

Lärares lärande om elever

En sociologisk studie av yrkespraktik

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Abstract

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This is a study of how professional teachers' learning about students takes place in relation to changed requirements and new organisational preconditions. Based on an approach from the theory of professions with inspiration by Lipsky's concept of street level bureaucrats, it examines which strategies or methods teachers develop in order to cope with the changes. Important points of departure for the study are theories of organisation, professions and knowledge. The three phases that are considered to distinguish professional work – diagnosis, inference, treatment – organise the disposition of the work. The study is empirically based on interviews with primary school teachers, recorded development conversations, and teachers' written documentation for the latter. The teachers' own accounts of their learning process, as well as how they interpret what is experienced, form an interpretive and analytical foundation together with analysis of the development conversations.

Teachers' meetings with students usually occur with the entire class as a collective, which makes the teaching profession special. Other professionals normally meet their clients individually. At the same time, teachers are expected to individualise the instruction. The study shows how the organisation creates obstacles by intensifying the teachers' work. This diminishes the leeway for teachers to work professionally. A recurrent problem for the teachers' teaching is therefore lack of time. They have to find standardised forms such as the categorising of students.

The analyses demonstrate that there is great uncertainty about the measures' effects, and that teachers do not have enough knowledge. One develops new knowledge by trial and error, and the study points to a need for the teachers' teaching in and through its practice to be given room to develop. In this context the study discusses teachers' professional language as a hindrance to professional development. As the study also shows, leeway for conversations is a prerequisite for learning about students. This in turn influences the possibilities of creating good relations. The study discusses teachers' interest in relation-building from a power perspective and as an important tool for successful instruction. But teachers lack tools for handling certain students who challenge the teaching role, and the analysis reveals deficiencies in both the organisation in the profession.

According to the study's results, teachers do not have support for coping with the changes that were made in the schools. Especially the profession's social dimensions prove to be a weakness for newly educated teachers, who need continued learning in professional practice, but more experienced teachers also lack tools for being able to individualise the instruction. While the causes are numerous, the bottom line is a scarcity of resources – in terms of time, institutional measures for solving problems, and knowledge about how the problems should be solved.

KEYWORDS: teachers' learning, profession, street level bureaucrats, human service organizations, knowledge, diagnosis, inference, treatment, development conversations, categories.