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Governance of teachers' Professional Development and Learning within a new Career Position

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Session Information

01 SES 16 B, Teacher Leadership and Professional Agency

Paper Session

Time:	2019-09-06
	13:30-15:00
Room:	VMP 5 - Room 2079
Chair:	Maria João Carvalho

Contribution

This study focuses on Swedish teachers' professional development and learning when trying to find ways to think and act in a new career position, introduced in a career reform in Sweden. In evaluating the reasons for shortcomings in the Swedish educational system, the OECD states that a long-term human resource strategy is needed as a tool to improve schools and to reverse the decline of Swedish students' performance (OECD, 2015). The Swedish Government in 2013 introduced a career reform with two new career-oriented positions; lead teacher and senior subject teacher (SFS 2013:70). Both positions require a valid teaching certificate, four years of work, and demonstrated pedagogical skills. For the position of lead teacher, a strong interest in improving teaching is required. For the senior subject teacher position a postgraduate examination within a field of relevance for the position is required.

The requirements and the related job descriptions for these two career positions are intertextually linked to the Swedish Education Act, (SFS 2010:800). The Act (Ch. 1§5) states, "Education should be based on research and proven experience" and thus the teaching profession's practice must be based on research-based knowledge.

According to evaluations of the implementation (The Swedish Agency for Education, 2014: Statskontoret, 2016) the reform has neither created a position for development and learning for the teacher profession nor been the expected effective tool for school development. Furthermore, neither of these reports say anything about how the lead teachers themselves have interpreted the reform in relation to the demands that teaching should be based on scientific ground and proven experience (SFS 2010:800).

In this study, we focus on lead teachers' professional development and learning within this new career position. The aim of this study is to elucidate, analyze and discuss how lead teachers understand and govern themselves in their position as lead teachers, their underlying assumptions about career and the intersection between their job responsibilities and demands on scientific ground and proven experience. The study is guided by the following questions:

(1)   How do lead teachers understand, a) the mission of the lead-teacher career position and b) the demand for research-based education and proven experience in education?

(2)   What underlying assumptions of career emerge in lead teachers' expressions about their work?

(3)   What ideas, strategies and actions do they use to handle their role in practice?

Our study is situated in critical policy research, and we conceive the career reform as an example of policy as a neoliberal technique for governance, whereby the state and its governmental entities redirect the responsibility for carrying out changes in the educational system to the individual teacher and by emphasizing the need for professional development (Ball 2009;2003).

When studying ideas and strategies of lead teachers, and of the rationalities they use to govern themselves in their mission as lead teachers, we use the concept of *governmentality* (Foucault 1991) combined with the analytical framework of career as a *social and professional representation* (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2013; 2015) based on social representations theory (Moscovici, 2001). Governmentality takes place through the lead teachers' adaptation to normalcy, e.g., "the good teacher", "the successful careerist" or "the well-performing teacher" (cf. Hansson, 2014). Career as social representation means that the definition and the meaning ascribed to career depends on our systems of values, ideas and practices, which enables us to establish an order for orientating and govern ourselves within this order. Moreover, we assume that certain professional groups form professional representations within their community (Ratinaud & Lac, 2011). We regard these representations as preceding and unfolded in discourses in the teachers' expressions, which govern their ideas and their strategies for handling their mission.

Method

We have conducted our study in two different Swedish municipalities adopted with the objectives to the career reform and where teachers could apply for the position as first teacher. We collected data from twelve lead teachers working at different compulsory schools (pupils 7 – 16 years old) in Sweden, randomly selected within the two different municipalities. Data analysis was conducted based upon qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), through steps of content condensation. First, we read the transcripts using an inductive approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), to gain an overall understanding of the content. Secondly, we identified the meaning units and read the included expressions in order to search for similarities and differences between the lead teachers' expressions (narratives) on the main issues. We then condensed these meaning units into meaningful sentences and coded them with key-phrases or key words to capture the core content. The meaning units with the same or similar content were then brought together. To disclose the governmentalities, we formulated the following questions based upon Dean´s (2010) dimensions of governmentality:1) which problems do the lead teachers visualize in relation to the career reform? 2) what knowledge and expertise are important for them to handle the mission? 3) what are the different techniques teachers use to govern themselves and others when handling the mission as lead teacher and the mission of research-based education and proven experience? 4) which subject positions are offered and taken by the lead teachers? We aimed these questions at the content of the expressions. With support from Dean's (2010) four dimensions of governmentality, we abstracted the meaning units into four different governmentalities of how the lead teachers understand the lead-teacher mission and how they govern their mission with different strategies. These governmentalities are the result of our categorisation of expressions of

governmentalities, i.e., rationalities that teachers use to govern themselves as lead teachers, based on teachers' expressions, and not a categorisation of teachers. In order to explore what underlying assumptions of career that emerge within these governmentalities, we applied the analytical tool of career as a social and professional representation (Bergmo-Prvulovic, 2013; 2015) based on social representations theory (Moscovici, 2001). Career as social representation means that the definition and the meaning ascribed to career depends on our systems of values, ideas and practices, which enables us to establish an order for orientating and govern ourselves within this order.

Expected Outcomes

Our results show when it comes to the first research question, i.e. (1) The result of the analysis generated four different governmentalities teachers used to govern themselves when trying to handle the career reform in their practices: the school developer, the process manager, the subject specialist and the involuntary careerist. These four different governmentalities show the diversity of possible subject positions used to govern their conduct as lead teachers and the mission of research-based education and proven experience. The governmentalities either offers a position as "head teacher" in which management is of interest, where the lead teacher functions as an intermediator for research-based knowledge, or a position as one among equals. In relation to research-based education, the lead teacher's different governmentalities mainly connect to ideas of teachers as research consumer, with two exceptions: On the one hand the process manager offering a subject position as research producer and on the other hand the governmentality the involuntary careerist in which, engaging in research knowledge is "out of the question". Furthermore, when it comes to the second research question, i.e. (2) underlying representations of career relate to both hierarchical views, and to a perspective of exchange. In addition, two new representations of career emerged: career as a non-hierarchical or equal level position, and career as a sorting tool. The career as social/hierarchical climbing emerges as a dominant pattern to which each governmentality refers to, either as something acceptable, or not. Within the social representation of career as hierarchical, the teachers develop different strategies to cope with both colleagues' envy and their own desires for professional acknowledgment, recognition and rewards. The results indicate that lead teachers have found themselves caught in tensions between multifaceted meanings of career, research-based education, and personal and organizational pressures associated with the intentions of the career reform.

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