He continues reflecting on his particular focus merging conceptualisations about relational competence with subject specific pedagogy focusing on students’ exploratory work in science: “.. I spotted [discovered] that there was a link [...] school students can have problems acting in an open learning space [...] they have to think themselves [...] relational competencies [...] be aware and meet students where they are [...] figure out how I can best as a teacher scaffold their open inquiries”.

Figure 4. “How do you rate your overall professional outcomes from participating in the project?” The answers are divided on respectively those 19 student teachers that made their BA Ed inquiries in the frames of the RC-project (blue), and the rest of the participating student teachers (green). Shown in % of all answers from student teachers.
Another student teacher emphasizes: "...yes, I am thinking in relations all the time [...] I used some exercises from the RC-project to create a cooperative space in class which rendered it possible to work with the subject [Danish]."

The third student teacher elaborates on how he through participation in the RC-project: "...I have eye for both the content and how difficult it can be for some of the school students...".

In the verifying interview with stakeholders from the RC-project it was also discussed, how the broad range of subject pedagogies and perspectives in the student teachers’ BA Ed projects has highlighted relational competence as "...a generic perspective [...] useful in several subject...". Furthermore, it was emphasized that "...internalisation and personal professional anchoring..." had been a specific and explicit aim for the work with student teacher at the 4th year.

A second theme is that it appears to have been quite important for the student teachers that various groups of stakeholders participated in the project: "It has been really important that both researchers, professors and teacher have participated in the RC-project [...] it caught my interest because in participation with them it appeared to me how important and useful these approaches were..."

Another kind of relatedness with and access to the teachers in mentioned by all three informants. One of them said: "I am getting wiser by hearing the teacher reflect on their practice [...] showing examples on how they act with the school students [...] good to see how they work with the exercises as part of the teaching, and after these observations have the time for shared reflections on how this is useful with the students in a class". She however mentioned a "but": "...it would have been good if I had my school practice placements at a school where the teachers also participated in the RC-project [...] no need for all this explaining.".

This challenge, that some of the student teachers had school practice placements at schools not being a part of the project is further elaborated on below based on respondents’ reflections in the questionnaire. It was also raised as an issue in the verifying interview elaborating on that it had actually been tried to arrange it so schools where the participating student teachers had their school placement periods were invited into the project, but for structural reasons teacher education did not fully succeed with this. The importance of cooperation across stakeholder groups was also discussed in the verifying interview: "...the fact that the student teachers experience this as a project we are in together [...] and that this is recognized by the teachers".

The third theme is the cooperative participation and relatedness in the class of student teachers. This was experienced as a very positive thing, and the informants referred to being sorry that some of the students stopped after 3 years: "I have been annoyed that so many did not continue [...] those that are back must be the ones that can really see the meaning". Another student teacher said: "...quite a lot from the MATH class in the beginning felt challenged by the exercises...". This is also a perspective elaborated on below.

Internalisation and anchoring over time, through the student teachers’ persistent effort is confirmed by the research from Aarhus University. This research has focused on the student teachers’ development of relational competence using repeated qualitative interviews and participatory observations (Herskind, Laursen, & Nielsen, 2014; Nielsen & Laursen, in Matthiesen and Skibsted, 2016).

It is highlighted that the student teachers in the beginning of the project period were unsecure in particular in relation to those of the exercises, which they could not directly see how to transfer to their teaching during school placements periods: "Many student teachers were kind of sceptical in the beginning, but a part of them realized along the way how exercises with awareness and presence of mind was useful, in the beginning in classroom management [...] but along the project period many of the participants developed a fundamental consciousness related to persistent and intended work on developing relations with students".

Based on the research it is concluded that the student teachers, through their participation in the project, did develop competencies related to:" seeing relations as crucial, and being aware of own relations having the ability to react on the spot, keeping calm in difficult situations and take a reflective and analytical stance towards the teacher role [...] not 100% with a certain version of a teacher role [...] cracks in the professional appearance".
3.2 Reflections on personal professional outcomes

The participants first spontaneous perspectives and reflections on outcomes and challenges in the beginning of the questionnaire follow in section 4.3, but first a summing up on the respondents’ elaborations on and reasoning about their answers at the Likert-scale about personal professional outcomes. The categorized and coded answers are represented in figure 5.

![Figure 5](image)

**Figure 5.** The open reflections on perceived professional outcomes are coded in four categories plus ‘other things’. ‘Prof.pers.’ refers to the experience of development as a professional over time, e.g. formulated as “finding you own teacher person”, ‘Not’ refer to an experience of no or only a small level of professional outcomes, ‘Knowledge’ is about what knowledge is and new knowledge about how crucial relations are, and ‘Exercises’ are reflections about how the respondents found the concrete exercises useful in practice.

Here follows some examples (quotes) coded in the various categories:

**Prof.pers.:** “During the four years I have trained, exercised, reflected how to see myself as a professional person. Because of that I have already now a clear vision of how I want to be as a teacher, both in interaction with students and parents, but also in interaction with future colleagues” (Student Teacher)

“We have been through a long development process together – both as individual professionals and in a group context” (Teacher)

**Not:** “I do not feel I rest more in myself than before. I do not think I am better in creating and nursing relations because of this project. I did not create any relations through the project. I feel I approached it with an open mind and did what we were asked to do, but it did not grow to be natural and because of this I do not think I will use it” (Student Teacher)

**Knowledge:** “In relation to leaving your own perspective for a while I think I have grown to have a more nuanced view on what knowledge is” (Teacher)

“Collegial community with colleagues over time and with student teachers - sharing knowledge and experiences” (Teacher)

“The project has provided a unique opportunity to sustain reflections and knowledge about an important field in teacher education (VIA participant in research)

**Exercises:** “I have gained methods and possibilities to strengthen my own and my students’ relational competencies, have several times used both collaborative and individual exercises in a teaching situation” (Student Teacher)
Other things: “The peace and accept and non-judgmental curiosity trained in the project has been “like striking gold” in a working life with aggressively high speed” (VIA participant in research)

“I have as a school leader been in distance of the work with children, and I do not feel I succeeded with my vision [dissemination in the organization]” (School-leader)

3.2.1 The category ‘Not’
In the category ‘Not’ is shown an example of a reflection from a student teacher, who did not experience any professional outcomes. This is explained by not feeling the approach as natural. This particular student teacher is from the MATH-class, and he is obviously one of those that did not continue at the 4th year. Another student teacher from the DA-class wrote: “I chose to stop in the project after three years precisely because I did not experience so much outcomes. The positive outcomes could also have been achieved at many other ways. I did not experience to develop relational competence through those exercises although I tried to use them in school practice during placements. My reflection will be that for those that feel insecure in relations there are many good tools, but for those that do feel safe by going into new relations this could give a stiffness in how that works. I am one of the last mentioned and my experience has been that my own tools have been the best”.

One of those quotes raises the issue that ‘something’ is not felt as natural, apparently, some particular exercises used in the project. The other quote refers to some particular ‘tools’, where the respondents have experienced to have other ‘tools’ that are better. If you also include the quote from a student teacher in section 4.1 here is oppositely referred very positively to certain ‘tools’: “The tools I got by participating in the project has made me a better teacher …”.

So, there are looking across the data some indications that some of the concrete exercises, tools and approaches which are specifically emphasized very positively by some student teachers are the same referred to negatively by other student teachers. There seems to be something here which is a source of disagreement. This is elaborated on below.

3.2.2 Personal professional outcomes - teachers and school leaders
As illustrated above in figure 2 did all teacher−respondents answer a high or very high level of personal professional outcomes. Quotes from teachers under the theme “Knowledge” illustrate that this is among other things connected to a new or developed, nuanced, and exploratory understanding of what “knowledge” is. This understanding and approach did apparently develop over time by sharing in the collegial community in and across stakeholder groups.

As it will be further elaborated below the perceived outcomes from the project are experienced by the teachers in their daily meetings with colleagues and with the students in the classroom. At a seminar at VIA University College May 2nd, 2017 one of the teacher described her experiences like this: “I have grown to be more resilient [...] I do not need so much room in a dialogue it is fine just to listen [...] with presence and empathy I am able to give room to others, that they feel free to tell about stuff [...] this I am proud about”. In this quote, it is indicated that she has developed what you with concepts from Bandura (1997) can call mastery enactments experiences and self-efficacy (more under Perspectives).

The school leader quoted under the theme “Other things” problematize however is the high level of perceived outcomes from the participating teachers did spread also to their colleagues at the school – this had been his original vision. This school leader elaborated in another open reflection in the questionnaire: “...the intention [...] spreading this to the whole school/organization. The work pressure among the school staff related to the recent school reform and curricular changes has in many ways blocked. It has been a bad timing for focusing on relational competence at the whole school “.

At another seminar spring 2017, at The Danish Society for the Promotion of Life Wisdom in Children in Tebstrup this issue about spreading from the participating teachers to the whole school was also discussed. A school leader referred to that some from school staff was quite sceptical: “We have [in the project coordination] discussed that we also had to target this who we sceptical, therefore we at the school moved from talking about mindfulness to relational competence to leadership of and in change”.

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A school leader said about an arrangement at the school for the full school staff: "...I asked for a slightly modified program, but I regret that we did not go all in...".

So, there seems to have been some sceptical voices in particular in relation to an approach referring to mindfulness (this perspective if further elaborated in in the next section). But, oppositely, it seems to have been core approaches exactly in this field that has been experienced to be in particular rewarding by other teachers. So, the school leader is in his reflections highlighting that it might have been better to ignore (the expected) opposition and go all-in also with exercises related to mindfulness in the arrangement with all the school staff.

### 3.3 More or less beneficial elements

As mentioned the respondents were in the first (open) item in the questionnaire asked about their spontaneous reflections on what in the project has been most beneficial and what they had experienced as less beneficial and/or as challenging. Naturally here are some overlapping with the respondents’ elaborations about why they answered as they did on the Likert-scale – reported above - but there are some nuances and details adding further understanding.

#### 3.3.1 Experiences of the most useful elements

These open answers have also been categorized and coded. Quantifications of the six categories describing the most useful elements as experienced by the participants are shown in figure 6. The most frequent category is awareness of how important relations are. Next are references to own focus on grounding and being present in the teaching situation, and perceived outcomes in relation to cooperation across stakeholder-groups. The other categories include how professional development and a reflective stance can be facilitated (among others, i.e. student teachers), outcomes from the concrete exercises, and development over time finding “your own teacher role”.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 6.** What will you point to as being, over all, most beneficial, from your participation in the project? The main argument in the open reflections are coded in 6 categories plus “other things”.

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Here follow quotes coded in the various categories:

EXERCISES: *I am in particular fond of the concrete exercises [...] I can go directly out as a teacher and work with relations. Especially the mindfulness-exercises are really useful to create peace and to see the big picture in class ...* (Student teacher).

COOPERATION: *“The character of the project as co-creation/ with groups of various stakeholders being interested in developing knowledge about and practice focusing on relational competence in teacher education and schools”* (VIA professor participating in research).

IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONS: *“First of all it has for me been tremendously giving to have a focus on the fundamental and crucial factors giving all children and youngsters the best possibilities for learning in school. Gaining new knowledge about how important relations are, and how the conscious work with empathy and presence affects the relational work. My personal experience is that I have been supported in having a sustained focus on these fundamental and crucial elements to succeed in the everyday work with student learning. I am both proud about this and a little humble about that we, in a time-period with a narrow focus on intended learning outcomes and data, continuously also stay form to support basal and vital qualities”* (School leader).

“Through the project, I have gained an understanding of what it means to possess relational competencies, and what concrete criteria you can look at. The conceptualization “relational competence” appears in many contexts in more or less concrete versions. The project has given me tools and insight to talk about this competence as a concrete professional competence and not only a week overall thing which can be important in a school and teaching context” (Student teacher).

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: *“I have developed new ideas for how to work with relational competence with student teachers. And I have gained new insight in relation to that teacher and educators do not need to change everything to solve this challenge. I have also learned a lot by being reminded of the kind of reality the teachers are working in”* (VIA professor, not in research).

TEACHER ROLE: *“To find the teacher role I want to have. I do not want to be the teacher yelling and getting arranged due to conflicts in class, I have received some tools to keep calm and believe in what I do. Furthermore, the relational-exercises have been personally rewarding and I do not doubt that I am going to use these in my future work as a teacher”* (Student teacher).

PERSONAL: *“A new vision about relations between people – a vision providing me with ways of acting – both for me personally and in relation to meeting students, parents, colleagues, friends. When I am calm, consciousness and present in the situation I have the overview in the relation and the situation. Therefore, I am better both in communicating and in making choices at the spot.”* (Teacher).

One of the categories is about the value of some concrete exercises. A category also appearing when analysing reflections about the personal professional outcomes above. The “main argument” is added because many of the respondents also emphasize the concrete exercises in reflections coded in another category, see for example quotes under “TEACHER ROLE” and “PERSONAL” above.

So, 10% of the answers are coded “EXERCISES”, but more than 50% of the respondents mentioned the concrete exercises somewhere in their reflections.

This further add to the already mentioned finding that a main part of the respondents referred to the concrete exercises, used in the project, as one of the most important things supporting them in their personal professional development or, in some/a few instances, participants also referred explicitly and “passionately” to these exercises, but in a more negative way (see more below).
Figure 7. “What will you point to as being, over all, most beneficial, from your participation in the project?” This representation is designed so the answers in each category (as 100%) is divided on the stakeholder groups. So, the representation is not dimensioned in relation to comparing the amount/percentage coded in each category. This is shown in figure 6.

In figure 7 the categories are cross-analysed with the various stakeholder-groups. The overall picture shows the dispersion on stakeholder-groups, meaning that the various stakeholder groups did refer to some of the same issues. For example, did both participants from Life wisdom in children, student teachers and professors from teacher education refer to outcomes in relation to developing competencies in supporting other’s professional development (PD), and there are respondents from all stakeholder groups in particular referring to this as a cooperative project (Coope.).

There are however categories with only student teachers, e.g. finding your teacher role, and a category with only teachers and student teachers with ‘Exercises’ as the main argument. In relation to the latter this was, as mentioned, present as a perspective also in other reflections.

A single quote from a VIA professor participating in research is in figure 7, as an exception coded as both being about personal development and cooperation:

“I would like to highlight two aspects: 1) My own raised awareness of being present in my teaching, consciousness and in the body, and the ability to get strength and calmness from the body, and 2) the cooperation with the teachers from the participating schools, the student teachers and the colleagues. As a professor in teacher education you are often a lonely rider: It has been a great experience to inquiry into a field together. It has been a high degree of added value with the close contact to the very engaged teachers”.

3.3.2 Less rewarding elements
The respondents’ first open reflections about elements form the projects which they have experienced as less rewarding and beneficial have also been categorized and coded.

These results are represented in figure 8.
The open reflections have been divided into 8 categories plus "other things".

Here follows some examples (quotes) coded in some of the various categories. "NO" is self-explaining, as it is reflections stating that they were not able to mentions something that was not beneficial. Here follow quotes from the other categories:

CRITICS FROM OTHERS: “The greatest challenge has been the distrust among colleagues” (Student teacher)

“That it still can be hard to talk with leaders and colleagues […] someone see e.g. the exercises as something that does not belong in school” (Teacher)

DIFFICULT USE: “I am specialized in Physics/chemistry and Craftwork/design. For these partly practical subjects it is harder to use the exercises we have worked with because students do already move rather much around. It can be harder to arrange a gathering of students to make an exercise in Physics/chemistry compared with Mathematics” (Student teacher).

GOALS?: “It took a little time before I realized what kind of project this was, and how I for example could use mindfulness in school. It is important in teacher education all the time to argue about the purpose with what we are doing, so it is not just tacit knowledge from the education” (Student teacher).

MINDFULNESS: “I did personally not gain much from the mindfulness-aspects in the project. I found it hard to use this part directly in school, but I use it anyway as a kind of meta-perspective” (Student teacher).

The focus on mindfulness (“inner exercises”) – too much “looking inside” –to little focus on relations as something between us “looking out”. For the student teachers relations competencies, equal exercises which is a little skew” (VIA professor).

TEACHERS: “Focus was in a period quite much on the student teachers and I wondered about why it was not likewise interesting for example to collect data form the practicing?” (Teacher).

NON-ATTENDANCE: “It has been difficult to keep up the level of attendance both among student teachers and teacher educators, and this has of course made it difficult to “get as far” as it might have been possible […] there has been thing we had to give up because it was disparate people attaneding and like that […] international education […] in Berlin […] 24 people sign up, and they are all attending” (participant from ’Life wisdom in children´)

“.. the general press you are under as a teacher educator sometimes challenged the possibility to attend. But when I was attending it was a very rewarding break. I did however also experience that there was not enough openness in relation to critical voices related to mindfulness-exercises” (VIA Professor).
PEDAGOGY: “To figure out what is important to learn/understand about relational competencies both in relation to how it can be worked with at schools and in teacher education. In relation to teacher education it has been difficult to find a way which is eatable for all student teachers. The work with relational competencies in the project has been rather much about various exercises. It has been a little hard to move on and also work coherently pedagogical with relational competencies” (VIA Professor).

The first quotes are about some partipants’ experiences of outsiders being quite critical towards the project. This perspective was also raised in an interview by a representative from ‘Life wisdom in children, in particular to reflect on the fact that some student teachers returned disillusioned from school practice placements:”...some of them were placed at schools with teacher who [...] was a part of the project [...] others with teachers who just laughed at them.”.

What is called the “mindfulness aspects” in the project is emphasized both as an overall perspective in the reflections coded as so, and as an element in reflections coded in some other categories. See for example the quote above under “GOALS?”, where the main focus is the respondent’s doubt about the purpose of the project, but where mindfulness is also mentioned. The same in one of the quotes in the category “NON-ATTENDANCE”. The term mindfulness has not been used so frequently in the project group, but there has been referred to respectively outer and inner exercises. When the term is used here in the evaluation it is simply because some many respondents used it in their reflections. It is beyond the scope of this evaluation to discuss what mindfulness is and can be as part of the educational world, but it can just shortly be mentioned, e.g. referring to Herskind & Nielsen (2011), that there in educational research and development is a growing interest towards interventions in schools and kindergarten inspired by mindfulness. Those interventions refer to evidence that: “exercises and activities with focus on stress relief, and visualization can be the source of calmness, friendliness and motivation to learn” (Herskind & Nielsen, 2011, p. 85). Referring to this understanding it seems appropriate to define the “inner exercises” as mindfulness, as several of the respondents do. The interesting issue in the frames of this evaluation is not what this kind of exercises is going to be called, but more the clear indications that these exercises do seem to be a source of disagreement. More than 50 % do in some way mention “exercises” when they reflect on the most rewarding elements in the project, but they are also on the agenda when it comes to the challenges mentioned.

In the category “NON-ATTENDANCE” are both some reflections from Life wisdom in children about the challenges regarding some participants not being there in all training. This has been elaborated on in an interview: “something we had to give up because it was a kind of different people being there at training sessions. Reflections form VIA professors about work-pressure making it difficult to participate in all arrangements have also been coded in this category.

![Figure 9. Can you, oppositely, highlight element from the project, which you have experienced as less beneficial - some challenges you have experienced?](image)

This representation is designed so the answers in each category (as 100%) is divided on the stakeholder groups. So, the representation is not dimensioned in relation to comparing the amount/percentage coded in each category. This is shown in figure 8.
In figure 9 are the reflections on the elements experienced to be less beneficial divided on stakeholder-groups. Answers are also here relatively divided on the stakeholder-groups. In all groups there are some participant who could not find anything not beneficial, and the reflections coded in the category “CRITICS FROM OTHERS” are both from teachers, student teachers and VIA professors. Mindfulness is also mentioned by both VIA professors, teachers and student teachers.

In figure 10 below is both the categorized experienced outcomes and the elements experienced to be less beneficial cross tabulated with whether the student teacher did make the BA Ed inquiries in the RC-project or not. From this analysis, it can for example be highlighted that those student teachers’ reflecting about not being able to find anything less rewarding (“NO”) are among those choosing to make their BA Ed in the project. It is also those student teachers most involved in the project who mention others being critical towards the project as an issue. Outcomes related to concrete exercises are on the other hand mentioned a little more frequently by the student teachers not making the BA Ed in the frames of the project.

![Graph](image)

**Figure 10.** The categorized reflections on elements not so beneficial (to the left) and perceived outcomes (to the right) cross tabulated with whether the students made their BA Ed in the project or not. This representation is designed so the answers in each category (as 100%) is divided on BA Ed or not BA Ed. So, the representation is not dimensioned in relation to comparing the amount/percentage coded in each of the categories.

Two VIA professors involved in research have more thoroughly discussed the exercises used in RC-project and the benefits for the student teachers (Vilain & Munkholm, 2016). They among other things mention that the exercises at the course days were used in pedagogical reflections: “the student teachers were pre-occupied with the concrete challenges they met in school practice placements”. They conclude that: “the inner and outer exercises, worked with in the project are what stands back as the most important elements for the student teachers. It is those exercises they want to try out in their school practice placements” (Vilain & Munkholm, 2016). They use them for a kind of “soft classroom management”. “Outer exercises with a clear focus on interactions are easier to transfer from course days to the classroom”.

So, the focused work with framing the relational exercises to an educational context from Life wisdom in children and the VIA professors seems to have been crucial for the student teachers’ outcomes. And the concrete exercises are referred to by the student teachers as being a central element, mainly in positive reflections but also in some negative. This finding is what inspired the quote from the evaluator at the front-page.

### 3.4 Various aspects of relational competence

In a closed category, the respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they have experienced to develop competencies in what can be called sub-elements of relational competence, as it is described and defined in the RC-project. For example, Skibsted & Matthiesen (2016) mention being attentively present and acting with empathy: “Development and training of presence and empathy as part of developing relational competence have been central elements in the project”. Therefore, those two concepts have been included in the questions where results are represented in figure 11.

The first of the two editors in an anthology presenting a range of research from the project (Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016), has been the practical coordinator and project-leader in VIAs work in the RC-project.
She referred at one of the final seminars to relational competencies as a “fluid but also very complex concept”. She added that “relations cannot be studied independently from the context”. And just to be clear I will repeat that what is illustrated in figure 11 is not whether the participants did develop these competencies – that would not be meaningful to represent like this based on the present data and without further description of context. What is represented is how they themselves perceive to have developed these competencies when answering in a more general and overall questionnaire.

![Figure 11](image)

*Figure 11. “To what extent did you by participating in the project develop your competence to….”. The respondents’ ratings in relation to six defined aspects.*

At the first glance the six representations in figure 11 are quite similar. In all representations, more than 50% of the respondents did mark that they “to a high degree” or “very high degree” have experienced to develop these competencies. There are however some minor differences. The two illustrations to the left show that in average a few more have answered in those two categories referring to students you teach than to colleagues. Being attentively present in collegial interactions is however rated relatively high (the top to the right). And attentively presence and empathy, the two representations in the middle, do show a slightly higher rating that the representation at the bottom to the right illustrating competencies in managing conflicts. The differences are too small to make any firm conclusions, but, summing up, the conclusion must be that the participants to a rather high degree have experienced to develop competencies in relation to the areas mentioned in the purpose of the RC-project.

### 3.5 Co-creation

A representative from Life wisdom in children did at one of the final seminar days at VIA May 2nd, 2016, refer back to the beginning of the project: “...back in 2011 I was sitting with school leaders discussing what kind of competencies do school students need in today's society [...] we had to involve teachers if we wanted to focus on what we can do in schools [...] and we needed to include teacher education and also researchers [...] this colourful crowd was dauntlessly initiating a project [...]we knew that if we were going to change anything we had to create it together”.

So, co-creation was a keyword from the start of the project.
In this section first some results about how cooperation has been experienced by the participants. After this some elaboration on the concept “co-creation” and how this concept is used internationally and in the Danish context.

3.5.1 Cooperation in and across stakeholder groups
In the evaluation, the respondents were asked directly about cooperation both in own groups and across stakeholder groups (figure 12).

![Figure 12. The respondents’ rating of the degree to which they had experienced that the project contributed positively to cooperation in own group (top) and across stakeholder groups (below).](image)

It is illustrated that 65% of the respondents did experience that the project “to a very high degree” or “to a high degree” did contribute positively to the cooperation in own groups of stakeholders, meaning for example cooperation among teachers. In relation to cooperation across stakeholder-groups 50% report that the project has contributed positively to this (figure 12). “To a low” plus “to a very low degree” are marked by respectively 6% and 10% at the two questions.

Without having any material to compare it can based on these answers (cautiously) be concluded that the respondents in average to a rather high degree do acknowledge outcomes when it comes to cooperation. This has furthermore been illustrated in some of the spontaneous open reflections above.

But what can more be said about the exact concept “co-creation” than it about cooperation both in and across stakeholder-groups?

3.5.2 Co-creation
The central persons cooperating in initiating the project have several places referred specifically to co-creation as it is defined by Otto Scharmer (e.g. Scharmer, 2009) when reflecting about the RC-project as a co-creation project. An illustration of Scharmer’s so-called “Theory U” is shown in figure 13.

Central in Scharmer’s theories is the approach that development and change, and the reactions towards this, is an integrated part of persons and organisations (Scharmer, 2009). One of the aims is that a person is able to act “in an instant”. Scharmer uses the concept “presencing”, which is based on the two words “sensing” and “presence”. So, here is some of the theoretical background behind the reference to presence and awareness, as it is emphasized in the definitions of relational competence used in the RC-project. The model (figure 13) is showing an arrow formed as a “U” illustrating the change-process and the anchoring, where changes are sustainable: “deep learning”. The left side of the model is illustrating the sensing and analysis, while the right side is the acting part of the model, where co-creation – to create something new together – is central.

The term for Co-creation in Danish (“samskabelse”) has also been used more frequently in the last years, but mostly in contexts where it is about public service: “...the active involvement of citizens based on partnerships and shared responsibility ...”, emphasizing that public institutions develop and produce welfare together with and not for the citizens” (review: Agger and Tortzen, 2005). So, the most widespread way of
using the term co-creation in DK is slightly different than the way Scharmer focuses on the core in change and anchoring processes. Ulrich (2016) supplements Agger & Tortzen’s review with a typology, where a more equal kind of co-creation is described with the premise that the shared inquiry can have outputs not defined in. This understanding mirrors to some degree the way the RK-project has been iteratively developed. Based on the vague definition of the concept in Danish language it was chosen to use the English term in the questionnaire.

How do the respondents answer when asked about to what degree they have experienced to contribute to directions taken along the way in the RC-project and did they themselves see the project as a co-creation project?

The answers summed from all respondents in relation to experiences of contributing to the project directions are illustrated in figure 14.

Figure 13. Co-creation (Scharmer, 2009).

Figure 14. The respondents’ ratings in relation to experiencing to have contributed to the direction taken in the RC-project along the project period.
It is illustrated in figure 14, that 26% reported, that they “to a high degree” or “a very high degree” had contributed to the directions taken in the project. There are 10% marking that they “don’t know”, more than in the other items. 30% did answer “to a low degree” or “to a very low degree”.

In figure 15 these answers have been cross tabulated with the respondents’ ratings of the perceived professional outcomes.

![Experience of contributing to project direction](chart.png)

![Level of perceived professional outcomes](chart.png)

**Figure 15.** Rating of the degree to which the respondents have experienced to contribute to project directions crossed with their experiences of personal professional outcomes.

First of all, it is shown in figure 15, that it appears to have had some effect on the personal professional outcomes if the respondents had an experience of contributing to project direction (or the other way around). Those experiencing to contribute to project direction (red in figure 15) did also experience the highest level of perceived professional outcomes. And those answering “to a high degree” in relation to contributing to project directions is divided on the three top categories in relation to perceived personal professional outcomes (black in figure 15), while those experiencing a low or very low degree of influence on project directions are the same respondents who have experienced a low level of personal professional outcomes.

Respondents have also contributed with some open reflections about whether and in what ways they saw the RC-project as a co-creation project. Here are some quotes from these reflections:

- "It has been extremely important that me and my co-students were listened to, also when it was critical voices and experiences" (Student teacher).
- “I see it as a co-creation project because there was no finished template for the project from the beginning. Furthermore, we have often, after project activities discussed how the next phase might look like” (Student teacher).
- “As a representative for the student teacher in the planning-group I experienced the first years that many suggestions were “brought to the table”, but rather few of them were actually used. As I see it many student teachers were critical towards the mindfulness part, but anyway there was more of that” (Student teacher).
- “In the beginning, we evaluated so much that we nearly couldn’t stand the word evaluation anymore! But it provided the researchers with the opportunity to re-direct the project to be meaningful for as many as possible. Through the project there has been a lot of focus on participants’ opinions. I have felt that this has been my project as well as the researchers” (Student teacher).
- “…in the cooperation with colleagues around developing our pedagogical practice…” (Teacher).
These open reflections were like the rest of the open answers categorized in the analysis. Three main themes appeared from this analysis, distinguishing reflections that are mainly about, 1) whether “someone” have listened to input – also critical voices – and if those inputs have been used to change the direction in the project. This type of reflections are mainly from student teachers. They apparently think about the project as being a part of their education, where it can be seen as natural to reflect upon whether your feedback and evaluations are taken seriously by “the teachers”. Another group of reflections, nearly the same amount, do implicitly point to an understanding of more equal “responsibility for success” focusing on: 2) co-creation as the process with formatively and iteratively developing a project in cooperation across stakeholder-groups. Here are some student teachers and some from the other groups. Finally, there are a few reflections which is about 3) respondents not experiencing any influence stating that the project direction was given from the start. Quotes from all three groups are represented above.

It can also be mentioned that cooperation and co-creation also have been perspectives in the respondents’ reflections about their perceived outcomes above. For example in a quote like this referring to what has been most beneficial in the project: “The character of the project as co-creation/ with groups of various stakeholders being interested in developing knowledge about and practice focusing on relational competence in teacher education and schools”.

This quote does pitch the core of the project so it will be allowed to stand alone as the thread to the final conclusions and perspectives.

4 Conclusion and perspectives

The relational competence project was initiated by a broad group of stakeholders, referring to both research and to concrete experiences of a need for development in schools and teacher education. Relational competence was defined referring to the four elements: Acknowledgement, Change of perspective, Empathy, and Attention and presence of mind – and with the context placed in the middle of a model.

The evaluation of the project has been based on a retrospective survey with answers and reflections from all stakeholder-groups. This was supplemented with interviews and analysis of project documents. The evaluation is, overall, positive in relation to the participants perceived personal professional outcomes. The development as a professional teacher and as part of a professional community was highlighted, and the same was new insight into the importance of relations and the concrete tools and approaches tried with students in schools by the teachers and the student teachers. Some of the challenges emphasized was about the so-called “inner exercises”. It seems that systematic enactments with these exercises was perceived as extremely beneficial for some participants, but as a challenge for others. This can be summed up saying that those specific approaches making the project strong, also might be what causes challenges for some participants.

The character of being a co-creation project with cooperation across stakeholder-groups and institutions furthermore seems to have been crucial for project success. Not all participants did have the experience of contributing to project direction, but is seems that there have been some iterative developments and the inspiration from Scharmer’s (2009) understanding of co-creation is evident.

For the student teachers, in particular the sustained enactments and reflections over time through the four years of education have been important. Is has been documented in the project research that the main part of the student teachers did develop relational competence over time, but also emphasizing challenges in particular in the start of the project. The student teachers needed support to see how the approaches in the project could be used with school students in their placement periods. The participation
at the 4th and last year was voluntary – and some student teachers furthermore used the project aspects to frame their inquiries for the final bachelor-project. Those student teachers have experienced the highest level of professional outcomes. Relational competence has in their bachelor-inquiries been used in a very wide range of pedagogical and subject matter contexts, emphasizing relational competence as a generic perspective, not only relevant in certain subjects. There seems to have been a process of internalisation involved in using relational perspectives in own inquiries contributing to the student teachers sense of autonomy, relatedness, and competence: self-efficacy and agency (Bandura 1997). These student teachers can be expected to a higher degree than the average participating student teacher to use central perspectives form the RC-project in their future career as teachers.

Looking forward the recommendation based on the evaluation must be to continue the work with relational competence as an explicit focus in teacher education. The project has shown concrete results which can be used in teacher education, among other things more precise understanding of what are the central elements in relational competence and relational work in the educational system (e.g. Jensen et al., 2015; Skibsted & Matthiesen, 2016). Furthermore, there have, based on the experiences from the project been developed modules for teacher education focusing both theoretically and practically on developing student teachers’ relational competencies, for example the module: “School students’ conceptual, social and personal learning and development”. The work on operationalizing how best to work with relational competence in teacher education is continuing referring to a balance between “looking out and looking in”, issues raised also in this evaluation.

It can be recommended to continue the cooperation also with schools and the other external stakeholders involved. The experiences of taking part in “co-creation” seemed to contribute to the perceived outcomes, and the external stakeholders like the Danish Society for Life wisdom in children can based on the evaluation be seen as contributing with central and relevant perspectives.

In relation to the school-student perspective which was also mentioned in the project purpose this has mainly been an indirect perspective in the respondents’ reflections, as observation at schools have not been a part of the evaluation. It has however been a clear perspective for example when a teacher says about her personal professional outcomes: “A strengthened cohesion and community in my class”. In this area, it can be mentioned that a new research project is running (Skibsted & Bertelsen in Skibsted and Matthiesen, 2016), focusing on the possibility for children and youngsters to develop self-worth and self-confidence, to support their learning and well-being by an appreciative and empathic pedagogy. That project in particular focus on the students, but also includes the demands for teacher professionalism.

Relational competence must be seen as a central aspect in teacher education for all student teachers, and through the full progression over the four years, but in relation to prioritizing co-creation projects as part of teacher education in this area, and in relation to other pedagogical aspects, it could be considered if student teachers could positively choose participation in a given project. Student teachers could be involved in co-creation a little later that from day one and have the opportunity to choose themselves what projects to be involved in. It seems that an element of autonomous choice and independent inquiries have been rewarding for those student teachers involving themselves mostly in the project during the last period of their training.

5 References

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