Narratives of Professionalization and Intraprofessional Strains

Swedish Teacher Unions and the Translation of Professionalism: a first sketch

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Introduction

In this paper, a brief presentation will be made of parts of an ongoing Ph.D.-project focusing the role of the Swedish Teacher unions within the ‘politics of teacher professionalization’ in contemporary Sweden. The overall purpose of the project is to understand how and why the Teacher unions develops and uses ‘professional’ projects in their efforts at strengthening the social position of Swedish teachers. The part of the project presented in this paper focus specifically on the relationship between the two unions and the way that they make use of a ‘professional terminology’ or, what I call ‘narratives of professionalization’, in their responses to a number of education reforms by including them into a larger narrative of the teaching occupation and its position within Swedish society. It draws theoretically on narrative as well as institutional theory, and points at the intraprofessional stra

Before going into a more detailed description of the theoretical base for the analysis and some preliminary findings, some comments are required on the historical relationship between Sweden’s two teacher unions and some recent education reforms seriously complicating this relationship in relation to current debates on the development of teaching towards a professional occupation.

Swedish teachers are organized in two different unions, Lärarförbundet (LF) och Lärarnas riksförbund (LR), historically descendant from two different teaching traditions. LF is, by far, the largest, and organizes, generally speaking, preschool teachers and schoolteachers up to grade 6 (but also vocational teachers within upper secondary schools, some headmasters and others). LR, on the other hand is primarily organizing teachers from grade 7 to 9 of the compulsory school and subject teachers working within upper secondary schools (grades 10-12). The historical difference between the organizations is a legacy of the mid-1800s when a compulsory school system for all Swedish children was established. The system was, however, a parallel one with clear distinctions between social classes, a fact that was mirrored
by the teachers employed in its different parts. These differences are described by Ringarp (2012) as follows:

In 1842, [the Swedish] Parliament decreed that every parish should have a public elementary school, and that the teachers had to be graduates of a teacher’s college. The elementary school teachers were recruited primarily from the rural population and the peasant class and hired as municipal functionaries […] On the other hand, grammar school teachers taught at the state-run grammar schools. These teachers often came from a bourgeois background and had university educations (Ringarp, 2012, p. 330).

Their divergent backgrounds continue to affect their policy positions in relation to present day reforms even though the parallel education system described above was replaced by a new comprehensive and secondary school system in the 1960s. The major reason for the abolition of the parallel school system was a desire to bridge class differences in society by having all Swedish children attending the same education system (Ringarp 2012; Persson 2008). In a way, the same would go for teachers as the, by tradition, ‘blue collar’ elementary school teachers and ‘white collar’ grammar school teachers where to become colleagues within the new unified system of education. The idea of a unified school system – and thereby a united teaching occupation – continued in the 1970s as all kinds of teacher education were incorporated within the tertiary education system; by the decision, in 1989, to decentralize employer responsibility for all teaching positions to local authorities and in 2001, with the replacement of a system of different teaching exams with one single exam for all teachers, regardless of where in the education system the teacher in question where to be employed.

During this period, for a number of reasons, the social status of teachers declined and in the early 2000s the public criticism of the school system in general increased dramatically as results of international evaluations showed that the performance of Swedish students were decreasing. As the social democratic government was replaced, in the national election of 2006, by a center-right alliance, a massive education reform program was launched resulting, among other things, in the presentation, in 2008, of two reforms that were later implemented during 2011; the introduction of a system of teacher certification and a reformed system of teacher education. These reforms indicated a new direction in Swedish education policy away from the idea of a united teaching occupation as preschool teachers was not included in the teacher certificate but got their own (Lilja, 2011), and by the reinstitution into teacher education of different exams for different kinds of teachers. The direction of these reforms was greeted very differently by the teacher unions. Although both supported the introduction of a certificate, LF was heavily against the inherent division of the teaching occupation and even if they agreed that the teacher education system was in need of reform they opposed what they considered the rigidity of the new system. LR, on the other hand, having been against a number of reforms during the 1990s – not least the decentralization of employer responsibility in 1989 – saw an opportunity of reconnecting with their academic identity of the past by supporting reforms underlining the differences between different kinds of teachers. As is argued by Stenlås (2011) and Ringarp (2011) LF and its members had more to gain form the idea of a united teaching occupation than the former grammar school teachers of LR, whose historical position as relatively high status academics had suffered more from the development of a unified occupation described above. Having contextualized the study
somewhat, I will now briefly present the main theoretical departures of this particular part of my project before presenting some preliminary results – or first readings – of the material in question.

**Theoretical Points of Departure**

A *narrative* approach is essentially about how people, individuals or groups, “construct disparate facts in [their] own worlds and weave them together cognitively in order to make sense of … reality” (Patterson & Monroe 1998:315). They are useful tools in analyzing politics at different levels as they are the building blocks of our perceptions of political reality which in turn affect the way we choose to act in relation to that reality. “In this sense we create and use narratives to interpret and understand the political realities around us. We do this as individuals and we do it as collective units, as nations or groups” (Patterson & Monroe 1998:316). In this study, the focus is on the way that Swedish teacher unions, as a collective groups, or organizations, of teachers makes sense of the political environment affecting the work of teachers in Sweden and how that process of meaning making produces certain kinds of possible actions in relation to their view of how education reforms have affected the teaching profession in various ways.

Patterson and Monroe (1998) argue that a narrative approach, as a research methodology, is about discourses of human communication, but that it differs from other forms of discourses in important ways. They set out four defining characteristics of narratives within a framework of social science research stating that narratives (1) requires agency; (2) suggests the speaker’s view of what is canonical; (3) requires some sequential ordering of events and (4) requires the narrator’s perspective by focusing on how the speakers make sense of the commonplace. A longer quote may shed some light on how a narrative approach, thus defined, becomes useful in studies of individual or collective political behavior.

It provides a sense of speakers’ cognitive maps of themselves, both in relation to others and in the specific context of their described behavior. Narrative is especially useful in revealing the speaker’s concept of self, for it is the self that is located at the center of the narrative, whether as active agent, passive experience, or tool of destiny. In at least one sense, narratives function as autobiographical accounts given by the narrator in the present about a protagonist who bears the same name, who existed in the past, and who blends into the present speaker as the story ends. The story explains and justifies why the life went a particular way, not just causally but, at some level, morally. The narrator uses the past self to point to and explain the present and the future. This is as true on the individual level as it is on the macrolevel, when groups of people describe a common past suggesting why they have a collective identity that should be recognized as legitimate by others (Patterson & Monroe 1998:316).

In other words, in order to understand why Swedish teacher unions argues as they do within the current education debate of Sweden it is vital to analyze how the organizations perceives of themselves in a temporal sense. How is the past described and how is it connected to the present state of things? What does the preferred future of the respective organization look like and what measures are needed in order for that future to become reality? How are different
reforms and policies directed at teachers interpreted within the overall organizational narrative of the different unions?

A central aspect of a narrative analysis is, in other words, to interpret how an actor, in this case an organization, makes sense of a number of different events by including them in a story, or to be more specific, a plot, that highlights the significance of these events for the actor in question. As a result, emplotment, or how the actor constructs meaning and coherence by relating events causally to one another, becomes a key feature of such an analysis (Somers 1994).

In the present study, this kind of narrative approach is linked to a wider theoretical framework, called organizational institutionalism, or the new institutionalism in organization studies (Grenwood et al. 2008; Powell & DiMaggio 1991). There is no space here, however, to elaborate on this wider framework in any detailed way. Even so, in order to explicate the connection between the narrative approach and an institutional approach to organizations, some of its basic tenets must be presented. As all kinds of institutional theories, organizational institutionalism is, historically, a reaction against rational-choice theories and their focus on the interest maximizing individual as the central locus of explanation within the social sciences. In the words of Czarniawska and Sevón:

Its main message […] can be formulated as follows: organizational action heeds the logic of appropriateness, and not, as the theory of rational choice would have it, the logic of consequentiality. Actions are decided on the basis of actors’ classifications of the situation they are in and their own identity (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996:3).

Even if the quote above seems to indicate agency, as actions are decided upon based on ones experiences of ones place in different situations, much institutional theory have placed focus on institutional fields as static environments characterized by inertia and a resulting resistance to change. Nevertheless, there are strands within institutional theory that opens space for agency as well as for dependence upon institutional structures, and thereby also for the possibility of processes of change (Hardy & Maguire 2008; Friedland & Alford; 1991). What is sometimes called “Scandinavian institutionalism” is one tradition that puts focus on processes of organizational identity formation as a way of understanding organizational behavior (Czarniawska & Sevón 1996). Sahlin-Andersson (1996), among others, puts focus on how a situation of identity crisis leads to processes of organizational imitation where organizations models themselves on, or mimic, other organizations conceived as more successful. Sahlin-Andersson argues:

Organizations seldom have direct experiences of the organizations or practices they imitate or refer to. What they imitate are rationalizations – stories constructed by actors in the “exemplary” organization, and their own translations of such stories. What spreads are not experiences or practices per se, but standardized models and presentations of such practices. The distance between the supposed source of the model – a practice, or an action pattern – and the imitating organization forms a space for translating, filling in and interpreting the model in various ways (Sahlin-Andersson 1996:78-79).

In this study “the model” is professionalism (or publicly “accepted” professional occupations) in some sense and focus is given to the construction of the stories (issues of translation, filling
in and interpretation) used by the teacher unions as they tell the story of teaching as a professional occupation in different ways. In other words, the use of the narrative approach to teacher union policy texts described above is to be seen as a way of understanding, or more closely examining, the identity processes of the unions within an institutional context and how they present themselves as professionals and, also, what “kind” of professionalism they are narrating in their different stories about themselves. These stories will, in a later stage, also be discussed in relation to Andrew Abbott’s thinking about intraprofessional differentiation and status strains within professions in general (Abbott 1981, 1988) in order to understand why the professional projects of the Swedish teacher unions is constructed in the way they are. There is no room here, nor have I come that far in my analysis, to elaborate much on this part of the study in this paper. Instead, I will now briefly present some results from a first reading of parts of my material.

Preliminary findings

The empirical material of this part of my Ph.D.-project consists of a number of policy texts (referrals and op-eds. primarily) from the two teacher unions. As of now I have made a first preliminary analysis of a number of op-eds. from Lärarnas riksförbund published between January and April 2011 as a kind of pilot study in order to try the narrative approach presented above.

The LR Story

The Present: A System in Decline

The central theme of the way that LR describes the present situation of its members within the education system of Sweden is one of accelerating crisis. The performance of Swedish students in international evaluations, such as PISA, is in decline. LR writes

Nyligen visade PISA undersökningen att svenska elever fortsätter att tappa i både kunskaper och likvärdighet gentemot andra jämförbara länder. Reaktionerna blev förstämning och förvirring. Sverige håller på att förlora positionen (alternativt har redan förlorat) som en kunskapsnation (Fjelkner 2011-03-30), since

Overall, the focus on international competition is central in the way that the current crisis of Swedish education is depicted. The need to improve the situation is closely connected to the need to stay (or become) competitive on a global market. The goal of the policies suggested by LR is a highly competitive world class school system, staffed by equally competitive world class teachers (for example Fjelkner 2011-03-30), since


Even though the international perspective is prominent as a background for the need to improve the way things are in the present, the focus of the texts is primarily on the
deteriorating conditions of the Swedish school system. The main problem is that, for a number of reasons, the inequalities between different Swedish schools are increasing. LR states;

Debatten om skolan måste fortsätta. Politiker av alla färger måste ta till sig det som framkommer nu om läget i skolan. Vi ser en bild som allt för många lärare känner igen. Här sätts också fingret på huvudproblemet, att alla elever inte får gå i en likvärdig och rättvis skola (Fjelkner 2011-04-20)

So, in all, the current situation for Swedish teachers is defined by looming crisis, centered around the fact that the results of Swedish students in international comparisons are in decline simultaneously as inequalities within the Swedish school system increases. As will be pointed out below, the reasons for this current state of emergency, according to LR, can be found in the deteriorating conditions surrounding teachers’ work as a result of a number of political reforms implemented over a period of 20 years.

Explaining the Present - Emplottment in Action

The story of the decline of the Swedish school system, as it is told by LR, has a very precise beginning. The decline started in 1989, about 20 years ago, when responsibility for providing and financing Swedish schools was decentralized from the central government to local municipalities. Almost every other problem identified in the current situation for Swedish teachers are, as will be evident as we go along, to some extent connected to the system of local school governance. Among other things the local control of schools and teachers work have led to increased inequality, under financing, decreasing teacher salaries, nonexistent in-service education for teachers, more unqualified work tasks, extensive bureaucracy and a general depreciation of teachers as professionals. Fjelkner writes

Och nu har vi sett, och ser, hur skolan blir alltmer olika och hur elevernas föräldras sociala och ekonomiska bakgrund har fått allt store betydelse för resultaten. Undervisningen har nedprioriterats till förmån för omsorg och fostran. Lärarnas yrkesroll har urholkats och allt mer kringuppgifter har lagts på en hårt pressad yrkeskår. Kommunerna har velat se enhetslärare som kan plockas in varhelst det uppstår luckor – om läraren var utbildad för ämnet och skolformen var underordnat (Fjelkner 2011-03-14).

That the transformation of responsibility is considered to be a direct cause of the current crisis is made perfectly clear by another text by Fjelkner, where she claims that


Beside the dominant theme presented above, two other things are considered to contribute to the current situation, the introduction of publicly funded free schools and a disconnection of the relationship between school practice and educational research. However, the lack of research theme is also in some ways connected to the failures of the main antagonist - the local school authorities.

It is no surprise that the question of teacher salaries is central to the LR story, given the fact that LR is a teacher union as well as a professional association. LR makes two main
arguments concerning teacher salaries; first, that they are to low and second that there is a non-existent relationship between performance and financial rewards, even though this is a central part of the agreement between the teacher unions and the employers. Fjelkner argues:

Sedan årtionden har de högt utbildade lärarnas löneutveckling kraftigt halkat efter. Löner för svenska lärare i grundskolan och gymnasieskolan ligger idag långt under genomsnittet i OECD-länderna. /…/ Riksdagsledamöterna satte i slutet av 1960-talet sina arvoden efter vad adjunkternas hade. Idag har riksdagsmän 56 000 i månaden. Den 55-åriga gymnasieläraren (dagens adjunkt) har 28 000 i lönet i snitt (Fjelkner 2011-04-28).

What is evident in the quote above is the reference to a past where teachers and members of parliament were equally valued by society. As the argument goes along, the alarming decrease in teacher salaries are connected to the fact that teaching no longer has the ability of attracting the most gifted students, resulting in decidedly lower quality of the teachers working in the schools of today. As society no longer values the work of teachers enough to offer competitive salaries, the student teachers needed to raise the results of the future disappears into other professions with better pay and higher societal status. In line with the central plot of international competition the quote also highlights the fact that Swedish teacher salaries are falling under the OECD average, contributing to the narrative of the diminishing international competitiveness of the Swedish school system.

The other part of the low salary argument concerns the fact that successful teachers aren’t financially rewarded for their excellence. According to LR the agreements regulating the salaries of teachers establishes the principle of performance based pay. However, this is ignored by local school authorities, resulting in the affirmation of teaching as a non-competitive profession when it comes to attracting and keeping the most qualified people in schools. In the words of Fjelkner:


As is evident from the quotes above, the disinterest of local school governments for awarding successful teachers is but another part of their devastating effect on the conditions for teachers’ work and the school system in general.

Connected to the under payment of teachers is the argument that the local school governments have been decreasing funds for schools in order to compensate for overall budget deficits, and that the establishment of some two hundred local school administrations have increased the administrative cost of the school system in an indefensible way. Fjelkner et al. argues that it would be possible to transfer about five billion Swedish crowns to increasing teacher salaries or improving class room activities and raising results by making the local school bureaucracies more efficient.

Ansvaret för detta är jämnt fördelat bland de politiska partierna. Delvis kan de försämtrade resultaten förklaras av att endast lite drygt hälften av grundskolans totalkostnad går till undervisning i Sverige, jämfört med cirka 64 procent för OECD-länderna. Vi förenas av insikten att resurserna i svensk skola används fel. Sedan kommunaliseringen har skoladministrationen vuxit. Det finns idag ett flertal tjänster som kan effektiviseras genom centralt eller regional samarbete. Här borde ansvariga politiker i regeringen och ute i landets kommuner våga ta bort
Once again, the references to international comparisons are evident, as is the blaming of the local school governments for being the source of the current state of emergency. Following the track of financial problems as causes for the current situation, LR is also critical of the way that publicly funded free school companies have been allowed to make large profits from their businesses and using them for rewarding stock holders instead of raising teacher salaries or investing them in order to raise results. LR is also accusing private school companies of deliberately trying to keep costs down in order to be able to maximize profits, resulting in poor quality education. As Fjelkner et al puts it:

Following this, LR claims that the reason for the unions support for the free school system was to create a market where different employers would be forced to compete for teachers and thereby contribute to increasing teachers’ salaries. However, in order to maximize profits free schools have, in cooperation with local governments, kept salaries down by hiring people without proper teacher education, contributing to the falling results of Swedish pupils as well as the depreciation of the importance of professional teachers in general.

Even if the economic arguments are central to LR as a teachers union, there is another accompanying argument more closely connected to the professional status of teachers in general. Not only has the decentralization of the Swedish school system had dire consequences for the economic rewards of teachers but it has also severely diminished their societal status as professionals. It comes as no surprise, given the way the story is told above, that this diminishing status is caused by the local school authorities’ mishandling of schools and the teaching profession in general. In an op-ed co-authored with the minister of education Fjelkner claims:

In another text Fjelkner makes clear that ”för Lärarnas riksförbund har det hela tiden varit tydligt att politiker genom kommunaliseringen ville sänka lärarnas status” (Fjelkner 2011-03-14). This has been done by a deliberate strategy to diminish the role of the individual teacher and of the importance of teaching and subject skills overall. Local school authorities have instead focused on other values in schools, such as caring and the development of social competencies and skills in a more abstract way, making highly educated teachers unnecessary and interchangeable for even persons lacking any kind of teacher education. Furthermore, the specific subject based competencies of individual teachers was devalued as teachers was expected to be able to teach whatever subjects the headmaster wished in order to be used as efficiently as possible form an economic perspective. The lack of interest on behalf of local
school authorities when it comes to proper funding of schools and thereby the work of teachers is central to the LR story. As Ärlebrandt, another LR representative, writes;

För att lärare skall orka vara engagerade krävs grundförutsättningar vad gäller klasstorlekar, resurser m.m. Då kan inte skolans resurser ställas mot snöröjning, äventyrsbad, teaterhus och annat (Ärlebrandt 2011-02-02).

Another consequence of this, highlighted by Fjelkner above, is the resulting lack of in-service education and skills development made available for teachers. According to LR, the fact that the number of uneducated persons working as teachers have increased dramatically in Sweden since the decentralization of the school system is evidence of the downgrading of the importance of per-service as well as in-service education for teachers in the view of local school authorities. Fjelkner argues;

Alltför länge har skolans undervisning och därmed läraryrket, styrtts av andra än lärarna själva. Det har kommit in personer utan erfarenhet av vare sig relevanta ämnen eller aktuell skolform och fått arbeta som lärare och till och med leda skolor. … Inställningen från arbetsgivare har tyvärr varit sådan att vare sig lärares grundutbildning eller fortbildning har varit viktig (Fjelkner 2011-01-31).

Taking the argument even further, Fjelkner argues that local school authorities used a kind of rhetoric in which teachers that defended the importance of subject skills and traditional ways of teaching was described as a problem for the development of a schools system based on the liberties of free choice. In her words;


Local school agencies, in other words, implemented a system of ”anything goes” under the label of free choice in order to downgrade the importance of qualified teachers and their need for financial rewards and expensive in-service education, resulting in the falling results of Swedish students and the general depreciation of teaching as a high status professional occupation. In the words of LR, this exemplifies the somewhat disdainful view of teachers held by representatives from local school authorities and their central organization SKL. Fjelkner exemplifies this in the following way

I tidningen Skolledaren säger SKL:s Ingela Gardner Sundström att hon hoppas att ”om fem år är läraryrkets själ inte längre sommarloven utan elevernas resultat”. Hon menar alltså att lärares drivkraft är sommarlovet – inte att ge elever kunskaper och hjälpa dem att utvecklas till kunniga samhällsmedborgare. Denna syn på lärarkåren är oerhört föraktfull och skulle inte kunna riktas mot någon annan yrkesgrupp. Men jag borde kanske inte bli förvånad? Sedan kommunerna fick huvudansvaret för skolan har de försökt nedmontera den enskilde lärarens roll och förmånsa undervisningens betydelse (Fjelkner 2011-04-20)

In order to summarize, the story, as it is told by LR, of why the Swedish school system is in such a decline is about how the decentralization of the responsibility of providing and financing education led to a depreciation of teaching as a high status professional occupation with dire consequences for Swedish pupils. This is because local school authorities, in order to defeat budget deficits and keeping costs down, devalued the importance of highly trained and specialized teachers by not paying them competitive salaries and by denying them access to in-service education at the same time as the number of unqualified persons working as teachers were permitted to increase heavily. The result of this development is the current
unattractiveness of teaching as a professional choice for the most talented students, leading to a decrease in highly educated and competent teachers working within the Swedish school system. In light of this, as LR argues, the decreasing results of Swedish education comes as no surprise. So, what does LR suggest must be done in order to change the current situation? How is their story of why the present came to be connected to the policies they suggest in order to reach a future more similar to the situation before the devastating events of 20 years ago?

**Backwards Into the Future – The Past as a Roadmap Ahead?**

According to Golant and Sillince (2007) a narrative plot often revolves around the fact that something was (a past) but something happened that disturbed the way things was supposed to be (the present) and that a return to equilibrium is what is needed in order for the story to come to a successful end (the future). Thus, in the case of the LR story of the current educational situation of Sweden, decentralization broke the status of teaching as a professional occupation with high societal status, making the re-establishment of teaching as a high status profession the central goal in order to bring the story to a successful end. Given the way that decentralization, embodied in local school authorities, is given the role of the main antagonist in the LR story, the central objective becomes to break or defeat it by arguing for a recentralization of Swedish education. The need for the central state to retake control of the education system is, by far, the dominant policy suggestion supported by the story laid out above. As is stated by Fjelkner and the Swedish minister of education:

*Men för att den nedåtgående utvecklingen helt och hållet skall kunna vändas är det vår bedömning att nuvarande huvudmannaskapsmodell inte håller i längden. Sverige behöver bygga upp ett nytt och modernt huvudmannaskap som har till syfte att göra skolan nationellt likvärdig, med hög kvalitet, elever som når sin fulla potential och en lärarkår i världsklass. ... Den nya styrningsmodell för skolan som vi vill se innebär inte en återgång till gamla Skolöverstyrelsens stela detaljreglering. Det behövs en modern styrning istället för den stora skolbyråkrati som har skapats i 290 kommuner (Björklund & Fjelkner 2011-03-15).*

This is somewhat elaborated upon in another text by Fjelkner on the same topic:

*Vi vill se en tydligare statlig styrning av skolans resurser och finansiering. Även om många beslut nu fattas som är bra för skolan och skolans kärnuppdrag, så behöver vi gå vidare och återta kvalitetskontrollen genom tydligare lärarfokus för att eleverna ska få den utbildning de har rätt till (Fjelkner 2011-03-30).*

It is obvious that LR consider a number of the reforms currently directed at the school system as good ones, but that there is no way for the Swedish school system to become successful in the long run as long as the financial responsibility resides with the local school authorities. Once again it is obvious that the antagonist must be defeated in order for the happy ending to come about. Beside the overall goal of recentralization, the LR texts include two more vital policy suggestions deemed necessary in order to re-establish teaching as a high status profession. That is the implementation of a system of teacher certification and a connected reappreciation of the importance of knowledge in schools in order to uphold high quality within Swedish education. Fjelkner argues:

*Nu blir det möjligt för lärarna att återta den position och status de en gång hade. Med lärarlegitimationen, som införs från 2012, är det bara legitimerade lärare som får tillsvidareanställas och sätta betyg. För att få legitimation ska läraren ha examen och därefter ha visat sig lämplig för yrket under en introduktionsperiod på minst ett år (Fjelkner & Pålsson 2011-03-02).*
The importance of a system of certification is that it would make it impossible for persons without teacher education to work as teachers and thereby force local school authorities to stop employing unqualified teachers in schools. But it would also force local school authorities to fund in-service education in order to educated unqualified or partly qualified teachers in order to be able to keep them within the system. The system of certification is also designed to highlight the importance of subject and age specialization in teaching by only certifying teachers for the subjects and age groups corresponding to the teaching degree of the teacher in question.

There is, in other words, a clear narrative hidden within the different LR texts. It is a story of a professional occupation under attack, with clear roles for heroes (teachers struggling on in spite of the current conditions of work) and villains (decentralization, local school authorities). Only by overcoming the villain can teachers regain their lost status, which in turn would make it more competitive as an occupational choice of talented students, which, then, in turn would produce better teachers and better results within Swedish education in general. As Fjelkner and Pålsson concludes:


The purpose of the previous section is to illuminate the central storyline of a number of different LR texts on a number of different topics. The next phase of analysis is about interpreting this story in relation to the context in which it is produced. LR isn’t making things up by themselves, but they are using already existing narratives of different kinds, other public narratives as well as more general metanarratives in order to create their own plot. Unfortunately, there isn’t time for me to write this next phase of analysis before this seminar, but I will conclude by highlighting, very briefly, some thoughts on the relationship between the story constructed above and the context within which it is designed to operate.

First, it is obvious that LR is placing their narrative within the educational discourse known as the knowledge economy. The importance of education for the future success of Sweden as a knowledge based nation is a central point of departure in the LR texts. As a result, the importance of international competition becomes central both in terms of the results of Swedish teachers and in terms of the conditions under which Swedish teachers work. In this sense, a number of OECD comparisons become central for the way LR argues nationally.

Secondly, there is evidence of the fact that LR supports, or at least use, what could be called a story of effectiveness surrounding the implementation of what is usually called the New Public Management model of providing public services. There is, in the LR story, a strong emphasis on effectiveness and the need to cut administrative and bureaucratic costs. Fjelkner is repeating, in a number of different texts, the need to spend tax payer’s money wisely and with care. Furthermore, the centrality of accountability is also highlighted by the LR story in terms of demands on more central control, support for the national school inspection, and to some extent also the system of teacher certification as a way of controlling the work of teachers.
Finally, the need for the professionalization of teaching is central to LR. However, there is an interesting duality in the way this professional development is to be achieved. In the words of Evetts (2009), occupational as well as organizational aspects of professionalism are blending within the LR story, contributing to what could possibly be called a kind of reprofessionalization. However, this will have to be developed further later on and based on a broader selection of texts. The purpose of this one has been to try out a narrative approach to analyzing texts like these in order to discuss the usefulness of thinking about policy texts and political behavior in a narrative way.

The next step of this study is to analyze texts from the other teacher union, Lärarförbundet, as well and to compare the way they are emplotted in different ways depending on the policies they are constructed to defend and the identity they are to support. For the final analysis more focus will also be given to the connection between the ways the unions use these stories in relation to their professional projects and how, if at all, notions of professionalism is translated or edited in order to suit the needs of the narrator in question. What is a professional teacher? What is the base for such professionalism? What differences and similarities are present in the two narratives and how can those differences and similarities be understood in relation to intraprofessional competition over the professional jurisdiction of teachers?

References


All analyzed texts from Lärarnas riksförbund referred to in the text were downloaded from - and are available on - the LR homepage (www.lr.se).