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Teacher Experience During Paradigms Shift - in Deaf Education

Abstract

The aim of this ongoing study is to describe teachers' experiences of possible paradigm shifts within the special education area, education for children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing, in three Nordic countries (Sweden, Finland, Norway). Special attention is paid to the choice of language in education and teachers' experience of how it has affected their work, both linguistically and in other respects.

Focus is on teachers' own stories of their lived experience of 20 years as teachers. Research on the experience of public change and its impact on a specific area such as Sign Language in education is very limited (SOU 2006:29). No study has previously investigated the teacher's experience over time.

The paradigm shifts that may have occurred in line with governmental policy decisions will be visualized in this project. Comparisons can be made over time between the three Nordic countries and the project can involve clarification of the impact these decisions may have had and how or if the various countries have developed in the same way. Such knowledge may be relevant not only for the understanding of teachers' work in Deaf Education over time, but also for other educational venues in the various Nordic countries.

The project is a life story study in which 10 teachers each from Sweden, Finland and Norway will be asked to tell about their experiences of change within the profession over at least the past 20 years. Participants' stories will be videotaped when using Sign Language, and audio recorded when speaking.

All three researchers in the project have extensive experience of research in the field of deaf and hard-of-hearing education and the special requirements for the management of data from such a small group and of Sign Language use.

Background

The study seeks answers to questions about teachers' own stories of their lived experience of many years in the profession as teachers. Research on the experience of public change and its impact on a specific area as sign language in education is very limited (SOU 2006:29). The government inquiry "Sign Language and Sign Language Users - the status of Sign Language in Sweden" (SOU 2006:54) has shown that there is a lack of research on education of Sign Language users, and no study has previously investigated the teacher's experience over time (Roos, 2008). The parliamentary decision on the education of deaf people to be bilingual in Sign Language and Swedish as languages of instruction (1981) may have had immediate influence directly on the teacher education as well as in classrooms. The reform was implemented with focus on training for all teachers in Sweden (30hp), at the Department of Linguistics, Stockholm from early 1980s.

The possible paradigm shifts that have occurred in line with governmental policy decisions and due to new technology regarding hearing aids and medical treatment will be visualized in this project. Comparisons can be made over time between the three Nordic countries and the project can involve clarification of the impact these decisions may have had and how or if the various countries have developed in the same way. Such knowledge may be relevant not only for the understanding of teachers' work in Deaf Education over time, but also for other educational venues in the various Nordic countries.

Focus is on the following questions:

How do teachers describe their teaching career and teacher's work in Deaf Education?

How do they talk about their teacher experience and their perception of themselves as professionals?

What do they choose to tell us about their experience of language and language usage over time?

What changes are depicted in their stories?

What are the similarities and differences that appears in the stories from comparisons between countries and how can we understand them in relation to the social changes and political decisions taken during the period under study?

Method

The project is a life story study in which 10 teachers each from Sweden, Finland and Norway will be asked to tell about their experiences of change within the profession over at least the past 20 years. Participants' stories will be videotaped in case the teachers are using sign language and when they are speaking they will be audio recorded with digital recorders.

Possible implications from the study

The results are interesting at group level and the comparison between countries. Thus the study's findings may increase the understanding of teachers' professional role and of teachers' own understanding of his professional history when the results is related to others.

The results of the project may have implications for future planning and school improvement. It can also increase the awareness of the individual teacher and school management about the consequences of decisions made to teachers' professional role, professional status and occupation.

The project may also reveal changes over time regarding the implementation of ideologies regarding special education in general, taking its departure in the example of the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

SOU (2006). *Teckenspråk och teckenspråkiga* SOU 2006:29 [Sign Language and Sign Language Users]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

SOU (2006). *Teckenspråk och teckenspråkiga - Teckenspråkets ställning i Sverige* SOU 2006:54 [Sign Language and Sign Language Users - the status of Sign Language in Sweden]. Stockholm: Regeringskansliet.

Roos, C. (2008). *Skriftspråkande barn med dövhet eller hörselnedsättning. En kunskapsöversikt.*[Literacy in Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing children] Örebro: Specialpedagogiska institutet.