

Teachers' narratives indicate professional stamina

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ABSTRACT

The neoliberal restructuring of the welfare state has changed the conditions for teacher practice. Teachers' narratives have been collected in the western part of Denmark. They give insight in teacher practice and how teachers' conditions for working have changed. 3 themes are discussed to illustrate this development: 1) individualisation, 2) operating economy and 3) loss of authority. The teachers' main focus is the benefit of the children even though this means they have to manipulate the demands issued on them.

TEACHER PRACTICE UNDER RESTRUCTURING

Teachers willingly or unwillingly become advocates for the restructuring of the welfare state through their professional work as civil servants. Klette et al (2002) summarises interviews with Nordic teachers regarding what their main tasks are as teachers. They mention: teaching, upbringing, social tasks, organisational responsibilities and cooperation with parents. These tasks has changed and increased in workload. The teachers experience pupils and parents as being more demanding as part of general changes in society that among other things has decreased the status of the teacher profession. The teachers also has to meet increasing demands from legislation and school administration regarding more detailed curriculum, more extensive documentation and never ending cut-downs in the school budgets. The conditions for working as a teacher are increasingly complicated and the teacher has to defend the work they perform under these conditions in order to keep up their self-esteem.

The changes in the welfare state are in Denmark and other countries in the world driven by rhetoric on flexible workforce, harmonisation and globalisation. This rhetoric is based on a neo-liberal ideology, according to Beach (p. 10, 2005) characterised by 5 denominators.

- 1) Market economy, where economic decisions are considered to be voluntary
- 2) Monetarist economic policy, where the economy is being stimulated by manipulating the money supply
- 3) Privatisation of state-owned industries and services
- 4) Low taxation to stimulate individual freedom
- 5) Control of expansion of State expenditure in the welfare State and local government.

This changes the welfare state into an economic redistribution establishment for economically effective delivery of services to individual citizen-clients. This

introduces logic, notions and concepts of operating economy into the welfare state. The civil servants in such a welfare state have to be flexible and adaptable at the same time towards changes in the market for welfare benefits. The autonomy of the civil servants is being regulated by the legislation issued by politicians and the financial support they get from the same political authorities. The financial support is more and more managed by means and concepts of operating economy. Due to constant international comparison in the globalized economy the autonomy is slowly but surely being reduced through increasing control mechanism and more external influence on teachers' work (Carlgren et al 2002). The market model of schooling operates like a shopping mall with supermarkets and boutiques where the majority of consumers buy standardized school products and different minorities shop more selectively and buy their school products in small boutiques (Robertson 2000). The market primarily harmonises the school products in relation to globally transferable qualifications – reading, science, mathematics and English.

This rhetoric and harmonisation affects the civil servants such as teachers through professionalisation, academisation and increasing centralized management of the professions. The professionalisation of teachers is long and extensive debate which in Denmark reached a peak in 2000 when the Teachers Union published their "Professional Ideals" (DLF 2000). The debate is still running (e.g. Krogh-Jespersen 2005), it tries to give the teaching profession an ethical, political and societal status from where to reclaim the lost esteem of the teaching profession. The teachers union summaries in 2005 this in a profession strategy that contrasts a traditional employee strategy

Employee Strategy	Profession Strategy
If we aren't paid for the task, we don't do it	We must have conditions that support our work
Threats	Quality management
Reactive	Proactive
Control of the work	Professional accountability
Confidence	Liberty of action
Security	Flexibility
Justice	Respect from partners
The work consists of parts, that is performed within the given conditions	We have the responsibility to prioritize and solve the task

Table 1: The Danish Teachers Union Profession Strategy (DLF 2005)

This more extrovert strategy puts more responsibility on the teacher for fulfilling the expectations from the citizens and the State. The union wants to reclaim some of the lost esteem with this strategy.

The academisation in the teaching profession is not as predominant as it is the teacher education. The teachers' have in their practice met increased demands for written records but no tendency towards academic processing of these records. Teacher practice is primarily oral and is also a practice of the moment, Dale (1998) describes teaching as an act of constraint as the

teacher can't choose not to teach in the classroom. Roth (2002 p.21) calls this the immediacy of teaching; it is in this classroom with these students at this moment you have to teach. The task this poses on educational research is how to grasp this and research it. Such research has to bear in mind that momentary teaching in the classroom only is a part of the teachers practice. In the preparation and evaluation of the teaching the teacher has to include consideration on the curriculum, the pupils' skills and abilities alongside the available teaching material. These elements of teacher practice must also be included in comprehensive educational research.

Teacher education is – in Denmark anyway - distinct from teacher practice not only in the career of the individual teacher but also in the degree of academia. Teacher education has been undergoing frequent changes in the last 20 years, with new laws put into action in 1992, 1998 and 2007 (Eriksen 2009). This process is partly due to the Bologna process demanding harmonisations within the EU, and it also includes increased demands to the teacher students to meet academic standards in their working with knowledge and writing assignments.

Despite these efforts to increase the educational level of teacher there has been a relative decrease in teacher educational level as the general qualification level in society has increased. This is a factor in the falling esteem and authority of the teachers. A theme I will return to in the analysis.

The increase in centralized management of the teacher's practice can be illustrated by the process of describing the subject matter content in the Danish primary school. In order to ease testing in the public school, aims and purposes of school subjects has undergone three revisions over a ten year period (2002, 2004 and 2009). The tendency has been that the aims have become more detailed and explicit, which then enables better possibilities for evaluating and measuring the individual student outcome of the teaching. There are now stated aims for the 2nd, 4th, 6th and 9th grade for every subject in the Danish school and additional aims for some subjects for the 8th and 10th grade. These detailed aims are part of increased focus on evaluation and testing in the primary Danish school. The tests are present at almost every grade (table 2).

Subject/Grade	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
Danish/reading	x		X		X		x
Mathematics		x			X		
English						x	
Geography							x
Biology							x
Physics/Chemistry							x

Table 2: National tests - subjects and grades (Skolestyrelsen 2010)

The schooling is ended by 7 final tests in the 9th grade. 5 of them being compulsory: 2 in Danish, 1 in Mathematics, 1 in English and 1 in Physics/chemistry. 2 are chosen by lot, one within science either Biology or Geography, and one in humanities either English, Religious knowledge, History, Social science, German or French.

This describes the public welfare school education very detailed to the citizens. They can easier see what to expect from the schooling of their children. This way of describing the intention of schooling through subject matter content and tests reflects the neo-liberal ideas of better management and accountability in the welfare state. Biesta (2007) discusses the relation between means and aims in education. He finds that very detailed aims can control but not develop education. The problem is that even though means and aims are optimised in accordance with a given standard, it is very unlikely that it will be appropriate from holistic analysis of the entire complexity in a teaching situation. Such detailed aims don't improve the professional behaviour of the teachers; the reduced room for professional action can inhibit the implementation of reforms in the educational system. The considerable effort put into continuous revisions of the aims demonstrates the neo-liberal reduction of the autonomy of the teacher through increasingly detailed descriptions of the public service of education.

Experiences with teacher practice have been investigated in a local area of Western Denmark close to the North Sea as part of on-going research at VIA University College focusing on teachers, nurses and social workers. The research collects narratives of professional and personal life in an attempt to understand how civil servants perceive the changes in their practice and in the welfare society. The teachers willingly tell their experiences and the

narratives illustrates how they cope manoeuvring between the needs of the children and demands of the contemporary welfare state.

NARRATIVE RESEARCH STARTS FROM THE TEACHERS OWN LANGUAGE

The use of narrative inquiry in creating an understanding of the work conditions of teachers is an inclusive approach that unveils details and ambiguities. Details are important in order to understand the complexity of teaching in its entirety. The narratives about the context of teaching from Roth (2002) illustrate the contribution narratives give to understanding which detail to focus on in the actual situation. A given narrative contains many opportunities for interpretation but the relevant one can only be chosen through simultaneous understanding of the context of the school, including pedagogical trends, colleagues, curricula and ongoing reform processes (Elbaz-Luwisch 2007). In this process of understanding the context of the teacher's work it can be beneficial to include some aspects of the life history of the teacher (Goodson 2008, Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

An example of presenting interesting stories of teachers is the cohort study by Goodson and Numan (2003) on a class of Swedish teachers who graduated in 1960. These stories tell about the changes in the Swedish primary school over a period of 40 years. Many interesting aspects are raised by the teachers, but the presentation given by the authors lack exhaustive analysis of the circumstances and contexts that might have extracted knowledge of more general interest from this impressive material. As the authors themselves are aware of as they promise to provide (ibid. p. 228) this analysis in a later publication, unfortunately this publication is still lacking (email correspondence with Numan in fall 2008). The details and ambiguities is overwhelming in such a large set of data, therefore you need to choose a theme that you want to focus on e.g. becoming a science teacher (Roth 2002).

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stress that narratives are the best way to get teachers experiences verbalized. A narrative includes interpretation, reflection, history, environment, relations, ontogenesis and exclusion of experiences. It is not an accurate and true version of the teachers' past but a recollection of past experiences recreated in the dialogue with the researcher.

Narrative interviews

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) give detailed guidelines on how to perform different types of interviews. They stress that the narrative interview focuses on the stories the informants tell as well as how they tell them. The narratives are the fundamental given data in this type of research. The narratives are either told freely or the interviewer helps constructing them through questioning the informant. It is important that the interviewer clarifies details in the storyline, so that conflicts, solutions and tensions are formulated by the informant. Researchers affect the participants. Their questions start reflection and development among the participants. The narrative emerges in the dialogue between participant and researcher; it does not exist prior to this dialogue.

Herman and Vervaeck (2005) present the main characteristics of structuralism in their *Handbook of Narrative Analysis*; they distinguish between the Narration, the Narrative and the Story. The Story includes events and presents the characters involved, the Narrative gives the timeline, details about the characters and the focus of the story finally the Narration is the actual dialogue – the spoken words – and actions between the characters. This distinction between the elements in a story is good structuring tools in the process of selecting relevant details for further analysis.

Life history

The life history can be formulated when the narratives are placed in contextual settings. Bruner (1984) clarifies different levels of life. Lived life is what actually happens, experienced life consist of images, feelings, desires, thoughts and meanings. These emotions and recollections affect the life story, that later can be told. Bruner (1984) defines a life history as: "*A life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context*". Goodson (1992) distinct between life story and life history, his notion of life history is in accordance with Bruner including contextualisation; but he introduces life story to describe life as told as merely the story without elaborate inter-contextual elements developed by the researcher.

The researcher arranges the narratives in chronological and contextual order to create a coherent life story. This life story is related to essential historical events regarding society, school, science and science education creating a life history of the teacher. This work involves an analytic and interpretive process where the researcher is looking for harmony and interaction between teachers narratives and experiences on the one hand and on the other hand the historical context. In this process the researcher sensitivity towards the teacher's life and the evolution of the society is essential to avoid intimidation of the teacher.

The life that teachers' live beside their professional carrier reflects the social status of teachers', their economic capacity and cultural orientation (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2004). Høyrup (1983 p. 100 ff) reports of a teacher family in a rural area of Denmark, which illustrates this theoretical point. Both spouses work as teachers at the local school. The husband has had several minor jobs in his holidays; the family is well-integrated in the local area through many contacts with the other citizens. They exchange work, natural goods and services as part of their relation to neighbours, dentist, colleagues, etc – a typical rural life form. They live in her birth place a small farm. The house, the garden and their work is not different from a teacher family living in a town. These circumstances do not in themselves lead to the rural life form they are living. It is rather the surrounding rural environment, the teacher family is living in and grown up in that conditions their life so that it becomes rural. The point is that this family's cultural orientation is towards a rural life form and that local community accepts them because they live a rural life form.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stresses the importance of contextualisation as part of narrative research, they describe it as composing a research text based on the interviews. A research text includes the story of the researcher in the inquiry, the story of the participant and the larger landscape on which they live. Clandinin and Murphy (2009) further elaborate this point of view as they state that the research text speaks to 3 audiences: the participants, the researcher and a larger scholarly and public audience.

The relation with the participants is of great importance, so that they remain ownership to their statements (Roth 2002). It is important to maintain the original coherence between conscience and the historically lived life of the participants in order to fulfil the relational responsibilities of representing the experiences we co-construct with the participants (Clandinin and Murphy 2009).

Using Leontjev (1981, 267-271) it is possible to refine this part of working with life histories. We have primarily access to the external notions of the teachers' experiences through the physical statements and utterances they produce. The essential empirical foundation of this type of research is the narration of the teacher's multimodal experiences. We do not have insight in their inner reflections unless they provide us this insight through their utterances. Narrative research is not providing psychological insight or evidence it provides narratives that can be interpreted in relation to relevant historical, cultural and social conditions.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) establish 3 axes for analysis of the narratives given by teachers: 1) the time lines of events and experiences, 2) the environmental context for events and experiences and 3) the social and personal relations of the events and experiences. This is in agreement with Goodson (2008) who emphasizes the importance of relating the personal teacher story to the more general history of changes in the school. This study focuses on the teachers own points of concern and their own phrasing of these concerns.

UNDERSTANDING TEACHERS' PRACTICE

Teacher practice is composed of many different work functions, where teaching is predominant, others being dialogue with colleagues, principals and parents. Characteristic for all of them is relations to other humans; teachers are therefore constantly engaged in social relations. These relations are regulated by conditions given the teacher for performing their work. This interplay between conditions and relations will be discussed in 3 themes in the following. The first theme will be individualisation. The Danish teachers are requested to have increasingly attention to the individual pupil. This individual attention operates in a very complex setting of relations. The second theme will be operating economy. The economic conditions given the school in the restructuring welfare society is marked by increased influence of market ideas that affects the teachers' conditions for teaching. The third theme will be the loss of authority. One of the benefits of a well established welfare society is an increase in the general level of education in the

population. A democratic welfare society also gives the citizens increasing influence on the management of the welfare benefits through different types of boards, elected governors and counsellors. The combination of the increase educational level and increased democratic influence on the schools has affected the esteem of the teacher.

Teacher practice is based on relations to many actors in the school. These relations to other humans are the most significant feature of the teachers practice. The Danish male teacher Knud puts it this way: *"You have to like humans. That is rather important; if you don't like humans, if you don't want the contact with other humans, then it probably is a foolish choice, then it is a foolish profession to enter."* We met Knud during the life history interviews conducted in the western part of Denmark close to the North Sea. At an age of 40 Knud had been a teacher for 9 years. Knud is a former fisherman, after 10 years of fishing on the North Sea he started taking higher preparatory courses; afterwards he entered the teacher education and became a teacher. Knud was replying to the interviewer's question of whether everybody could be a teacher, this question was posed when they were talking about what it takes to be a teacher. Knud's mildly ironic phrasing of his answer is characteristic for the understated use of speech language in this part of Denmark. You never exaggerate and you seldom address critique directly. Being aware of this local nuance of spoken language it is easy to see his main point, the deciding factor in the teaching profession is the relations to other humans.

Roth (2002, p. xv) describes how his detailed knowledge on a pupils short-term knowledge didn't help him in understanding the learning difficulties that a particular pupil was facing upon the death of his aunt. He uses this example to illustrate the awareness that he developed when returning to teaching after finishing his doctoral study on pupils' short term memory and learning in science. He realised that theories on the reflective practitioner by Schön (1987) or pedagogical content knowledge by Shulman (1987) didn't describe his teaching practice in its complexity; they all just described parts of it.

These two narratives from actual teaching practice illustrate the social skills teacher have to possess in their relation with other humans in their daily practice. Researchers need to be sensitive to these and other elements of teachers practice in research in education. Roth (2002, p. 21) adds a critique of mono-theoretical approaches to education research, which raises questions on how to gain insight in what really matters to teachers in their practice and how to research this. Roth (2002) points to the fact that awareness of details in an educational setting can lead to focus on the significant detail in an actual teaching situation. Roth (2002) was in the actual case acting as a teacher-researcher observing and reflecting on his own practice, but this observation and reflection could also have been done by an academic researcher in dialogue with the teacher. The point is to get the story with the boy in learning difficulties told in its entirety. So by starting with sampling the experiences that is present in the classroom we have a better chance for getting back to what is actually the problem.

A Danish female primary school teacher – Helle - gives a characterisation of teachers' practice, which reflects Roth's (2002) experience of the complexity of the teacher profession.

Helle: *"You must have situational awareness. It's about very fast to pinpoint what is happening here. You should be able to navigate in very many different signals, you must quickly respond to it. Situational awareness is what you have to possess. Then you have to multitask, it's nice seeing that I do not get stressed out by it, damn there may be many things at once. Can't you multitask so ... I have contact with some of my classmates from the teacher education, which some of them have already left the teaching profession because they can't. It is because there is too much going on."*

Roth (2002 p. 21) formulates the same experience as follows: *"I noted that in becoming a teacher, there was a development in my capacity to do the right thing at the right moment"*. Roth (2002) describes teaching as white water rafting; you have to follow the stream and manoeuvre the best you can. I met Helle during the formerly mentioned life history interviews. She had only been a teacher for 4 years despite her age of 43 years. She has worked 15 years as an industrial worker. Her last employment was at a male-dominated window assembly plant. She suffered a work injury and had to be rehabilitated. She chose teaching as her new career. The years of working at industrial plants shaped her approach to relations with others: *"I have a sharp tongue and the parents learn that is the way I am."* Helle's former lived experience forms her relation to the parents and her present lived experience of teaching add to these embodied experiences and shape her notion of teacher practice.

Her narrative above illustrates the awareness of the details and ambiguities in the teaching situation among the teachers' we met. Such awareness academic researchers also have to develop in order to provide recognisable pictures of science teaching back to the science teachers. Carr (2006) discusses educational theory and its relation with practice, he emphasises in his conclusion the need for practical justification of educational theory (ibid. p. 155). Roth (2002. p.21) joins this view as he says *"I believe that the ultimate test of theories is the capacity to explain subjective human experience"*.

Teacher practice has to consider individualisation

Differentiation was formally introduced as a principle in the Danish primary school in 1993, where a new school law was set into effect. The basic idea is that each pupil shall be taught in accordance with his or her own capacity to learn. This idea adds significantly to the complexity of the teacher's practice. To stress the importance of the consideration of the individual child in the school an individual study plan for each pupil in each subject was introduced by law in 2006.

The Danish female teacher Helle tells about her work with the individual study plans. Helle works at a small school in a rural area of the western part of Denmark. The local school authorities has decided that the teacher have to hand in the study plans in the spring. Helle tells what she thinks of this procedure and how her way of doing things affects her relations to the pupils and their parents.

"I'm one the few who argues hard for the individual study plans, if I'm going

to use the individual study plans as a progressive tool with the pupils, then they have to be handed out in September October. What good do they do in May when I'm going to take 6 weeks holiday that is not right. I hand them out in the fall and use them as a tool in the pupil status conversations and the parent status conversations. When I start after the one week winter break in February with the second round of pupil status conversations, then I take the individual study plans from the fall and say: 'Now what my friend, how are things going'.

They contain agreements on what shall I do, what shall they do. When I write them I'm conscious that I'm going to use them as a tool, so I can put plus or minus. 'Have you taken notice of the advice you were given? Did you follow the agreement we had?' In the beginning they find it tiresome, but the class I have now, the ones I have been form master of for 2 years. Now they think it is nice, in the beginning they found it very unpleasant, now they can see it is a help to everyone, because they can pin me on something as well. It is on their conditions it is not boing boing on the head it is an agreement we are both partners. They can also see the benefit if the parents have been complaining, then I can say: 'Shall I phone home'. Then I phone the parents and say we had an agreement, it is slipped and that is no good because we gave a joint promise. It involves 3 partners otherwise things won't work. In the beginning the parents were a bit puzzled and thought what is she thinking, but now they can see that it is not to punish them in any way. It is because we had this agreement and we have to show that we are role models for these young people. We have to show that we can trust people. This is what we want and we want the best for you."

This narrative tells how a teacher takes the official demands of the individual study plans and adapts them to her need for a tool in the relational work with the pupils and the parents. She acknowledges that the welfare society insists on individualisation of the teaching that she provides but she does not follow the intentions blindly. She balances the official demands of with her professional judgement of what is operative in her actual context and her way of working with the pupils.

Teacher practice relates to school operating economy

In the rural areas of Denmark – and in other countries as well - decreasing population has consequences for the number pupils attending the local schools. This results in class sizes that are either very small or very large. In the local area I have been collecting narratives the actual solution has been to merge smaller schools. But this has not solved the problem as the following narrative illustrate.

Jesper (male 53 years, 24 years as teacher) grew up in a village in the western part of Denmark; this part of Denmark is called West Jutland. He was originally trained in trade and office in a larger town 15 km from his birth place, after finishing this training he worked in an engineering company in a larger town on the east coast of Danish peninsula Jutland for 2 years. He finds the work boring, so he moves back to his birthplace in West Jutland. The story of Jesper entering the teacher profession is interesting as he moves from the more densely populated east coast of Jutland to take a teacher education in West Jutland and work locally as a teacher subsequently. This

move back west is unique; very few people who have left the western region moves back again. His upbringing in West Jutland retracts him to this part of the country. The teacher education is one of the only available higher educations in the local area. Jesper had already after finishing high school considered becoming a teacher, but due to family tradition he chose otherwise in the first place. A choice he later regretted and returned to become a teacher "back home".

Jesper teaches primary science and mathematics. Jesper describes the problem with large class and the need for differentiated teaching.

"Now we have classes that are huge, so it is no way the way, I thought it would be. We did not know initially that they would be so big. In mathematics, it is not possible to do practical work. I've tried dividing the class, and then take care of one half and then have the other do something themselves. It's not a solution, I tried it 3 times and then I went back to having the entire class together. Of course you have a lot of different activities and they work in groups. Many changes to give variation to the lessons, but they are always under control, because those who do not want to do something you always have to keep an eye on them. It is rather difficult, but goes fairly well."

"There is a teacher's aid here, she should be in every Friday in the 2nd module, but she has not been there yet because either she has been sick or she has been set to do other practical chores here at the school. Today I came and had again planned and duplicated ten sheets she had to work with 10 vulnerable pupils who actually just is being fobbed off, as we can not get at them because there are too many, then I will teach the 20 who can and will on their own. You know it's not something we hide. It is somewhat sad to see a group that is falling through. It has been reported to the office many times. I've had the headmaster down a few times because she has to see it. She says it is an ordinary working situation. I can not expect to get them all to work, but it is a big group that never has any benefit of the teaching"

"On the other hand, when they are divided in small teams in primary science it works well, and you will learn to know the pupils much better."

Jesper tells that he sometimes uses the minor teams in integrated science to trick some of the pupils who fall through in the mathematics lessons to do mathematics in these more quiet science lessons. *"I tell them they have to do their mathematics assignments before they can start on the science experiments, and they do."*

This report describes a teacher with a professional dilemma of wanting to do more than he can overcome on his given conditions. Jesper know he can make a difference to more pupils if he had other conditions for his work. The context is a small rural school with only 30 pupils at this year level. A division into two classes will cost the school more hours to be paid to the teacher, which then will reduce the economy for the entire school as it is paid per pupil not per class - a typical operating economical notion of funding activities. In order for all pupils to achieve well in mathematics the right thing to do professionally would be two minor classes, but this collides with the economic conditions given this school in a rural area of Denmark. In an international perspective class with 30 pupils are not rare, but this is not relevant in the actual case where the teacher experiences that he is not able to differentiate sufficiently to reach all his pupils. His frustration on the situation in the

mathematics class is also affected by the fact that in the integrated primary science class he has the class divided into 2 teams of 15, and here he experiences, that all the pupils participate and contribute to the learning in the classroom. So he knows that all the pupils can be reached but his conditions for doing this are different when he teaches the two subjects. The story illustrates the cultural and social conditions that govern his possibilities for teaching according to his personal and professional optimum. Jesper has deliberately chosen the teacher profession in this part of the country after trying something else. His devotion to the teaching profession and the well-being of his pupils is uttered in a low voice, because he also realises that the economic constraints put on the school can't easily be changed. Despite his frustration there seems to be established a harmony between the teaching profession and the attachment Jesper has to the local area. Muel-Dreyfuss (1983) talks about this harmony between humans and professions, she states that: *"People choose a profession and the profession makes them it's chosen ones."*

In this example of interpretation of a teacher narrative I have included my general knowledge of the local area. I have managed to get Jesper to tell a coherent story about a part of teacher work that worries him. I lack making observations of his teaching in order to get a more detailed understanding of the problems he is telling about. This would improve my foothold in walking in the landscape of teaching in a rural part of Denmark.

My intention has been not to prescribe either psychological or theoretical explanations on Jesper's story and I have tried to stay close to the perspective Jesper present. My intention has though been to avoid ending in a pitfall of practice from where the applied reflections would lack a general overview of teacher practice. I have aimed at giving primarily sociological explanations of the narrative i.e. operating economy. The mechanism I have focus on here is how the financing the schools is affecting the conditions the teachers have for conducting their work. When a school is paid per pupil and not per class the economy of the school resembles more the operating economy of private companies focusing on the cost per unit produced than a welfare economy where the actual need is taken into account in determining the financing.

Teacher practice is losing authority

The teachers used to have a fairly high authority and esteem in the society due partly to their high educational level and partly due to their work with the future of the society – the children. This esteem is changed significant over the last 10-15 years in Denmark. Several factors has contributed to this change one being the increase in international comparisons where Danish pupils perform from bad to mediocre, another being the general increase in educational level in the population in Denmark yet another being the general loss of respect for authority (e.g. Høyrup 1983 p. 100). The teacher no longer has authority alone through their 4 year education or from being civil servants. The profession has lost esteem as the work it produces has been shown to fall behind in international comparisons like PISA. In Denmark this debate has been topped by a parliamentarian majority and a government who constantly reminds the public and the teacher that the Danish school is one

the most expensive in the world. For this reason alone it is just to demand better results from the Danish teachers. The Prime Minister Lars Løkke Rasmussen stated in his new years speech 1.st of January 2010 that Denmark has be among the 5 best in PISA in year 2020.

The following narrative illustrates how a teacher experiences this change. The narrative is given by Marie. Marie is 53 years old she has been a teacher for 29 years. Marie is raised in the local area where my investigation has been conducted and she has taken her teacher education there as well.

MARIE: *"I think we have lost a lot, it is a story about...We have lost much of our professional authority in all these years. I think it happened when we shifted from school boards to school governors in 1990. I was a part of the union at that time; I thought that we as a union fell flat on your backs. We said to the parents of course are you as good as judges as us. We sold parts of the heritage back then because they are not.*

INTERVIEWER: *"of course not, what is the use of an education then."*

MARIE: *"There I think we have been too bad as professionals to say, we can something, we are very skilled, that is the reason why we decide on these matters. We will gladly talk with you but it is us who knows what this is about."*

The change from school boards to school governors was an increase in influence of parents on the daily business of the school. The school governors now have to supervise the activity of the school within the frames given by the municipal board. The school governors now establish principles for the number of lessons given per class, cooperation between school and parents and the division of work between the teachers. They also approve the schools budget, teaching materials and house rules and the teaching plans. The governors of school has majority of parents elected directly for 4 years (Den store Danske Encyklopædi, 2010).

As the parents get more direct influence on the school is also becomes more clear that argumentation between teacher and parent are more direct, the parents get management power over the teachers, thus the teacher become subordinate to the parents. This relative status can be further shifted in the disadvantage of the teacher when the parents have higher educational level and thereby or through work life experience have better argumentative skills than the teachers.

The loss of educational status due to the general increase in educational level in society coincides with more direct influence of the parents on the everyday of the teachers work. This synergy leads to loss of esteem and authority.

THE AUTONOMOUS NORDIC TEACHER UNDER PRESSURE

Robertson (2000 p. 137 ff) discusses empowerment and autonomy of teachers. She finds that the rhetoric of teacher empowerment and autonomy is part of neoliberal agenda that describes teacher practice in terms of skills, outcomes and control. She refers to research which mentions among others things that teachers should determine the curriculum and the ways of instruction if they are to be empowered genuinely. The presented narratives

indicates that the teachers have a very professional way of handling the demands put upon them by legislation and regulation regarding the daily school practice e.g. they turn demands of individual pupil plans into their own planning tool. The teachers describes the basic value of teaching as being the relation with the pupils, this is not a unique finding for this study see Nordenbo et al, (2008). Helle puts it: "*We want the best for you.*" The study indicates that the tradition of fairly autonomic teachers in Denmark and other Nordic countries empowers the teachers to professionally reformulate demands issued by the central school authorities in order to maintain focus on the benefit of the children.

The introduction of operating economy in schools put certain strains on the deregulated and empowered point of decision – i.e. the school and its teachers (Klette et al 2002). The increased management through individual study plans and frequent adjustments of subject matter aims and tests calls for increased autonomy from the teachers in order not to render the children helpless in the increasing demands to them. Klette et al (2002 p. 150) reports that the Danish teacher seems most irritated among the Nordic teacher in relation to changes but also seem to shake of the new demands and keep to teaching in a more traditional sense. This is a super tanker syndrome of the Danish school; it is hard to change direction towards the better as well as the worse.

3 of the 4 teachers you have met in this paper have changed to the teacher profession after years of other work. They all have a sharp focus on the main work function in the teacher practice – teaching. Their practice has changed from their former careers to the teaching profession, in this change their former experiences have been supplemented with new experiences. They consolidate their present practice by giving clear statements on central aspects of the teaching practice. Given the opportunity to tell about their experiences with the teaching profession they all do this in a committed manner.

CONCLUSION

3 themes have been discussed: Individualisation, Operating economy and Loss of authority. They illustrate different aspects of how teacher practice changes under the restructuring of the welfare state. Pupils are more being seen as individuals rather than members of a class, this increases the demands to and the complexity of teacher practice. The work conditions for teacher practice are changing as notions of operating economy enter the class room. The teacher has to optimize the individual pupils learning within the given conditions even if this means compromising with achieving the aims set for the subjects. This struggle of making ends meet in the class room is performed in relationship with parents who are seen as both more demanding and more in control of the school.

The narratives told by the teacher show that they focus on the relation with the pupils. They value this relation as the basis of teaching and they work primarily for the benefit of the pupils. This gives them a professional stamina; so that in spite of teaching being a low esteem job they keep on doing it.

They don't change to other professions or lines of work. Furthermore they keep teaching subjects as mathematics and science that according to international comparison – e.g. PISA - is poorly taught in Denmark. They could change to other subjects, but they don't. They practice their teacher work in accordance with their focus on the benefit of the children even though this means that they have to bend the rules and manipulate the structures in achieving this goal. The teachers perform civic unrest in their civil service for the benefit of the children; thus performing a form of active citizenship and showing stamina towards the demands of the restructuring welfare state that changes their profession. The teachers are White Water rafting in the daily routines, but Super Tanker manoeuvring the basic values.

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