Teacher education as school development

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Abstract

The teacher education at Dalarna University is quite unique in Sweden in some ways, for example in the way the steering documents have been interpreted and the education has been accomplished, above all in the way the theoretical university based content has been integrated with the more practical school based.

This paper gives a short introduction of how the school based part of the teacher education is accomplished, partly by pointing at the importance of cooperation between the university teachers and the tutors in the schools.

The paper also examines in what way the students’ degree projects can contribute to school-development through statements from questionnaires and interviews.

The meaning of the paper is to discuss how both the university and the schools can benefit from cooperation.

Background

In 2001 the teacher education in Sweden was reformed. All the different programmes for teacher education were put into one single programme with different orientations and specialisations. The universities were given greater freedom to design their own teacher education programme and the students were given more freedom to choose what they wanted to study in their teacher education.1

One intention of the new teacher education was to increase the collaboration between the universities and the local authorities and through them the schools in the region. Instead of the earlier so called “practice”, the term “school located training” was introduced. The aim of the school located training was to develop better connection between theory and practice. The meaning of the collaboration for Dalarna University was to qualitatively improve the training of the teacher students and to contribute to the development of the schools – that is at the same time this should function as a driving force to develop the activities in the schools and the same things were supposed to happen within the University.

In this paper the collaboration between Dalarna University and the schools is described and examined.

The teacher education at Dalarna University is quite unique in Sweden in some ways, for example in the way the steering documents have been interpreted and the education has been accomplished, above all in the way the theoretical university based content has been integrated with the more practical school based.

The teacher education in Dalarna University has since many years a close cooperation with the schools in the region, something called cooperation in partnership for the teacher education and school development. The aim of this cooperation is to create good conditions to educate qualified and professional teachers. Another aim is to promote research and

1 Proposition 1999/200:135
2 SOU 1999:63 ,Högskoleverkets rapportserie 2005:17 R
development in the partner schools and to support and develop the competence of the partner school teachers. To accomplish this the University together with the partner schools have chosen different strategies. This is done partly by the students’ degree projects, partly by building networks between the teachers at the University and the teachers in the schools, and through continuing education of the schoolteachers at the University.

First of all there is a written contract between the parts saying among other things that the University must carry through certain what we call dialog meetings during the academic year. For this matter a certain developer was hired and is now fulltime working on the project. Before the dialog meeting, each partner school and the University, have written a self-appraisal to make the meeting well adapted and constructive.

A new academic subject has been created just for the teacher education named pedagogical work. The name of the subject Pedagogical work is used to describe partly a practice, which is carried through in decided social connections and which are aimed to learning, partly an area of knowledge that deals with such activities. More specifically the term describes a multiple scientific area of research and a degree subject in teacher education.

Pedagogical work at Dalarna University consists of three courses, each of them twenty weeks long (30 ECTS) and all integrating practical schoolwork in total corresponding to 30 ETCS and in addition to possibilities for the students - in consent with the tutors - be present whenever they want. That means that pedagogical work contains 60 weeks (90 ECTS) during the teacher education. These courses mix didactic studies, tutored practical work in schools and theoretical studies. Students studying for different levels of education in the schools are integrated during all these courses. The tutors are employed in the schools but are seen as school based teacher trainers together with the academic teachers at the University who at least half of them have a Ph D. The school-based tutors have all been examined in a University course of at least five weeks duration before being accepted by the University as school based teacher educators.

In the last course of pedagogical work the students are expected to do a ten weeks long degree project (15 ECTS). This degree project must be connected to the work in the schools where the students are placed, during their education. The students are connected to just one school district during the whole teacher education. This is the way the teacher education tries to live up to one of the keystone of Dalarna University’s ideas of action, namely to function as a catalyst for the development of the region.

The University has also started to create and identify research sections within the University, which can meet the demand and wishes for development and research in the schools. One of the projects now financed is this investigation of how we succeed to realize the intentions described above.

**Purpose of the paper**

The purpose of this paper is to investigate if and how Dalarna University have succeeded to promote development in the partner schools and if and how the partner schoolteachers have received support for development of their competence.

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3 Högskolan Dalarnas självvärdering inför Högskoleverkets granskning 2004
Methods

To get information about the idea of “teacher education as school development” a short relatively open minded inquiry was constructed and sent to all the involved school districts.

Four school districts, which seemed to have thought a lot more than the others concerning teacher education and school development, were sorted out and inter-views were carried out. Directors of education, headmasters, co-ordinators for the school based teacher education as well as tutors were interviewed.

Results

The inquiry showed us that we perhaps had overestimated the results we had attained concerning school development, but there were differences in the answers. The ideas from the schools were full of enthusiasm but we think there is still much work to do. Concerning what effects the degree projects had contributed to in the school districts we quote some answers:

Yes some of the theses have illustrated interesting areas for example the gender perspective. Affected teachers have thought it interesting with the subject “Sports and health” as it shows how the concentration from the community works.

Nothing that we know.

Just the single thought that we can influence what the student can investigate in their degree projects make us stop and think to reflect over our actions and what we want to develop.

The interviews the student made and his discussion around the subject “the boys school situation year 7-9”, have been thought-provoking for the pupils and the staff.

But few theses seem to have gained school development as such.

No not yet, but we still hope.

The students have made their research in other schools and the relevance for our work has been small.

The school management has not been engaged in the work: The students have had opportunity to choose their subject and they have not they received the support they should have. There was no dialogue during the work.

The students had already decided what to investigate.

One work is directed towards our upper secondary school. The work has contributed to how we work with questions concerning equality.

We have not until newly given suggestions for degree projects. But we hope a lot.

Two of the questions we put in the questionnaire concerned why the degree projects failed to contribute to school development, and what that failure could depend on.
The problem is that the account of degree projects at the university does not fit in with the ordinary school semester. The students have moved away from town before they have reported the results in the schools investigated.

We have to invent what we want to develop in our working team and then we maybe can ask a student to help us to do the investigation.

We have to start with the choice of subject for the degree theses. It has to be done early in the teacher education to develop in favour for all involved. The partner school offers thinkable subjects from the working plan. A description of aims from the school administration is needed. The university teachers and the schoolteachers have to cooperate concerning the supervising of the degree project. The result must be presented in the partner school.

A lot is a matter of the headmasters in the schools. I mean that this is an opportunity for us to find out and investigate different field of activities in our schools which can contribute to school development. It is important to make the degree project clear and evident in the beginning of the teacher education so the students early can begin to think about what and how they can do the research project during their last semester. We file all the degree projects and make use of them as a source for development both for the teachers, the school and future students.

Concerning ideas of how the degree projects would be able to contribute to something constructive for the schools there were a lot of ideas.

Our director of education underlines that the degree projects must concentrate on specific problems in each school to be of importance for school development.

We think the idea good as it is but we must work more actively by
- initiate meetings between the headmaster and students earlier
- establish ideas by presentations of ongoing degree projects for new students
- establish ongoing degree projects in the staff through presentations
- account for the results when the degree project is finished
- invite school teachers to the examination at least one from the school investigated or locate the examination to the school
- we must tell the students to turn to the teachers in the schools more for discussions/feedback during their work with the investigation.

Maybe we should arrange seminars between the school teachers and the university teachers to find the best ideas from all involved?

Cut down the number of different subjects in the degree projects. The supervisors will then be able to concentrate and become more of experts. The degree projects could be performed in the same subject area of many students in different schools. That would probably be more interesting for the schools and the degree projects would become more comparable in nature.

During the interviews the concentration was on how to develop the idea of teacher education as school development and above all discussions concerning how to live up to the contract written between the schools and Dalarna University. Several degree projects had been
produced and presented, but not in all of the schools. As one successful example can be mentioned, “International and external contacts contribution to development of the pupils”.

Some schools lack ideas of what they want to have investigated. Maybe the research teams in the university might come up with ideas?

Notice that, how the cooperation works is very person related.

Dalarna University is considered a long bit of the way concerning the integration of school reality and university studies.

Some of the University teachers must learn more about reality in the schools and the profession for which they are teaching.

The schools have the problem areas but the University teachers must help us to formulate the research questions.

Some of the schools had decided a limited amount of areas for investigation for the coming years and as always economic problems and payment were on the agenda.

As already has been mentioned, Dalarna University has a contract with each school district involved in the teacher education saying among other things that we shall:

- support school development and contribute to competence development among the school teachers
- be responsible for building and maintaining networks between the departments of academic subjects in the University and the school teachers
- through the degree projects contribute to school development
- locate some of the seminars, lessons and/or lectures to the partner schools to make it possible for the school staff to participate
- invite the school staff to lectures to the University

As a result of the interviews we can establish the fact that this could be developed much further. The school teachers (around 700) have all passed a course to become tutors and some schools even more courses. Networks function within some subjects but far from all. Lessons, seminars and lectures in the schools do not exist. The staffs of the schools are quite often invited to lectures, but better planning must be done. Some of the degree projects have contributed to school development but far from all.

During the interviews a lot of ideas were given for both the University and the partner schools to carry through.

Presentation of degree projects in the schools both for the teachers and the students who just have begun the teacher education to make the new students begin thinking of the coming degree project and perhaps inspire them to go further with the projects already accomplished.

Presentations of the degree projects during the whole process to give response to the students and come up with ideas.

Use the tutors in the schools as supervisors in the degree project together with the university supervisors, but the school teachers must be well educated to do that.
Courses concerning methodology and criteria for research projects for the school teachers.

More contact persons between the University and the schools, not only the directors of undergraduate studies in the University.

The University must bang the drum for lectures given in the University and invite the school teachers.

Seminars must be accomplished in the schools so the teachers can take part.

Try to arrange the lectures in the afternoons. That would make it easier for the school teachers to take part.

Invite the school teachers to the course introductions, in above all the subject Pedagogical work.

Meetings for idea exchanges between the schools.

The headmasters of the schools ought to make an annual plan for the school located training.

Summary

- All partner schools are very interested in receiving help in their development by the degree projects.
- There are a few who have received real help.
- The partner schools have no well-reasoned strategy or organisation for how to work with and benefit from the degree projects.
- The University must increase the effort to build net works and provide the schoolteachers with lectures and courses.
- Many partner schools clearly underline that they want the University to give the degree projects an aim, direction and content that contribute to the development of the schools.

Discussion

The ideas from the partner schools about how to handle the degree projects must be implemented in the University and among the supervisors, as well as the University teachers’ research areas must be known in the schools to be able to contribute to school development. During the interviews it became clear that the headmasters of the schools have an important role to play. They have to carry out plans for their school development and mediate these to their partner students as well as to the University. It is in other words important for the partner schools to improve the organisation and deepen the contacts with the students as well as it is important for the University to mobilize internally to reach the goal – teacher education as school development.

One example of how to work, has derived from a partner school where long-term goals for development exists. In cooperation with the University a one semester long course, divided into four courses of 7,5 ECTS each, is carried out. The course is called “School development” and interests teachers from different departments in the school. The students
located at this partner school is invited to work together with these teachers by writing a
degree project as a part and basis for this education. They take part in the discussions and
become through this a direct help for the school and they are able to write and analyze things
of importance for themselves and the work in which they themselves are a part.

To conclude we must continue to implement the ideas of teacher education as school
development both in the schools and in the University. Arenas for meetings between the two
categories of teacher educators must be found, future research settings must be connected to
the degree projects, the degree project must be based in the schools and presented to and
discussed with the teachers both in the schools and the University.

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