

Summary

Next to the pupils, the teachers must be considered the most important group in the school. Without a skilled and enthusiastic cadre of teachers, the school cannot function well. This report seeks to answer the question how the last 20 years of school reforms has affected the teachers' possibilities to perform professionally. These reforms is the municipalisation of the employment of teachers and the decentralisation of the education system in the years 1989-1990, the introduction of management by objectives in schools in the beginning of the 1990's, changes in the forms and content of work primarily during the 1990's, the reforms of the teacher's education together with the introduction of independent schools and school competition. Moreover, the competition between different professional groups in the education system is also treated despite the fact that it is not a reform but none the less important in order to understand the development of the teacher's profession.

Teachers are a professional occupation or at least an occupation that has had professional ambitions. The professionals are signified by common occupational norms, high internal demands for quality, a common educational background and high responsibility. In order for an occupation to function professionally a high degree of influence over working conditions is needed. In other words professionals need a certain autonomy. The first chapter contains a discussion of professionalism in occupations based on literature. The reversal of the process of professionalization, the deprofessionalisation of an occupation, is also possible. The report then discusses the educational reforms against this background.

Decentralisation

In the years of 1989 to 1990 the responsibility of the employment of the teachers was decentralised to the municipalities. This was done despite a strong resistance from a large part of the teaching corps. Especially the secondary school and the upper secondary school teachers regarded the reform as an attempt to circumscribe their working conditions and as a threat to the profession. To other teacher categories, without a strong professional identity, the reform did not pose the same threat and the employer's wage compensation became more of an attraction. Fears that differences between schools and municipalities would arise, became the strongest argument against the municipalisation.

Very little research has been done regarding the effects of the municipalisation. Some research has indicated that school segregation has increased, but the reasons for this has been debated. However, it is obvious that the working conditions for teachers have changed over the last 20 years, in the direction of a more controlled and less autonomous profession. Even if the municipalisation in itself cannot be blamed for this, it is clear that it marked the beginning of a series of reforms that in one way or another has spelled less professional autonomy for the teachers. The municipalisation reform was also important because it clearly demonstrated to the teachers that further resistance was futile. Despite the fact that all teachers initially were against the reform and anticipated its ill effects, they did not succeed in affecting the reform ambitions of the government.

Management by objectives

Management by objectives was early introduced in Sweden and the education sector was one of the first areas reformed. The ideas behind the reform were imported from the United States and Great Britain and similar reforms were introduced all over the OECD area at roughly the same time. However, the Swedish reform was introduced early and, contrary to for example the British case, was introduced without political struggle. Another reason behind the reform was the criticism against bureaucracy that had been voiced during the 1970's. A major governmental commission on school's internal work, the SIA commission, had pointed towards

decentralisation and to the fact that primary education had failed in one of its main tasks: to achieve social equality. Another reason behind the introduction of management by objectives in education was “progressivism”, an educational ideology that was strong at the time Progressivism originated from the thoughts of John Dewey and denied the value of knowledge for its own sake. All knowledge had to have a purpose. That was a message that seemed to fit management by objectives perfectly.

The municipalisation had cleared the way for the decentralisation that followed in 1990, where the new principal (the municipality) took the full responsibility for schools, education and employment of teachers. The state agency of education (Skolöverstyrelsen) was closed down and a new agency (Skolverket) was built up from scratch. The new agency was much smaller and inexperienced. In order to secure that government intentions were followed, the architect of the reform, Ulf P. Lundgren, was appointed director general. Thus, the creed of the new agency was to refrain from interference in the municipalities’ management of the schools. The curricula that were introduced in the following years, Lpo 94 (primary and secondary school) and Lpf 94 (upper secondary school), were built on management by objectives. The notions ‘objectives to achieve’ and ‘objectives to attain’ were completely new to teachers and school leaders alike. In a recently published official government report the author regarded ‘the new elements in the system of objectives as revolutionary, but also as a theoretical construction of which no practical experience previously existed’ (SOU 2007:28, p 75).

The reform was meant to create more freedom to form education on the local level. It is however doubtful if the reform has had that effect. From a perspective of teacher’s professionalism it is more likely that a new actor on the stage, the municipality, absorbed much of the ‘power space’ left by the state. Another problem with the reform was that the new governance documents were unclear and emphasized transmission of values instead of transmission of knowledge. This has meant an increased risk that grades will mirror student’s values rather than their knowledge, that local variations between schools will increase beyond what the law allows for and that the priority of knowledge transmission will decrease because of lack of strong support in the documents.

The content and forms of work

All actors in the field of education demand professional teachers. However, the only measure of professionalism that is emphasized in the debate is the academic exam and the need to exclude non-qualified teachers. The state's interest in strengthening the teaching profession thus focuses on the education and on the question of authorized and non-authorized teachers. But these are only external criteria, which importance are relatively simple for all parties to agree upon. The influence over the content and forms of work is a much more important criterion of professionalism. The teachers' own influence over their work has diminished over the period covered by this study.

The study has shown that state documents emphasizes professional freedom for teachers but this does not reflect what is actually happening. The new freedom has meant that the state has abandoned the ambition to regulate the knowledge content of education and handed this responsibility over to the local actors. On the other hand decentralisation and management reforms have meant increased and more detailed regulations of teacher's working hours and working conditions. Regulations of working hours that binds teachers to their workplace, pay for performance wages, team work, parents influence and the introduction of a school voucher system are all changes in teachers working conditions that have occurred after 1990. Each and every one of these changes mean new working tasks and that focus is moved from teaching to non-teaching working tasks. In this sense the reforms have affected teacher professionalism negatively.

The report has shown how studies both in Sweden and abroad has demonstrated that teachers are dissatisfied with changes in working conditions at the same time as they regard their work as important and meaningful. There is a contradiction between the demands for a long education and exclusion of non-qualified teachers on one hand, and employer demands for stricter control over teachers work on the other. There is no reason to assume that stricter control leads to better results. On the contrary the opposite is more likely, as stricter employer control allows less room for professional influence over the work and professional autonomy.

Teachers' education and recruitment

For a long time the education of teachers has been a tool for school reforms and it has been a trend towards replacing “traditional” subjects with general educational skills. Knowledge of how to teach has been regarded as more important than what is taught. Another development has been to achieve one single teacher’s exam and thereby diminish differences between different teacher categories. The levelling of differences between different teacher categories has favoured, at least in the short run, those teaching at lower levels in the school system which traditionally has had lower wages and a shorter education. However, the levelling of teacher categories has meant that those teaching on higher levels have lost in terms of status, and control over working conditions rather than that those working lower levels have gained. Employers have also endorsed this development as the development of municipal labour markets for teachers would be much facilitated if all teachers are interchangeable. An emphasis on general educational skills rather than subject specialisation has promoted this development. The new teachers’ education of 2001 may have been the peak of the development into one single teacher category.

An official state commission proposed (in SOU 1999:63) the new teacher’s education that was introduced in 2001. According to the commission, the teacher’s role had changed from “the transmission of information” to “the critical evaluation of information both the information in itself as well as how children, youth and adult students convert this information to knowledge”. The need for traditional subject knowledge was not emphasised. Rather educational skills equal for all teachers was considered most important. Teacher students should be able to specialise freely and one single teachers’ exam was introduced for all, regardless of specialisation. The commission has recently been criticized as having been normative and ideologically biased.

The new teacher’s education, introduced in 2001, can be considered as an attempt to change the teacher. The commission regarded the teacher’s education as a tool for the state’s governance of education. The problem was that the requested changes in the teaching role were not in accordance with a professional development. The authors regarded the teachers’ authority as a problem and the traditional subject specialisation was regarded more as a problem than an asset. In 2007 a new commission in the

teacher's education, HUT 07, was launched which published its results in December 2008. This commission signals a break with earlier attempts to break up traditional teacher professionalism through reforms of teacher's education.

Independent schools

Independent schools represents a reform strategy that we can call "choice". The idea is that by giving parents and pupils an opportunity to choose between different school alternatives, schools are compelled to compete with each other on a market. To the non-socialist politicians this strategy has meant a possibility to create private alternatives to public schools. It seems as if the choice strategy has appealed to both left and right as far as competition between public schools is concerned, while there is a clear disagreement about how much space there should be for private companies in the education system.

The strategy of choice creates a number of challenges for teachers, some of which threatens their professional autonomy. One such challenge is that independent schools to a much higher extent employ formally non-qualified teachers. This could be a consequence of the fact that it is difficult to find formally qualified teachers that share the educational or religious ideology of the school, but there are indications that the problem is wider than that. Other explanations is that school leaders are not familiar with the regulations concerning formal qualifications and that formally non-qualified teachers cost less to employ and is easier to manage. Working conditions are also different in independent schools, which means a wider variation in teacher working conditions, which in turn creates uncertainties over teacher identity. Proponents of the choice strategy has claimed that schools also creates choices for teachers to choose a school that fits their own preferences for education style best or that pays the best wages. This is probably true to some extent, but at the same time several reports has pointed out that a possibility to choose between different schools also create incentives for schools to promote what is possible to sell, rather than what is desirable from a professional and educational point of view.

A problem that has increased during recent years is that the more competition between schools increases, the more problematic grading becomes. The number of students with highest possible grade in all subjects has increased 28 times over the past ten years. This increase occurs everywhere, but to a considerably higher extent in the independent schools. This is a clear indication that some schools use high grades as a competition strategy. This development is very dangerous and the consequences reach beyond the education system in itself. It means that the role of the school as a producer of formal merits are put into question. If one can no longer trust that school grades are compatible, grades will lose their role of formal merits. This in turn means that schools will lose their societal role as authorities and the teachers their roles as public servants. Schools will just be another service in a market where the consumer will get what he pays for. No matter whether this problem is handled or not it poses a severe threat to teacher's professionalism. Either because teachers become service providers that sell grades that doesn't mean much anymore or because severe regulations is imposed on gradesetting, in terms of external control systems that further diminishes teachers' professional autonomy.

Competition between professional groups in schools

If we, as in this report, apply a perspective of professionalism on the development of teacher working conditions during the last twenty years, we can see a dramatic change. Other occupational groups have established themselves in schools, some of which display signs of professionalisation. Such groups are school principals, which to a great extent have abandoned their background in education and rely on other skills and educational experts from the universities or teachers' colleges, which are often called upon when expertise is needed. There has also been competition between different categories of teachers. This means that the teacher's professional space has diminished when other groups have more successfully asserted their professional values in schools or in the administration of education. Sometimes other groups' values does not differ much from those of the teachers and sometimes they are shared by some of the teachers, but it is often clear that conflicts in schools and the teachers' diminishing influence over education are a result of such value conflicts. The

ultimate consequence is that it is not the professional values of teachers that govern the development of schools. Hence, knowledge transmission becomes secondary to what other groups find important.

Professional teachers in the future

It is possible to distinguish between two types of reforms that have had entirely different purposes and origins; we can call them reform ideologies. Often they have worked independently of each other but sometimes they have reinforced or supported each other. The first reform type has had the goal to change the teacher. It has originated from the scepticism of the educational pragmatism against knowledge for its own sake and sought to replace subject knowledge in schools with applicable knowledge and caring. The other reform type has not targeted schools and education in particular but is a general reform trend in the public sector. Its aim is to create efficiency and governability and seeks to replace professional self control with management. Work should be made “governable” by externally managers imported from other fields. In the literature this trend is commonly called “New Public Management”. These two reform movements have in common low respect for professional knowledge, experience and values.

The preoccupation of the state for teacher professionalism is not about allowing the profession to develop internal norms and values or about trusting teacher’s judgement and skills but instead about redefining the role of the teacher. It is true that the teacher ideally should be formally qualified through exams, something that is necessary for the legitimacy of the strategy, but it is not the values of the professionals that are supposed to govern work. That should be done by management, the empowerment of school leadership, choice for “customers”, competition between schools, standardisation, benchmarking and evaluation. All these processes moves focus from the main purpose of the schools (education) to different legitimising processes for school leadership, municipal administration and state.

The report does not actually suggest any course of action. That would require a much more detailed study of each and every field which has been touched upon in this paper. However, it is well worth mentioning that professionalism very well can function as a

form of governance for the public sector. Governance through professions means to create or keep a substantial space or autonomy for professionals to do their work and uphold the norms that is required for a good work. Moreover, the report supports the findings of Bertilsson (et al.) in Högskoleverket (2009), i.e. the crucial need to change recruitment to the teacher's education. If the ambitious students cannot be brought back to the teachers' colleges, the preconditions for teacher's profession will simply be missing in the future. A third observation is that a comparative study between the development of the teacher's profession in Sweden and Finland would be very interesting and could possibly contribute to our knowledge of the need for a professional role for the teacher. Finland is doing much better than Sweden in different international education comparisons and the popular explanation for that is that the education system in Finland has not been reformed to the same extent as in Sweden.