Developing teacher educator competence
How learning and competence development interact in the work of interpreting curricula, assessment and grading

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Abstract
Curricula are a part of the control apparatus of education policy in Sweden. Studies have shown that curricula state various aims and are written in various ways. These ways form the basis for the work of assessment. This paper concerns how learning and teacher educator competence development interact in the work of interpreting curricula, assessment and grading. This is a description of a working method whereby the approach to organising teaching is based on the knowledge the student is expected to have attained by the end of each course.

Keywords: competence development, curricula, assessment, grading

Introduction
In January 2005, the Division of Pedagogy and Social Change at the Stockholm Institute of Education was given the task of conducting a new 20-credit course, Perspectives of Education Science, as part of the General Education Area within the Teacher Education programme. A team of ten teachers with different specialisations was formed. Conditions were such that the curriculum, which was entirely new, was to be interpreted, assignments developed and course literature read at the same time as the course was being offered to 250 students. There was no time for preparation. It soon became evident that the teaching team had to delimit its ambitions for the course; the team therefore decided to focus on knowledge content and grading and assessment. The team enlisted the aid of a researcher from the institute’s Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education to assist the teachers in their work with grading and assessment. The institute’s four faculty committees (Education, Curriculum Studies, Childhood and Youth Sciences and Special Education), which are responsible for course content, were asked to lead competence-development seminars for the teaching team. We will describe a working method whereby the approach to organising teaching is based on the knowledge the student is expected to have attained by the end of each course block, and how we, via various criteria and indicators, make that knowledge evident for the teachers. We also intend to demonstrate how assignments can be formulated in a way that enables the student to present his or her knowledge so that it can be assessed by the teacher. We provide concrete examples of both the assessment matrix and our assessment work.

The curriculum as a control instrument
Since the early-1990s, Sweden has had a goal and result-oriented education system and curricula are a part of the control apparatus of education policy. The curriculum is perhaps the most concrete of all the control documents. Studies at the Stockholm Institute of Education

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have shown that curricula state various aims and are written in one of the following three ways:

- Some curricula describe what the teacher is to do/teach.
- Others describe what the student is to do.
- The third way describes what the student must learn, in terms of the abilities/skills she or he is expected to develop.

The various ways of describing course aims form the basis for the work of assessment, and the relation between aim and assessment varies accordingly.

- In the case of the first, only the teacher can be assessed in terms of the aims.
- In the second, assessment can only be made in relation to whether the students have done what has been expected of them.
- In the third case, the teacher assesses whether the student has developed the abilities/skills described in the aims of the course.

In the curriculum for the course described herein, the aims were formulated in terms of abilities/skills.

The researcher’s task was to provide a preliminary interpretation of the curriculum’s various course blocks and to give the teaching team a proposal for examination and an assessment matrix. Prior to each meeting of the teaching team, based on the described course aims, the researcher prepared a curriculum interpretation with a focus on interpreting which abilities the students were expected to develop within the framework of the course. This interpretation was then reviewed and discussed by the teaching team.

Finally, the researcher was required to design an assessment matrix for use as a basis for planning, formulation of examination tasks and as an aid to grading. The assessment matrix was to contain several indicators in accordance with the following requirements. The indicators were to be:

- assessable
- central with respect to the ability in question
- sufficient in number to provide an adequate indication, though not so many in number as to be unmanageable

**The teaching team’s work process:**

1. **Experiences, identify development areas**
2. **formal and informal work and reflection**
3. **Theories, others’ experiences and research**
4. **Lessons we learn, conclusions we draw, formulate examination task**
5. **Realisation, grading and assessment, development**
6. **freedom-confinement trust-anxiety challenge-indifference**
Learning as a part of developing the teacher educator’s competence

In this section, we wish to shed light on the question as to how learning interacts with competence development, and on the implications of competence development for the development of the profession. By competence, we mean the teacher’s ability to perform teaching in a qualitatively different way. Sandberg & Targama clearly distinguish between the concepts competence reinforcement and competence renewal. Reinforcement refers to the development of the knowledge, abilities/skills and self-confidence of an individual within the framework of previously established understanding of the reality that is relevant in a particular context. Renewal of competence denotes the process by which an individual or a group reassesses and changes the prevailing understanding. This distinction between reinforcement and renewal is, according to the authors, central to all discourse on competence development, and it points to a lack of insight into the fact that competence renewal presupposes social processes.

Targama & Sandberg offer a classification that is based on the two dimensions described above and on their reasoning surrounding competence renewal and competence reinforcement, constructing a four-field model in which four different processes for developing knowledge/proficiency are distinguished.

Fig. 2. Four processes for developing knowledge/proficiency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Development within the framework of existing understanding</th>
<th>emphasis on explicit learning</th>
<th>emphasis on implicit learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>competence reinforcement</td>
<td>practice development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>within the framework of</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>prevailing culture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Change in understanding</td>
<td>competence renewal</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cultural change</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Most traditional, planned, in-service training belongs to the category competence reinforcement. The teaching team’s work is an example of activities that may be categorised as competence renewal. During the working process, the emphasis has been (and is) on an approach that stimulates critical inquiry and reflection, which in turn lead to changes in the teacher educator’s understanding. During the course of work, practice development has occurred and the beginnings of a cultural change have come about. Practice development includes processes whereby individuals assume a behaviour as a result of their own experiences and interaction with others. The individual attempts to understand and to act “correctly”, and the result is a practical proficiency that is in line with the prevailing collective competence. Normally, this practical proficiency is not verbally expressed. For

example, this may have to do with the socialisation process whereby a new group member, while establishing herself/himself in a collective work situation, assumes the behavioural patterns and modes of thinking that prevail within the group. The teaching team’s work has resulted in an ongoing cultural change within the division. This category includes the processes whereby the members of an organisation interpret and change the meaning of the work they are engaged in, as well as the significance of concepts, symbols and actions. This entails a change in understanding as a consequence of implicit learning and takes place at the same time at both the individual and collective levels. This may be a spontaneous process, but also a process that is stimulated by conscious efforts on the part of management to create conditions for cultural change. In our case, it was a combination of these processes.

A concrete example of practice development and the start of a cultural change

Figure 3. The interrelation of knowledge content, formulated curriculum aims and teachers’ assessment work.

The teaching team started by focusing on two development areas: knowledge content, and grading and assessment, as a distinct way of referring back to the formulated curriculum aims. Questions of importance for realisation of the course and for consistency were addressed and joint assignments were formulated.

The examination assignment was developed by the teaching team. It was discussed and revised. A proposal for an assessment matrix was developed. The matrix was adjusted via e-mail discussion. The teachers stressed that the matrix would guide the work of assessment.

Figure 4. Assessment matrix.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment refers to</th>
<th>Criteria for Failure</th>
<th>Criteria for Pass</th>
<th>Criteria for Pass with Distinction</th>
<th>Remarks to the student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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Initially, much of the work involved application of the assessment matrix. The teaching team agreed that, for reasons of consistency, teachers would not assess/grade their own groups’ examinations.

**Presentation of one teacher’s assessment work**
The teacher used the assessment matrix partly to comment on the students’ work and partly to draw the line between Fail and Pass and between Pass and Pass with Distinction. The abilities/skills which the students were expected to demonstrate in the text were the abilities to analyse and problematise. In this process, students were required to demonstrate their skill in applying various theoretical concepts.

The teacher began by defining, for herself, what it means to analyse, problematise and apply theoretical concepts.

**Analysis**
An analysis can be described as a thorough examination of something; in this case, using central concepts as tools. It involves explaining and interpreting the meaning of the concept and how it is used and clarifying the meaning of the concepts and terms that are included in the object of problematisation.

**Problematisation**
To examine something from different perspectives. How would X interpret the phenomenon that I am looking at and describing? X could be a theorist, e.g., Bourdieu or Foucault, or even a student, a parent or a colleague.

**Concepts**
Words embodied by a theory; a conceptual framework. The concepts acquire their meaning in relation to other concepts used in the theory. The words of everyday discourse often carry different meanings when they are used as theoretical concepts. Subsequently, remarks were formulated based on the formulations in the matrix and the definitions of the abilities/skills that were gauged by the indicators.

**The text is assigned a grade of Fail and must be revised**
The student uses concepts and aspects from the quality assessment but does not yet link them in an analysis. An analysis requires that the concepts applied are both defined and interpreted with an aim to clarifying the values theme. The concepts used must be those used in the course literature.

In the problematisation, the student does not yet use concepts to discuss conflicts and possibilities. School is not treated as a general institution, which means that the student describes an individual school but does not then problematise the phenomena that are described and draw conclusions that are applicable at an overall level. Problematisation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator 1</th>
<th>Level description</th>
<th>Level description</th>
<th>Level description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Indicator 2</td>
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<td>Indicator 3</td>
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</table>
entails investigation of something, e.g., school as an institution, from various perspectives; for example, first from a Bourdieu perspective, and then from a Foucault perspective.

The text is assigned a grade of Pass

Concepts from the course are used as tools to elucidate the values theme. The concepts are defined, placed in a context and applied in a simple analysis. The problematisation is done by giving clear examples of conflicts and possibilities in today’s school as an institution, which means that the student’s own experience has been applied in a larger context. In the problematisation, or investigation, several different perspectives considered in the course have been adopted; e.g., “Can I view these phenomena in any other way than in the way I have described?” “If I use Bourdieu’s concepts, how do I then understand school as an institution?”

The text is assigned a grade of Pass with Distinction

The analysis of the values theme is both broad and in-depth, which means that the concepts have been given meaning in relation to other concepts within the same theory. The interpretation is done on the basis of the chosen values theme and is independent, nuanced and critical.

The problematisation – in this case, regarding school, as an institution, from various perspectives – is complex and includes several perspectives which are thoroughly analysed. The problematisation demonstrates that the student is able to identify conflicts and possibilities that are subtle and contradictory.

Thereafter, work involved creating a template for remarks to students. In the presentation cited here, an authentic example of a text with a failure grade is given and assessment of the text is described (see Appendices 1 and 2). The formulations used were largely of a standard character, since they reiterated the matrix and the pre-defined indicators.

The authentic text in Appendix 1 demonstrates how a student who has not yet developed the analytic ability approaches a task that requires this ability. The student makes a serious attempt to tackle the assignment. The compulsory literature is cited and the student places these excerpts in context and lets them speak for themselves. Subsequently, the text is descriptive and the student relates how the school works with conflict resolution and that this work is grounded in the school’s plan of action. The student uses the headline “Analysis” and seems to use the cited excerpts as a means of supporting this heading. The text is assigned a grade of Fail.

Concluding remarks on the teacher’s work

The requirements specified for the indicators are that they must be assessable, they must state the ability/skill being assessed, and they must be sufficient in number as to enable conclusions to be drawn about the degree to which the student has developed the ability in question. The indicators have been established by the teaching team; the criteria, on the other hand, are the discernable attributes evidenced by the students’ texts. The point of departure for assessment

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is analytical. The advantage of an analytical approach is that it enables assessment of the different phases of a student’s work, such as understanding, analysis and reflection, and that it is possible to place varying degrees of emphasis on the different phases of problem solving. Some of the benefits are lost, however, if the intention is to assign numerical grades for the levels achieved, since qualitative aspects are then of secondary importance to qualitative ones. Finally, the examination task must be a test of the student’s ability to work independently, to substantiate arguments and to draw conclusions.

**Cultural change or practice development?**

The work process we have described is an ongoing endeavour, and we regard our approach to organising teaching and reflection surrounding grading and assessment as an ongoing process of change. This has meant that we have to a degree re-interpreted our task as teachers and are in the midst of what Sandberg & Targama refer to as cultural change. Since the make-up of the teaching team changes from term to term, this also entails, in some respects, practice development within the framework of a prevailing understanding.

We wish to conclude with a reference to Vygotsky and to consider various ways of regarding the interplay of learning and development. According to Vygotsky, the interaction between learning and development can be explained in light of three main theoretical positions. The first position has to do with the assumption that development is independent of learning. Here, learning is considered a purely external process which is not an active part of development and is in no way involved in the development process. Instead, this position offers a view to successful development as a way of using learning to change course, to advance in a new direction. The second position equates learning with development and has its origins in a range of theories, all of which stem from the concept of reflection. From this perspective, development has to do with controlling the quality and depth of reflection. Roughly speaking, this means that the learning process and the development process are inseparable. The third theoretical position concerning the interplay of learning and development attempts to bridge the gap between the two previous theories by simply combining them. This suggests a whole new way of comprehending these processes. Learning and development take place concurrently, but are subsequently referred to as distinct phenomena: learning and development. During the process, they are interdependent and in continuous interaction with each other.

**References**


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8 Ibid s. 82

Other literature


Appendix 1

Example text

Analysis
There are many aspects of activities at XX School which I would like to look at more closely, but I have chosen to consider, in detail, resolution of all of the conflicts that can arise in the school.

“School is an institution with a long history. School has become the largest social institution, and its expansion has given us an institution whose task is to prepare children and youths for life in society [...] It is an institution whose activities are intended to influence, and provide good conditions for, learning.” (Lindensjö &Lundgren p. 13)

At XX School, they work a lot with conflict resolution, especially in pre-school to grade 3. They work with something called African dilemma stories, whereby pupils are trained to take a position on issues that are universal and concern the world around them, and to discuss the consequences of their actions. They also work with a project known as Charlie, in which all teachers and pedagogues receive instruction. The aim of this project is for children to practice managing and expressing their emotions. Via these Charlie dialogues, the children learn to understand, make decisions and manage their anger and ultimately, to resolve conflicts. These stories and dialogues are followed up continuously. (plan of action for XX School)
## Appendix 2

**Date:**

Your use of an authentic case in this type of work is very constructive. This helps to make your reasoning clear to the reader, and it helps you, as a writer, to concretise concepts and theories. You use concepts and aspects from the quality assessment but do not yet link them in an analysis. An analysis requires that the concepts applied are both defined and interpreted with an aim to clarifying the values theme. You support your text with excerpts from the literature, but these are detached from their original context and do not substantiate your arguments. That they are detached means that one or several sentences are placed in another context without any clarification of the original context in which they were used. (Some refer to this as cutting and pasting.)

A problematisation is lacking.

For a grade of Pass, this must be developed.

Concepts from the course are to be used as tools to elucidate the values theme. The concepts are to be defined, placed in a context and applied in a simple analysis. The problematisation must be done by giving clear examples of conflicts and possibilities in today’s school as an institution, which means that the student’s own experience has to be applied in a larger context. In the problematisation, or investigation, school as an institution must be studied from different perspectives. As a point of departure for the problematisation, the question “Can I regard these phenomena in another way?” may be posed. “If I apply Bourdieu’s concepts, how do I then understand school as an institution?”, “How would Foucault interpret what I describe?”

### Criteria for grading:

**For a grade of Pass:**
- all examination tasks must be completed according to instructions given and answers must include substantiated arguments and reflections
- the student must demonstrate that she/he can distinguish different theoretical perspectives and be able to use fundamental concepts in a way that is commensurate with each perspective

**For a grade of Pass with Distinction:**
- using theoretical tools (concepts) from the course, the student must demonstrate critical acumen and an ability to analyse a problem with subtlety and at depth