

Teacher's Learning

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Presentation of the Research Area

The teaching profession has a long tradition in Sweden. The first teacher training started in the middle of the 19th C. Society has changed considerably since then, but the basic structure for organised teaching in schools still has clear similarities to the old elementary school. The children sit at desks and a teacher teaches relatively large groups both at primary level as well as the higher age group levels. Even at university groups of thirty students this is a common norm for teaching. Teacher training has changed through the years and the methods have changed and developed not least due to changed ways of living and also because of the large availability of information in today's modern society. Children and youth find in their homes stimulating environments. They come into contact with the world at an early age through TV-programs and computers. The majority of children in Sweden start pre-school at the age of three and meet professional educators and organised teaching in an environment suitable for their age.

All these changes place special demands on the school's teaching staff who we today call teachers, from pre school up to university. These constant changes also mean that learning among teachers must continue during their entire professional life. How this learning takes place varies a lot from individual to individual. How it is organised also varies a lot. A large part of a teacher's development is left to the individual teacher and to a certain extent to the heads or school directors in the local administration. Our aim is, through different projects, to find out how learning takes place. We aim to establish what takes place in specific learning activities and what situations facilitate learning and development of the teacher profession. Is it a question on the individual level or is there an organisation to promote teacher's professional development? How does a teacher's development affect a student's learning? These are some of the questions we asked ourselves and these questions provide the interest to study teacher's learning from their teacher training and through their careers at all school levels.

To sum up we propose to find out how the teaching profession is shaped, maintained and developed over time. By teacher's learning we mean both **student teachers' learning and practising teachers' learning**. We mean that teachers are constantly learning during their professional careers and continue to learn but in many different ways. We therefore aim to study the teachers' development at pre-school, elementary school, secondary school and university levels.

The main aim of the project: to describe, explain, and seek to understand how a teachers' profession is created, maintained and developed. Which factors contribute to development and change and within what framework does this take place?

Theoretical standpoints

We intend to place the teaching profession in a sociological and organisational perspective and from the critical theory point of view analyse which conditions contribute or limit a teacher's development and learning. What can our institutional framework and other factors do that in one way or another contributes to or prevents professional development?

We derive our inspiration from related research that treats; the perspective of society, curricula theory, the commission of teaching, the learning organisation, collective learning and institutionalised learning.

Method of Research

Since teacher training and even the teaching profession has changed a lot during a short time our aim is to use an explorative attempt in our research where Grounded Theory is our standpoint. Methods can vary in the different projects but will build on; action research, reflective dialogue and organised training programs. We will also study the teacher profession from a gender perspective.

Methods of data collection vary in the different projects. Here are some examples; Observation, Diary, Dialogue, Interviews, individual or group interviews and quasi-experiments. Other methods may be noticed and can occur in different combinations.

Here are some examples of ongoing projects

Research on Teachers' learning in a Master's program

Ewa Ivarson Jansson and Limin Gu

The prevailing Swedish strategy for Teacher's training implies that students are expected to take a large part of the responsibility for their studies and through this practice be responsible for their own learning, both during their training and after they have finished their studies.

The teachers who are engaged in teacher training (in field teaching) are given the opportunity to study at Mid Sweden University. We offer a Master's program with a school and development profile.

The program particularly emphasises the teachers own learning by training them to use different research methods and reflecting *on* and *about* the pedagogical practice as a tool for continued development in their teacher profession.

We (Limin Gu and Ewa Ivarson Jansson) have observed the master's program and have studied how teachers, who have taken the course, have experienced the different parts of the program, from a learner's perspective. The data we have used for this evaluation has included the work reports of the participants and a written evaluation as well as notes from group discussions on the written course paper. The discussion took place between course participants and the teacher /researcher.

We have been able to, by using research methods, in the form of observations, interviews and field notes, professional know how, reflections *on* and *about* field training, the reflecting practitioner and action research to conclude that the teachers during the course have not only developed a greater awareness for the techniques as such but have also received the tools to develop their teaching craft. They have also become more aware of their work, which has led them towards the need to argument for contentious reflective dialog with their colleges. We have found that this kind of action research inspired training helps to make training more effective and relevant as in-service training for teachers with regards to the new demands and challenges they are faced with. Additionally, they gain insight on how the new teacher training is constructed (Proposition, 1999/2000:135) and in which most of the participants

contribute to, by meeting the teachers to be, during their training. The course includes praxis related research methods and the course participants are therefore updated regarding current school research and can thereby actively participate in and contribute to school development at a local level.

Research-based Teacher Training

Limin Gu

There are many things beyond the knowledge and skills of teaching that a teacher needs to know. They need to know about themselves as learners, about students and how they learn, and about the context in which they are teaching. They must understand the moral component of teaching, the implications of the formal curriculum, and the politics of school governance. A critical issue for teachers is how they learn to think about the source and role of knowledge for practice or vice versa; how they blend theory and practice to further their knowing and understanding of learning, teaching and schooling.

Teachers are expected to have both theoretical and practical knowledge and therefore need an interaction within the teacher training between these different elements...Students must, during their training, be provided with the space to actively reflect over their views regarding knowledge, knowledge content and selection and in relation to how children and students learn. Part of these studies should be carried out on the practical educational environment. (Proposition, 1999/2000:135, s. 17)

Teachers' mission is not only to carry out, but also to analyze and develop their pedagogical and educational practices. To make this possible, it is also argued that teachers need to deepen their knowledge through the way of doing researches on their own practices. The development of teachers' professional knowledge and their initiatives and ability of doing research is regarded as central for teacher professionalism that refers to the quality of practice. (Cochran-Smith, 1994; Gore, 1995; Griffin, 1999; Tickle, 2001; Zeichner & Noffke, 2001). Zeichner (1983) classified the possible teacher education programs and divided them into four paradigms: behaviouristic, traditional craft, personalistic and inquiry-oriented paradigms. The research-based approach is, in our understanding, a variation of inquiry-oriented paradigm in which both integrating theory with practice of their learning and developing research competence of student teachers are emphasized. The aim of this approach is not to train the student teachers to be professional researchers but rather reflective teachers who understand what research-based evidence and thinking are, as related to educational practice such as learning and teaching, and the political and social issues as well.

Our intention of the research is to exam a new model of pre-service teacher education program at Mid Sweden University. The program consists of four part courses (totally 40 credits). One of the initiative ideas beyond building the new program has been integrating students' theoretical educational studies with practical studies in which a research-based model in organizing the courses (both the content and management of the courses) has been applied from the beginning of the program to the end. Different forms of studying and teaching, including lectures, seminars, PBL (Problem Based Learning), network-based activities such as the use of WebCT etc. both on campus and at a distance site, and a great numbers of investigations in the field by the students, including 5 weeks' practice in kindergartens (VFU) have been carried out. One of the principles is to combine the studies with researches by students in various ways at different course moments. This research-based approach culminates in an academic thesis in pedagogy in the end of the program, which is obligatory for every student.

The purpose of our research is to describe, explain and analyse how student teachers in this program experience and understand the goal of the courses and their own learning in relation to the research-based approach. The major research questions are: how the student teachers have experienced the knowledge supplied by investigation and reflection, the integration of theory and practice in their own learning when the research-based approach is used as the strategy of organizing and managing the program, and their own understanding on the function of research in their professional learning (research-based approach is both the way/manner/tools and content of learning). The study will be carried out by combining interviews (with both student teachers during the different periods of the courses) with analysing of written materials such as syllabus, study guides.

University teacher's learning

Ewa Ivarson Jansson

Planned projects

Within this area we plan to start some different projects to, in a research based way, develop the learning of the teachers at the teacher training. That is to say **University teacher's learning**. The teachers who taught in the master's course and compiled the participants' opinions on their learning process, were allowed to reflect on how they approached the task and how they interpreted them. This in turn caused the need to analyse which tasks the teachers experienced as most challenging and rewarding. These experiences have led us to the planning of systemised learning for university teachers. They have in different ways collected material from the university's courses and reflected on the material with regards to different themes and perspectives. Many levels of reflection can here play a part. The specific content, the organisation present in the learning situation and which form of mediation used. To clarify this work I provide an example.

An initial question could be:

How do we work at university to develop a course task in a pedagogically relevant question? For example; How do we treat boys respectively girls during sports lessons?

To be able to witness students learning and our own learning in different questions, we need to continually use critical analyses to confirm whether the tasks have the desired effect

Do the student teachers have the necessary knowledge to enable them to analyse what is happening in the classroom. What can we contribute to realise the aim. How can we in a systematic way learn from the students, the teachers and our colleagues reflections?

Another example that has become apparent is that teachers at the university meet with teachers and students at the schools and together reflect on a given theme in the form of a "reflection circle". On such occasions the researcher can take part and direct the discussion and from the different theoretical perspectives analyses what takes place in school. Others for example "gender teachers" or special teachers can here be a suitable recourse. The discussions are documented and provide an empirical basis for continued analyses and reflection by the university teachers.

Concrete forms and thoughts on the area of teachers learning in collaboration with a commune

Ewa Ivarson Jansson

Project description

Here is an example of an Actions research project in collaboration with a commune and The Mid Sweden University (Department of Education). In this project the learning experiences of teachers in the field and university teachers come together and it is even possible for student teachers to take part.

In collaboration with the commune we have discussed the possibilities of carrying out a project. The background being that the commune wishes to examine the effect of the economic investments made in schools for children requiring special support. It is consequently an evaluation project where one should be able to describe the effects in the form of increased achievement and results that said investment has given the children.

Our common goal is to develop knowledge regarding the investments made in schools so that all students manage the stipulated demands of the curriculum and gain sound knowledge in the basic subjects.

For many years we have invested extra resources to meet these needs but these measures have not provided the desired results. Many students still do not reach these required levels. What has, so far, not systematically been evaluated is how these extra investments have been used, organised and formed with regards to the established goals.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to find the forms to acquire knowledge of how the available resources are used in the classroom and how they can be used in a way that benefits the individual student, groups of students and hopefully the whole class. The effects apply to support resources for students in classes 3-6.

Questions at issue

What is being done and what are the effects on the individual student, on the sum of learning for the class and the classroom environment?

How do teachers teaching methods change when they become aware of the students learning process?

Research method

A project based on participant orientated research design where teachers and researchers together study every-day processes, efforts and effects from an action research viewpoint in which all those involved play an active part.

1. Establish knowledge of the teachers pedagogical environment
2. Establish knowledge on the interaction between teacher – students, students - students and special education – students.
3. Establish knowledge of pedagogical methods for children with special needs, develop, maintain and even update over time.
4. Establish knowledge on pedagogical context by using diaries which will be the foundation for group reflection.
5. Establish knowledge on and discover critical incidents that hinder a pupils learning, (to be able to remove the obstacles to enable children to reach the set goals).
6. To Establish knowledge of the conditions that are necessary and desired to enable children to manage compulsory school with satisfactory knowledge

The project is planned for a three year period and during that time we will follow the different phases.

Phase One: The teachers describe their work, students' attitudes, critical incidents and the environment and its conditions. The teachers collect diary notes, observations and field notes over a period of time. These become the basis for reflection and discussion. This may even lead to a deeper understanding of the facts regarding different types of difficulties.

Permanent reflection groups of three to five researchers and researcher/doctoral student are formed.

Teachers and researchers meet to discuss and reflect on the teachers diaries and their description of incidents. The discussion group's findings are written down and the reflections are summarised after each meeting. Discussions and reflections will deal with the different areas described above i.e. teachers' descriptions.

Phase Two: The different areas are studied and about twice a month the reflection groups will meet to discuss and summarise their reflections which should provide guidance on how to plan the next stage of the work. This work can take time should a need for change or redirected arise. Based on the themes that have been focused on researchers and teachers plan together what changes are needed.

Final Phase: This is where teachers and researchers divide the work. Each reflection group is given the task of writing about an area such as standpoints, experiences during the work, steps taken during the period of research. Teachers are expected to, independently, be able to interpret the changes needed to be made to enable the work to continue. The role of the researchers here is to guide the teachers and to summarise the progress and status of the project.

Connection between other profile groups within the area of learning and education
A Swedish – Russian action research study, working with young people's system of values 2005 - 2006
Harriet Augusén, Karen Cooper and Professor Vladimir Shabes

Questions of Values and Norms are very current issues in both Russia and Sweden and this is an area of common interest of Mid Sweden University and the Vyborg Branch of Herzen University in Russia. The two universities have co-operated in training programs for Russian and Swedish school leaders and teacher students before. Mid Sweden University has led the earlier training programs. The plan for this project is to make a more equal co-operation and is partly aimed at continuing the earlier co-operation, but to take it to a partly new area. Sweden and Russia are neighbours and are both experiencing difficulty with racism, crime, drugs and violence among young people. Global trends force us to work better with values in schools, in both Russia and Sweden, to create mutual understanding for each other. It is for us to work with the development of democratic values and to care for the upbringing of our young people.

Both institutions – Vyborg Branch of Herzen University and Mid Sweden University run teacher-training programs, where the knowledge created in this program easily can be shared in the programs.

Short term goals

- To design a research study on "the system of values" in a Swedish/Russian co-operation, to investigate the formation of values among students in both countries
- To plan and execute action research in schools in Russia and Sweden
- Sharing outcome in published articles and seminars about the study
- To meet and work together to create understanding among the participants

Long term goals

- To create knowledge about young people's values today, through carrying out a first research study
- To develop programs and activities for working with values in schools.
- Teachers learn to involve students in developing democratic values through the work with the developed programs

These are some examples of how we in different ways study the teacher profession. Those responsible for the different projects form discussion groups to share with each other the results and can thereby give each other support and constructive criticism.