

English summaries

Ingrid Andersson & Sven B. Andersson, 2004: Micropolitical perspectives on newly qualified teachers' reflections /Mikropolitiska perspektiv på nyutbildade lärares reflektioner/. Pedagogisk Forskning I Sverige, Vol. 9, No 3 pp 161–188. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788

This article is part of a project investigating newly qualified teachers' reflections on knowledge formation in the intersection between theory and practice. To arrive at your first employment as newly qualified involves the construction of a professional identity from the person you are, your education, life experiences and the people with whom you interact. This situation is similar in many other professions. All professions where many people interact are complex and imply an ability to transform and negotiate knowledge. What makes the teaching profession particularly complex is that there are many interested parties seeing themselves as knowledgeable within areas teachers handle every day. Hence, many people have opinions about how school practices should be pursued.

Methodologically, our point of departure is that individuals are active participants in discursive practices and that practices are contextually formed. Data are drawn from individual reflections and group discussions on experiences among eighteen newly qualified teachers after their first semester of teaching. We were inspired to analyse their narratives from micropolitical perspectives when seeing recurring themes in their interactions with regard to everyday work. The research questions, developed from the teachers' discussions, are: Whose interests are reflected in the teachers' interactions, what micropolitical aspects are reflected and how do the teachers handle micropolitical dilemmas?

Theoretically, the concept of micropolitics is used within organisations to explain activities concerned with the acquisition and distribution of power and resources, especially when dissensus is at hand. The aim is to sustain a smooth organisation and facilitate newcomers' adjustment to a specific culture. Power is socially constituted and legitimated within the organisation. For sustained legitimacy, power has to be transformed to authority and influence shared, even if this may change power relations. Micropolitical actions involve risk taking, making conscious choices and being prepared to withstand some insecurity. They also show how members of staff try to create their own space of time and support (Pfeffer 1981). In school settings, micropolitical aspects are discussed in terms of issues on promotion, how resources are distributed and how voices are heard (Hoyle 1982, Ball 1987).

Moreover, Blase (1988) describes how teachers handle criticism from parents and school leaders through micropolitical actions. Kelchtermans and Ballet (2002) have continued Blase's work and point out that micropolitics include struggle and conflicts as well as cooperation and coalition building. Our assumption in this study is that teachers' professional life can be studied from micropolitical aspects. We consider this perspective particularly fruitful when several actors depend on each other and when there is the possibility of different actors exerting influence.

Findings are discussed in terms of three major dimensions: The complexity of the teaching profession, a relationship oriented perspective and micropolitical aspects of change. Our data show that part of the complexity in newly qualified teachers' work consists of diverging interests, which often lead to a sense of exposure. The participants handle micropolitical dilemmas either by choosing a reactive stance, to follow and maintain the status quo, or choosing a proactive stance where they try to act for change. According to the teachers' narratives, so many things »just happen« at school, that they cannot follow their pre-planned schedule. This leads to reactive actions as they are influenced by the interests of others, or forced to change focus due to circumstances beyond their control. In our interpretation, the newly qualified teachers' stories show that conflicts between different actors' interests and micropolitical actions contribute to the complexities and dilemmas in their work.

The teachers have their own views on teaching and learning and their narratives also show how they see that others' interests influence their work. The findings indicate that they have a vision of how the work with their pupils can be materialised even if they currently experience their goals as short sighted. From a micropolitical perspective, the teachers' way of explaining the reasons behind their pupils' lack of motivation as being beyond their control is one way of dealing with their own exposure and keeping a positive teacher identity. In addition, they employ strategies for survival and they want to understand and explore possibilities and limits within the teaching profession.

A relationship oriented perspective is seen when all the newly qualified teachers stress the importance of good relationships with pupils, parents, colleagues and school leaders. This is shown in their openness towards dialogues and that they are ready to give arguments for their actions, while at the same time being prepared to negotiate (e.g. with parents) to understand and reformulate their own plans to accommodate different interests and, in that way, to grant continuous good cooperation. Our data show, on the one hand, that pressure from the organisation sometimes mortgages both working and spare time up to the hilt and that on the other hand, if ideas of decentralisation reach out to the teachers, there might be room for them to exert an influence on the distribution of common resources.

Micropolitical aspects of change are demonstrated in the context where many different actors want to mortgage the new teachers' time and make them commit themselves to questions concerning administration, projects and issues involving pupils and parents. If the newly qualified teachers show resistance to extra work, there might be a clash, especially if they are critical to »lack of action« in certain questions. However, their critique can also contri-

bute to change, which others have not observed in their too well-known environment or do not have the energy to accomplish.

In general, how different interests influence the teachers' work and the way they manage to handle their exposure is somehow dependent on the extent of decentralisation. The participants' ways of handling new situations, e.g., learners' and parents' influence, increased collaboration with colleagues and commitment within the overarching organisation can both result in more exposure and gains in influence. They can choose a reactive approach to maintain the status quo, or they can choose a proactive approach and take change oriented actions. They are, however, always dependent on the micropolitical actions of others and collaboration. Different interests in the environment of newly qualified teachers can often be understood as supportive and important driving forces, as well as ways to broaden their perspectives. Hence, in our interpretation, the increased complexity and collaboration with other actors are also regarded as important challenges for professional development and the roles that newly qualified teachers can play in producing educational change.

Gunni Kärrby & Marita Lundström, 2004: Educational integration and changed practice /Pedagogisk integration och en förändrad praktik/. Pedagogisk Forskning I Sverige, Vol. 9, No 3 pp 189–204. Stockholm. ISSN 1401-6788

This article is about educational practice in integrated preschool and primary school classes. Compulsory school starts at the age of seven in Sweden. In 1991 a law made it possible for parents to let their child start school at the age of six if they wanted, a reform called flexible school start. This led a number of communities to organize classes for six-year-olds. These were often placed in the same locality as primary school and sometimes pedagogically integrated with primary school. In 1996 preschool classes were instituted as a separate school form but were not compulsory. Integration with primary school was recommended.

School reforms are sometimes seen as initiated from above or from below. Earlier research has led to the pessimistic conclusion by some researchers that school reforms initiated by the authorities are doomed to failure. The purpose of an organizational reform initiated by the Swedish government was to make two different educational cultures overlap, that of preschool and that of school. The intention of the reform was to find new forms of practice and to create learning situations that raised pedagogical quality and led to better continuity in the learning environment and further life long learning. From this point of view a study was made to find out if classes that vary in amount of integration differ in practice.

Earlier evaluations of integration tried out as developmental projects show that they have not been very successful. This has been explained by differences in preschool and school culture, difficulties in the cooperation between the teachers due to differences in views of children's learning and teaching methods. In the new national curriculum for school there is an emphasis on the learning environment and more flexible methods are recommended, while the preschool curriculum is emphasizing more focus on learning. Both curricula are based on social constructivist theories of learning and development of knowledge.

The conditions for didactic changes in school practice is discussed. Nordic research on integration shows that the school tradition dominates in integrated classes. Institutional power is strong through the framing and structure of subjects in school. Developmental work has been based on models that start from educational goals ending up in different practice. Later theories on development of educational practice use consciousness raising models. Teacher Thinking and Teachers' reflection on their own practice are seen to be necessary conditions for development and change. Management and the role of the head teacher are seen as important factors for the organization of time and opportunities for the teachers to meet and discuss.

An empirical study is presented including 119 classes from 55 schools in the west of Sweden. These varied from high to low organizational integration. Teacher students from Borås University College observed a random sample of 231 six- och seven-year-old pupils in these classes. Their activities were recorded with an observation schema during one whole day in school. From this sample, 32 classes were chosen randomly. The activities of the observed pupils in these classes were analyzed in a qualitative way. The classes were sorted into three categories differing in amount of integration depending on how many lessons per week that were scheduled for work in mixed age groups. These could vary from no integration to five or over five lessons per week. Some were totally integrated during the whole day and included two and up to four age groups. The qualitative analysis of the activities were classified into the subject areas: *Group time*, *Reading and Writing*, *Mathematics*, *Creative art*, and *Free play*.

The results show that children's activities differ between classes with high and low integration in various respects. On the whole, activities in more integrated classes were more varied. Teaching methods common in both school and preschool were used. Learning situations were more focused but at the same time there was more flexibility and opportunities for the children to choose how to work with different tasks. The six- and seven-year-old children often participated in the same activities (like making a story book, solve mathematical riddles, or doing research on birds and animals). Both six- and seven-year-olds spent more time doing creative work and in free play or playful activity in integrated classes compared to traditional age segregated classes. Practice was often connected to everyday life experiences and there was more cooperation and communication both between the children and between children and teachers in more integrated classes. Planned integration did not always mean that children worked together, however. Projects or

themes were sometimes just organized as integrated activities but the children worked in subgroups with their own agemates.

Children's activities in less integrated classes were more characterized by practice that reflected the traditional cultures of school or preschool. Seven-year old children in the first year of school often worked individually and formal working methods dominated like filling out pre-made sheets. In preschool classes, attended by six-year-old children, the activities were either more school like or very much like free play. School like activities were more common such as reproducing numbers and letters in a book, or doing activities intended to train perceptive ability by finding similarities and differences. In a few classes the six-year-olds did not get any experience of writing or working with numbers and letters at all.

The results show that there is a clear tendency that a higher degree of integration is conducive to a different practice that could be rated as higher quality. This is discussed in relation to the learning process and competence development among the teachers. Teachers with different training who work and plan together and observe each other's work have more opportunities to discuss and learn. The question is asked whether these experiences lead to new views on learning and another way of pedagogical thinking. Research on competence development among teachers and the significance of learning from practice is needed.

Educational research today takes into account the environment as an important factor for learning and development of knowledge. The question for further research is asked: How does the practice found more often in integrated classes influence the children's thinking and learning?

- Is the new practice more meaningful seen from the point of view of the child's own experiences?
- Does increased variation lead to qualitatively better ways of learning?
- Do children get more opportunities for dialogue and social communication with each other and the teachers?
- Does the integrated practice imply that the teachers challenge the children to engage in more problem solving strategies?
- Do the children try more to actively solve tasks when working together with older or younger peers?