Absence and presence of leadership?

The experience of early career teachers with school management with respect to their competence from initial teacher education

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Overview

• The RELEMAST project
• Research questions
• Norwegian Initial Teacher Education
• Who is the newly educated teacher?
  – After submitted the thesis
  – After one year in service
• The meaning of recognition in educational practice
• Discussion
RELEMAST – Relevant MA education for primary and lower secondary school teachers

• A longitudinal research project (spring 2015 – spring 2022)
  – Main focus:
    • illuminating professional development of newly educated teachers with a Master’s degree in teacher education and
    • sustainability of knowledge from Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in encountering the profession.

• Method:
  – In-depth interviews with graduating students from a national pilot programme in Initial Teacher Education at UiT the Arctic university of Norway (Tromsø), conducted shortly after submission of the MA Theses
    • 2015: 22 teachers, 2016: 12 teachers, 2017: 12 teachers
  – E-mail correspondence at new year (Christmas letter)
  – A survey to the whole cohort each year

Research questions

The RELEMAST study

• How do the ECTs with a Master’s degree experience transition from study to work?
• How do this experiences relate to the knowledge base developed in Initial Teacher Education?

This paper presentation

• How do the early career teachers experience the school management’s effort to include them and make use of their competence?
Norwegian teacher education 1 - 10

• From 2017, five years integrated MA programmes

• Organised as two clearly defined and differentiated teacher education programmes in a manner that ensures progression and coherence
  – School’s level 1-7 and 5-10

• R&D based

• Master’s thesis, at least 40 ECTS, subject didactics, education or education for special needs

• 110 days practicum placement over five years

• Curriculum describes: Knowledge, skills, general competence
  – Reference to EQF

• UiT piloted a five years Master’s programme from 2010.
Who is the professional teacher educated from UiT?

- **Integrated knowledge base**: education, subject and subject didactics, R&D competence and experiential knowledge
- 3 or 4 subjects
- **In-depth knowledge** and Master’s thesis 30 ECTS in subject didactic or education (total 120 ECTS)
- Teachers with skills and knowledge to educate their pupils, and analyse their learning
- Able to base their pedagogical decision-making on research and reflection, and develop their work as teachers
- **Research and develop-oriented professional teachers**

- “…the purpose is not to educate researchers or even teacher-researchers per se. The objective is to acquire an inquiring attitude to teaching. Thus, teachers are able to observe, analyse and develop their work” (Toom et al., 2010, p. 339).
How do the teachers view themselves?

• The students displayed confidence in their research- and development-based (R&D) knowledge from ITE.
• The Master’s thesis serve to nurture the students’ development of deep subject didactic knowledge, professional autonomy and interpersonal skills.
  • a strong focus on R&D competence
  • considered this competence relevant for teaching and perceived the work with the Master’s thesis as meaningful according both to content and the development of research skills
  • feeling proud of their own work.
• Apart from the practicum placement, the students identified the Master’s thesis as the most important element in developing teacher identity.
Proud but insecure

• The students are proud to have completed a Master's degree. The thesis has given them in-depth knowledge about a topic that is relevant to their work.
• It has provided a professional confidence that they find meaningful for the work in schools. One of them said:

  I think I will be a better teacher with a Master's degree. I have insight into a field I did not know anything about earlier. I like to think that I can constantly really change and improve teaching and the system!

• The students are insecure about the encounter with future working life
  – How will my competence be perceived by colleagues in school?
– after one year in service (spring 2016)

• Typical new teachers
  – Dedicated to their subjects and their students, want to demonstrate that they can manage, taking on too much, stressed, parents are scary
  – Self-confident
  – Subject, subject didactics, in-depth knowledge
    • ECT7: I think it is about us who are new, we dare to try out new things. We are not locked into any tradition, which can be the case for those who have some years of employment. Maybe we are more confident in our subjects?
  – Active, taking initiative, responsible, collaborative

• Included
  – Most of the teachers have knowledge about the school’s developmental work, included socially - among the colleagues, several say they experience a sharing culture
– after one year in service (spring 2016)

• The content of the Master’s thesis
  – Less focused, the ECTs experience is that it represents too specific knowledge
    • “It is so specific, and since I do not teach that subject… I have not used it”.

• Several do not teach in their main subjects
  – Most of them do also teach in subjects where they have no competence from ITE
    • “I do not feel that I have control … I can see that my experienced colleagues work in different ways that I do… I cannot understand that it is possible to be so good as they are” (Teacher 5-10, teaching Norwegian as second language)
    • “I teach seven subjects. It is too much. I was promised the function as a resource in science, but feel it was a carrot to get me here” (Teacher 5-10, teaching in primary school)

• Strong focus on the students’ needs. Pay attention to and are aware of students with special needs. Urge for necessary professional support

• Huge variations in how the school leaders pay attention to the newcomers
Two different realms for the new teachers

There are a lot of locked doors over there, among the school leaders

New teacher, 26 years old

It is a closeness between the colleagues and the school leaders, we are one unit

New teacher, 25 years old
New teachers’ experiences of the school management’s effort to

- include the new teachers and communicate with them
- make use of their competence
- pay attention to their in-depth knowledge represented by their Master’s thesis

- Two teachers’ experiences of how their work is arranged by the school’s management
Inclusion and communication

Teacher A

• The communication with the middle leader is fine, but her office is located in another part of the building (talk about the distance)... If I need to talk with the head master, I have no difficulties with contacting her.

• I have no mentor. My closest colleague have in many ways had a mentoring function. I can ask her about everything.

Teacher B

• I am drinking coffee with the head master daily. Her office is close to mine... The school’s management is present. I have been in several meetings with the head master and talked... To know that they are satisfied with my work is fabulous.

• The school’s management has made a strong arrangement around the teachers’ teamwork related to both subjects, school development, and the students’ needs.

• I have a mentor, half an hour a week. It has not been used that much. We work close in different subjects so the mentoring comes natural when we work together.
Making use of their competence
(in-depth subject and didactic knowledge, R&D)

Teacher A. (Math, Science and Sport)
• Math is my main subject. But I only teach special education in math (4 h). We are four teachers with math and therefor some of us had to step aside. I do not fance special education, but it has been OK. “My students” are so fine, but I do miss to teach math.
• I am the sport teacher here… I want more competence in sport, maybe a new master study? My driving force has moved to sport…
• I teach in religion. I have no competence and the textbook is awful. I find it difficult and the students are recognising it and find it dull.

Teacher B. (Math, English and Sport)
• The school has arranged the division of subjects according to my background from the teacher education.
• I had to teach religion. But it has been really good and I hope to study it further one day…
• I was honored to be asked to take part in the team working with the local curriculum in English. It is not obvious that a novice is included in developmental work as this where experiences is demanded. I am sure that it is reasoned in my educational background…
Master’s thesis

Teacher A
I: Have the headmaster read your Master’s theses? A: I do not know, I had to bring it when the leader of the Liberal Party visited the school. She wanted to meet us new “master teachers” and then we had to show her our thesis.”

Teacher B
My colleagues in the math team have read my thesis.
The meaning of recognition in educational practice

• Two circles of recognition. (Huttunen & Heikkinen, 2004)
  – The positive circle is developed through reciprocal recognition, which means that the persons respect each other’s skills and abilities.
  – The negative circle means that the persons downplay each other. The latter proves difficult for new teachers.

• Recognition covers ingredients as listening, understanding, acceptance, tolerance, acknowledgement and openness. “These habits overlap, are integrated, are each others premises and refer to each other, in other words: They are dialectic” (Løvlie Schibbye 2009, p. 263).
Discussion: How do the early career teachers experience the school management’s effort to include them and make use of their competence?

- The knowledge base from the teacher education programme and the ideas the teachers have about their own competence is not recognised
  - Special when it comes to their in-depth knowledge, their main subject and the Master’s thesis.
    - They are not assessed as resources for the school
    - There are little understanding for their need for accept of their subject competence according to their professional learning and development
  - When it comes to their R&D-competence
    - The new teachers are occupied with establishing themselves as teachers, and most of them say that they lack the energy to engage in developmental work and to update themselves on research

They are recognised as employees, but not as professionals!
References


Interview contexts

The first interview at the end of ITE (2015, 2016, 2017)
- the students have submitted their MA thesis
- they do not know the exam results
- in an uncertain situation
  - Most of them have applied for work. Some have got an employment contract, others have been through one or more job interviews, some have either been to interviews or been contacted by a work-place
- Most of the students are interviewed by their former university teacher

The following interviews
- in May or June after one, two, three and five years of employment
- primarily at the workplace (they are spread from south to north!)
- If possible - the teachers are interviewed by the same interviewer through the whole study

Methodical challenges
Stranger relationships

- ...the stranger may wish merely to visit the host community, remaining an outsider throughout his visit; or he may desire residence in the host community without becoming assimilated into it – to be in the group but not of it; or he may aspire to gain membership as a fully integrated participant in the host community (Levine 1977: 22,23).

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<th>Host’s response to stranger</th>
<th>Stranger’s interest in host community</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Visit</td>
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<td>Compulsive Friendliness</td>
<td>Guest</td>
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<td>Compulsive Antagonism</td>
<td>Intruder</td>
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What makes the autonomous professional or what should be the teachers' knowledge base?

- **The practice-theory-model.**
  Practice an independent epistemological category (Løvli 1973)

- **The practical knowledge regime**
  Combining praxis (phronesis) and techne as the basis that pedagogy should be built on, rather than on traditional scientific theory - empirism.

- **Problems with theoretical justification as guideline to practice**
  - scientific results are preliminary
  - risk of categorical mistakes - technification of teaching

- **Research based teacher education** (or R&D-based)
  - Science a tool that enables practitioners to obtain critical distance and liberate themselves for the inadequacies of traditions (Dewey)
  - To analyze and change systematically
  - Teacher from consumers of research based knowledge to autonomous learning professionals and knowledge producers. Also of research based knowledge