Working together at eye-to-eye level and on equal terms

NQTs:- From teacher education to teaching position in schools: responsibilities for academics and practitioners

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Introduction

This article presents three participant-oriented research and development projects: Induction I: Support to newly qualified teachers (NQTs), Induction II: Support to newly qualified teachers by mentoring, and Induction III “From education to the workplace”. The projects deal with NQTs and their first period at work in schools. The projects are also about how the municipalities support the NQTs by creating different introduction or induction programmes based on the NQTs’ initial teacher education programme and on their experiences in local schools. The three projects are participant-oriented and praxis-related Research and Development Projects. The projects have been carried out in a research and development network with participants from nine municipalities in the Gävleborg region, from the University of Gävle and from the two main Swedish Teacher Unions. The projects are characterized by very close cooperation, at eye-to-eye level and on equal terms and in very respectful and rewarding collaboration.

The basis for the participatory research and development project is that practitioners and researchers are working closely together in every phase of the research process. For example, the research questions have not been formulated at the university only by the researchers as they used to be. They have been formulated out of real problems in the municipalities with regards to NQTs and in close cooperation between the municipality and the university. The outcomes of the three projects have contributed to increase the knowledge of NQTs and their professional development, to local school development and to development of the teacher education programme. In the project we can identify the initial teacher education phase, the induction phase and the phase of lifelong learning in professional development.

The projects deal with the university’s third mission statement, which means cooperation with the community outside the university. The aim is to describe, analyze and discuss three participant-oriented research projects, and try to find what is special about the cooperation model carried out. The results have been good and the discussion will focus on what might be the reasons for that. I will try to identify important factors for a successful project in close cooperation between the teacher education programme at the university, the induction phase as a part of the life long professional learning in the municipalities and

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1 Induction is the first period at work for NQTs and it is an Anglo-Saxon term for the first period at work. The concept can be used with different meanings according to national variations in relation to the initial Teacher Education, content and form. Sometimes the concept is used for a period of time or for a support system or even a learning process (see for instance Britton, 2003; Blair-Larsen, 1992). Blair-Larsen (1992) suggests that: "Teacher induction is defined as the period of transition from student to professional when beginning teachers are offered supervision and support as they adjust to their new role" (Blair-Larsen, 1992, s.1)
research at the university. First I will describe the background of the three Induction projects (I-III) in the perspective of earlier research and development, national and international. The main focus of the projects is, as mentioned above, the arena for cooperation between the municipalities and the university. The Induction projects will be presented with the project model and the main method for data collection. There will also be a discussion on what is so special about research close to praxis and with participant-oriented projects. Finally there will be a discussion on what factors promote success and regional development.

**Background**

According to the government, the municipalities should use the NQTs’ competence and give them possibilities to further professional development in the perspective of life long learning and to participate in local school development. The government states that the NQTs are especially important for the developments of local schools. They are expected to participate actively and contribute to a change of culture in the schools, rather than working according to the schools’ traditions. The NQTs have an education which is more theoretical than experienced based, compared to older colleagues. The NQTs have learnt to discuss, to problematize, which is very important if one is to develop local schools. They have very few tools for their work with them, and therefore the “praxis shock” will be tougher and the induction phase more tiring. What will happen, during good conditions, is that NQTs will meet older colleagues in a very good and productive way and they will all support the school development. The traditions, the old and the young, will be united in a productive way. The governmental task has been interpreted so that the university and the municipalities should make the encounter as smooth as possible.

The induction phase is an area of genuine cooperation. There have to be frames for the NQTs to develop within and the one important framework is an agreement between the employer and the NQTs. The agreement is very important for the municipalities to be able to create the induction programme and the mentor programme for the NQTs in the projects. The agreement was signed by representatives from the employers and the employees in 1996. It stated the NQTs had the right to an induction year and they had the right to be supported by mentors. The agreement expired in March 2000, and was replaced by various prolongations, called Öla 00, and sometimes called Agreement 00. Out of the agreement the municipalities were going to plan and to lay down the broad outlines for the local work with the NQTs.

Several studies show that the work has gone fairly slowly in the municipalities. One of the Teacher Unions (LR) studied the situation for the NQTs and it showed that only 18% of the municipalities had planned for some kind of induction phase. 53% of the municipalities said that they could offer support from mentors and they followed the agreement of a probationary year for newly employed teachers. The probationary year aims at a permanent position.

**Focus in the Induction Projects**

The main focus in the Induction Projects I and II is the induction phase of the NQTs. The induction phase is the connection between the teacher education and the life long learning in service, and it is a very important part of professional development. It is also an important link between the University and the municipality, and therefore it is a very obvious area of cooperation between the University and the municipality. The municipalities may share the interest for the NQTs’ professional development, but the interest has different focus. The municipalities want to improve their recruitment, because there will be a shortage of teachers when the teachers born in the 1940s retire.
The Gävleborg region has a big share of teachers without a teacher education. The municipalities in the Induction-project therefore have an ambition to welcome new teachers in such a way that they stay at least for some time in the municipalities and that they get a professional development. The introduction of the NQTs is very important for the municipalities; if they receive a good introduction, they might stay and contribute to school development. The introduction of the NQTs will also contribute to their professional development, and they might contribute to the school development.

The Gävleborg region has a very low level of education and very high unemployment and therefore schools are very important in the region. The newly educated teachers have another more scientific professional competence compared to the older colleagues and it is very important for the municipality to create good forums for the teaching generations. If they succeed in doing that there might be a very good school development. The research interest from the University has to do with professional development and to a great extent what is happening during the first years and what it is like to be a professional teacher in a school today. Early research results from the projects have shown that the more theoretical teacher education gives the NQTs a bigger “praxis shock” and a heavier induction phase at the work place and more difficulties. The concept “praxis shock” can be used to describe the induction phase.

Support during the induction period has been used in other countries for many years before Sweden started to use it. For instance, England has supported NQTs since 1972 and different kinds of introduction years have been tested. In the United States and in New Zealand support to NQTs has been in use since the beginning of the 70s (Britton, 2003 a). However, it is during the 1990s that all kinds of activities have increased. The global interest to support the NQTs has increased since the middle of the 1980s (Gold, 1996). The fact that there is organized support to NQTs does not mean that all teachers get some kind of support. In 1991 48% of all teachers (globally, in Sweden?) that had been working for at least three years had had some kind of support. The design of the induction programmes has varied over time. They cover everything from bare survival to getting a very good professional development. Today the induction period is a natural part of professional development. In many countries the support programmes are one part of the teacher education and one part of the authorization. The point of departure is that NQTs need support to manage to do their job, or that the first phase of the teaching career is a very important part of professional development.

The municipality and the University - a common arena for research and development?
In Sweden the work with the support to NQTs can be said to have started in 1998. The Baldassarre report was published in 1998 and it presented different articles on different countries’ induction systems and there was also an article from Sweden. In 1997 and 1998 two reports were published at the University of Gävle on the theme of Induction. In 1999 the first Induction project started and we are now working with the third project in 2006. NQTs are in need of professional development and further education directly after finishing the teacher education programme (Lindberg, 2002). The teacher education programme is quite an extensive programme, but the NQTs are not educated in everything they should be educated in, due to the rapid changes in our knowledge-based society. The NQTs continuously have to develop their professional competence, and to be able to arrange high-quality in-service training for the NQTs close cooperation is needed.

To be able to plan for a new teacher education programme an analysis is needed about the future demands on the teachers’ tasks (SOU 1999:63). Every university offering teacher training programmes need to interpret the future professional teacher’s task in a local context in order to design the new programme, but there is also an interpretation of the future
tasks of the municipality for teachers so that professional life-long learning can be built on that. What changes are to be expected in schools? What changes will NQTs be able to carry out? What changes are desired in the municipalities? What kind of changes are needed in the municipalities? Departing from those questions, our project work started in close cooperation.

**The Induction Projects – design and realisation**

In the first project, Induction I, launched in 1999, three municipalities participated together with the University of Gävle; Gävle, Hudiksvall, and Sandviken. All the three municipalities came together more or less by coincidence. One project manager in Hudiksvall presented their work in a radio programme on what was to be done to recruit NQTs. The two biggest teacher unions wanted to participate in the project, because their interest is also within the area how to support NQTs. The three municipalities developed different models for support to NQTs. The project has published several reports and articles. In Induction II: Support to NQTs supported by mentors nine municipalities participated: Sandviken, Gävle, Ockelbo, Bollnäs, Övanåker, Söderhamn, Ljusdal, Hudiksvall and Tierp. The project was closed by the turn of 2004 and the 18 of February 2005 a closing-up conference was arranged by the municipality of Gävle. The conference had participants from the whole of Sweden.

**Project design**

The model of the projects Induction I-III is built on every municipality having two participants (or one if it is a very small municipality) in the core group. The core group is led by the author of this article. These participants have somewhat different positions in the municipality, but they have all been chosen to represent their municipality and they are, in one way or another, responsible for the NQTs and support to NQTs. They are teachers or heads or coordinators for school development. There are also representatives from the teacher unions on the central level. From the university the research group attends and project meetings with the reference group are usually about 20 people. The meetings last one whole day and they are of two different kinds. They take place at the university as well as in the municipalities. This is a very important aspect for the project cooperation in the network; to be a host for the project is of great symbolic value and it has to be shared between the university and the municipalities.

One model is always used at the university and one model is always used in the municipalities. The model used at the university is when a researcher/researchers, national or international, visit/s/ the core group. There is always the same structure in use when a researcher, national and international, visits the Induction-network. These meetings are planned out of the same structure. The guests take part in the project meeting and after that give a lecture or seminar to a wider audience, not only participants in the projects. These days have been highly appreciated.

The other model is the model that takes place in the municipalities in a special order, one municipality after another. All the municipalities are hosts for such a meeting, at least twice during a project period of three years. These meetings follow the same models. They start with a presentation and a seminar of the induction-period in the Municipality. There could be a presentation of the induction-phase or a presentation of the mentors’ programme and education for mentors or some other urgent issue. In the afternoon there is a discussion of the host’s programme for NQTs and the discussion develops out of the question what the municipality needs to go on with in their local work. There could also be some information on project matters. These meetings are very important when it comes to how information is spread in the project. It is also an opportunity for the project leader to pick up project matters. To sum up these are two very different models for project meetings and they work very well, according to the municipality members.
International influences

In the three Induction projects we have arranged study tours to Scotland, to the Netherlands and now we are planning another study tour. International influences are very important in the project. In Scotland the project group took part in a conference for NQTs, teacher trainers, and people from the municipality. The models used for data collection are inspired by the Scottish model of seminars. We have four seminars with a group of NQTs in the participating municipalities per year. The tour to The Netherlands studied different kind of support systems for NQTs, for instance coaching and support by teacher assistants. The next study tour will go to another country.

The study tours have been very important to the project and the international influences on the work are very strong. The municipalities have also taken a large responsibility for the visiting research groups, for instance ATEE Red nr 9, paid a visit to Hudiksvall, Gävle and Sandviken and they were extremely well taken care of. There are also groups coming from abroad to the Induction projects. One group of heads came from the Netherlands to Gävle and Sandviken to study how the NQTs were taken care of. Study tours are presented and discussed in a special report.

When it comes to funding, every municipality has to pay for their own costs. The University of Gavle covers the costs for the Induction research group and the project leaders. We have money from UVK and from FAS (explain these abbreviations?) and now we are pretty well off. FAS support a Nordic Network with participants from Denmark, Norway, Finland and Estonia. The question of how to support NQTs has been very important. One important arena for the university and the municipalities is the data collection method called “open discussion seminars”. They will be described further down in the paper. Focus in the projects is the induction phase. The starting point for the projects at the university were of a couple of papers (Fransson, 1997; 1998) and a participation in a European project on NQTs. The Baldassarre report became rather well known in Sweden, because it was used for an article in DN (leading Swedish daily paper)“Sweden in last place regarding support to NQTs” written by Åsa Morberg, Staffan Selander and Göran Fransson. An application for funding was sent in to the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education and it resulted in about 3 million SEK to finance three doctoral students within the area of the Induction period.

The first project started in 1999. The participants from Sweden in the project:"Comparative study of induction programmes for beginning teachers in Europe”, which was reported in an ATEE-report, were invited to the Swedish Ministry of Education to discuss the situation for the NQTs in Europe and in Sweden. The NQT and the induction phase turned out to be very important to the Ministry of Education for the Swedish School system and the Swedish teacher education. There was a discussion about the possibilities to formalize the induction period in the Swedish educational system, with some kind of probationary service like the system for Medical Doctors. There was another European project as well within the Socrates. This project placed the focus on the content within the induction period.

The international contacts have been very important for the development of the three Induction projects I-III. The induction projects, in their turn, have been very important for the welcoming and integration of NQTs in the municipalities. There are Induction programmes in each of the nine municipalities, for the workplace introduction and the professional introduction, as a support to the NQTs, the heads and the mentors. The municipalities’ way of applying for new teachers has become famous all over Sweden and also their different models of mentor support.
**The essence of the data collection**

One very important part in the projects is the “open discussion seminars” we have had since the start in 1999. These make up the main method for data collection in the projects. We were inspired by the Scottish system and we developed the method further so that it would fit the conditions in our projects. The NQTs are allowed to talk about whatever they want to talk about and what it is like to be a newly qualified teacher. Each seminar discussion is led by two people; one member from the research group and one from the municipality. They are only to give a hand by structuring the discussion and to distribute turns and to sum up the result. We have collected data from 150 NQTs in our nine municipalities. The two people that conduct the seminar must not defend their workplaces, the university or the Municipality, but they can provide shorter explanations and corrections.

There is a brief description in *De första ljuva åren - lärarens första tid i yrket* (Fransson & Morberg, 2001).

The Municipalities collected 8-12 NQTs and organized 4-5 seminars per year. These groups consisted of teachers from the whole school system, from pre-school to upper secondary, constituting mixed groups that were not categorized according to level or subjects. The thing they had in common was that they were NQTs, new at the workplace, and new in the profession. These talks have been very important to the project. It is a place where the university staff and the municipality staff meet and listen to the NQTs and afterwards they can discuss matters in common. The staff involved has been forced to try to understand each other, and the difficulties in each organisation. These are unique opportunities for NQTs to meet and discuss with the staff from the University as well as the staff from the Municipality. The most interesting thing has been that the two arenas, the university and the municipalities, have been able to discuss in relation to each other. (Fransson, 2002a; 2002b; Fransson & Morberg, 2001, 2004; Morberg, 2002; Morberg, 2003;) The data collection method has been further developed so that we could document the talks with a double follow up. The seminars were documented first in the traditional way by taping the talks and after that transcribe the talks into text and then supplemented with notes from the local project leader. The notes also had the local leader’s reflection on the talk from the NQTs. The problems and what could be done to solve the problems for the NQTs was important to make reflections on. The documentation was rather simple and made spontaneously and freely on important matters; first what the NQTs said and then what could be done to give the NQTs an easier induction period and more support. There were also some very concrete suggestions on how the municipality could improve/develop? the induction period for the NQTs. A better start as professionals and a better start in the local school development was the goal.

**The very special with praxis-related and participant-oriented projects**

The three projects have all been arenas for the network Induction I-III, the period

Induction can be looked at as the crucial connection between the initial teacher education and further education in life long learning. The induction is about the NQTs’ first period at the workplace and in the profession. The induction is a very important period for a successful professional development. This area is a mutual responsibility of the University and the municipality and therefore it is a real co operation project. It can’t be carried out by either the University or the Municipality alone. The University is interested in what’s happening during the phase of induction but the municipalities want good teachers and they want them to stay in the municipality and they want them to contribute to the school development in the municipality.

The interest from the university and the interest from the municipality are quite different. The methodology in use is described in Holmer & Starrin (1993). The core issue in the methodology is that the research is carried out together during the whole research process, from the research question to the final result and the discussion. It also has some positive
effects on the professionals involved, and they may experience that research is a process of systematic knowledge that doesn’t necessarily have to be carried out by professional researchers (Holmer & Starrin, 1993, s.128).

**To meet in a dialogue**

The central thing in a praxis-related project is that researcher and practitioners meet in a real dialogue. What kind of research is praxis-related research? It is necessary to describe the research close to praxis in comparison with traditional research. The research often starts at the university with a research question, and then the researcher goes out to the Municipality and collect data and then the researchers go back to the university and write the report and then the Municipality can read the report, if they feel that it is of their concern. And often, unfortunately, it is not of their concern. In a praxis and participant oriented research project the question starts out in praxis. The researcher and the practitioners formulate the research question together and the researcher goes back to the university and decide how to collect the data, and the he/she collects the data and go back to the university. The report is taken back to municipality and the results will hopefully concern the municipality to a greater extent. The can also work together the researcher and the practitioners step by step (what do you mean here??). The research can also be carried out by a researcher and a practitioner in close cooperation (Söderhamsmodellen, 2006). It is very rewarding and productive to write together in close co operation.

**Difficulties**

There are a lot of difficulties in doing research and development projects in close cooperation. The two very different perspectives are not always easy to join. The perspective can be either the university’s or the municipality’s, and sometimes it is difficult to combine the two. Sometimes the interests can be very different, the interest from the researchers at the university or the interest of the practitioner in the Municipality. The most important thing is that neither perspective is supposed to be more important, One should not look at different opinions as a threat, but as a very good thing. You have to stick to the goals. Neither of the actors can lose contact with the goal. It is also important that you are not afraid of conflicts; you have to look at conflict such as a possibility for development. The traditional research community is very suspicious of praxis-related and participant-oriented research and in every presentation there is a discussion whether these two perspectives are possible to unite in the same project. Traditional researchers often argue that is not possible. Researcher and practitioners often have a very difficult case to prove. I argue that it is possible; it is not easy, but possible. If more researchers work together then there might be a change. More researchers are involved today in praxis oriented and participatory oriented research and this could mean that there is a change coming.²

**Factors for success and regional development**

The Induction I-III projects have been very successful³ and there are some factors that could be discussed as highly important: The projects *fulfil real needs, the work is carried out in mutual understanding and respect, there is understanding between the two parts and there is a willingness to cooperate. The projects started out of real needs and that might be the most*

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² What is research close to praxis? There is no over all definition, so it has to be defined for every discussion.

³ This statement is built on the municipalities evaluations in different activities and also on the evaluations at the university, It is also a big national interest for the project and other researchers talk about the project as very successful projects.

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The project has been carried out in mutual respect and a genuine interest to cooperate. The genuine interest has been shown in the daily work so that no interest has been the main interest, and the time has been shared. The relationship has been developed in a region with a long distance between the municipalities and the university. None has been more important than the others in the project.

The perspective of the university and the perspective of the municipalities has been fulfilled. The projects meetings have been important as a symbol for working on equal terms. The work has been like networking, and the network is a fairly broad network with NQTs, mentors, heads of schools and administrators. The study tours have been important, the participants know each other very well and that is important. The opportunity to travel together has been important to create a good atmosphere in the network. It has also contributed to the municipality being able to view itself in comparison with other municipalities abroad. This has been very important. We have got a lot of learning partners abroad. The networking has contributed to the municipalities getting another self image.

The interest for research has increased, and the willingness to participate in research has also increased. The main reason for that seems to be that the results can actually be of use. The research process has been dedramatized and research has not been made more remarkable than it has to be. It is systemized and problematized knowledge. The insight that research is something that you can participate in is important. One of the driving forces for regional development is the amount of research projects carried out. To have positive personal contacts with researchers is important. But it is then important that the personal contacts work and that the meetings with researchers and practitioners work on the personal level. None has the right to interpret their need as the most important one.

**Conclusion**

This paper consists of a description, an analysis and a discussion of three participant- oriented project. The projects are: Induction I Support to Newly Qualified Teachers 1999-2002, Induction II 2002-2005, Support to Newly Qualified teachers, and Induction III 2006-(2008) From initial teacher education to workplace in school.

The projects dealt with research and development for NQTs at the workplace and the projects have originally been inspired by research carried out in RcD 9 in ATEE. The aim of the three projects has been to achieve a more effective Teacher Education in order to reduce the shock that NQTs might experience when starting to work, but also to support the NQTs’ professional development. The Induction projects stress the need of highlighting both the academic education, and the teaching practice in order to make the Initial Teacher Education more effective. A joint model for support to NQTs is presented and stresses the importance of universities and municipalities working together towards a better connection between the universities and the workplaces. This paper also highlights the problems of how to get a better connection between Teacher Education Programme, especially in the Teaching practice, and the Induction phase.

The Teacher Education Programme has been late in responding to the needs of the NQTs as they have been presented in research. There is a need for a stronger connection between the Initial Teacher Education Programmes and the Municipalities. The main ideas are
that NQTs should be better prepared to start their work after finishing the Initial Teacher Education Program and that means, perhaps, a more qualitative professional development. Cooperation between the University of Gavle and nine municipalities is of great importance to many aspects of raising the quality of the Initial Teacher Education, but also for the NQTs at the workplace and their employers.

To sum up, the introduction to the professional career starts during the teaching practice, on the teacher students’ very first day. It is important to use every possibility to prepare the teacher trainees for their important task in schools and then give support to the NQTs when they start their careers in the municipalities. This is a mutual responsibility for academics and practitioners in close cooperation during the induction phase and that is discussed in the article.

References


