

NERA/NFPF 37th Congress, Trondheim, Norway March 5-7, 2009

The Globalization of School Policy and the Restructuring of the Role of Teachers: A Swedish Example

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Abstract: *For a long time education was a strictly national concern. Its purpose was to contribute to national unity and to educate citizens suitable for the society in which they would live and work. Changes in the last thirty years, often termed globalization, have come to challenge this function for education in important ways. Drawing upon a minor study consisting of a textual analysis of the school policy debate present in the editorial and debate pages of the largest Swedish newspapers, this paper argues for an apparent collision of public discourses of the role of teachers in Sweden. Results show that a global discourse of education collides with the national curriculum of Sweden in the national policy debate on the overall purpose of the Swedish school system, and the role of the teachers working within it. In short, the national curriculums' description of the complex nature of the teaching profession, with a strong focus on the fostering of democratically competent citizens firmly based in the defining values of Swedish society, are challenged by the global narrative of a knowledge economy where the purpose of the educational system is to generate competitive subjects with the skills to secure key positions in the global race for high quality jobs and property rights in a global economy. The analysis shows that based on the argument of a relative decline of Swedish students in the Timss and Pisa surveys of the OECD, leading politicians uses a disaster-like rhetoric in order to highlight the need for dramatic improvements of an educational system in deep crisis. This is because the declining results of Swedish students are interpreted as a risk for the future competitiveness of Sweden in a globalized economy. This, they contend, is due to the fact that Swedish teacher educations are infested with muddled ideologies focused on feel-good activities and questions of social competence, instead of the education of teachers who are effective instructors with in-depth knowledge about the subjects that they teach. The solutions to these problems, proposed by leading politicians, have strong connections to the global educational discourse and its focus on market style solutions of accountability and competition in creating effective schools and teachers. The paper concludes that this collision of public discourses of the role of teachers complicates the construction of a coherent professional identity among Swedish teachers, the result being that teachers lock themselves within a conservative view of their profession, seriously hindering the development of the teaching profession necessary for a more globalized world.*

Introduction

This paper deals with the changing nature of teachers' work in relation to the concept of globalization. It argues that the uncertainty of teachers when it comes to definitions of teacher professionalism can be explained by a discursive struggle between two opposing public narratives of teachers and teaching present in contemporary Swedish society. One is heavily influenced by a more global narrative of a knowledge economy and the other has its roots in the traditional educational model of the Nordic countries.

Drawing upon a minor study of the collision of these somewhat opposing discourses, the paper discusses the relationship between globalization and education and how this is affecting the model of education in Sweden and the possibilities of teachers to construct a coherent professional identity.

Globalization and the Changing Nature of Education

Understanding Globalization

When using the concept of globalization one must be cautious given the multiple meanings and interpretations associated with it. Normally, the term is used when one refers to the growth of a global capitalist system which affects the organization and conditions of labor on a global scale, but as Dale (1999) argues, globalization also has political and cultural strands.

Scholte (2005) argues that if the concept of globalization is to contribute to a deeper understanding of the social world of today, the term must add some new dimension, which can not be as thoroughly understood with already existing vocabulary. Because of this, any definition of globalization as the same as (or just more of) internationalization, universalization, liberalization or westernization, will not suffice. Instead he argues for a definition of globalization as “/.../ transplanetary – and often also supraterritorial – connectivity” (Scholte 2005 p. 84), meaning that even if globalization relates to all of the above mentioned social processes, it is the changing nature of social geography that it generates that is its defining feature. What is special about globalization, according to Scholte, is the change in spatial relations that it brings. Thus, the processes involved in globalization thereby render territorial boundaries more or less obsolete. However, this is not an even process and although this transplanetary connectivity connects people anywhere, it doesn't do it *everywhere* or without relation to more territorial influences. Scholte writes:

Global relations today substantially rather than wholly transcend territorial space. Although territoriality does not place insurmountable constraints on supraterritoriality, global flows still have to engage with territorial locations. The present world is globalizing, not totally globalized. By the same token, however, little if any territoriality today exists independently of supraterritoriality. Most contemporary regional, country, provincial and local conditions coexist with – and are influenced by – global circumstances. Indeed, territoriality is changed by its encounter with supraterritoriality (Scholte 2005 p. 77).

In addition to this, Dale also underlines the importance of understanding that “/.../ the effects of globalization are mediated, in both directions and in complex ways, by existing national patterns and structures /.../” (Dale 1999 p. 3).

This paper takes this as a point of departure as it seeks to investigate the influence of such globalizing tendencies in the (territorial) school policy debate of Sweden and in so doing, it focuses on the political strand of globalization, which, according to Cerny (1997) is characterized by the fact that “/.../ the shaping of the playing field of politics itself is increasingly determined not within isolated units /.../ called states; rather it derives from a complex congeries of multilevel games played on multilayered institutional playing fields, above and across, as well as within, state boundaries” (Cerny 1997 p. 253).

Globalization, Education and the Knowledge Economy

For a long time education was a strictly national concern. According to Green (1997), large scale national education systems grew out of post-revolutionary Europe as an instrument of state formation and they played a crucial role as instruments of social cohesion in the construction and preservation of the European nation states. But under the influence of globalizing processes the nation states of today, and thereby the education systems within them, are being challenged and forced to reconstruct in accordance with a more global world system in which a number of other actors, i.e. intergovernmental organizations and multinational corporations, have come to play a more prominent part.

According to Dale (1999), intergovernmental organizations are central actors in the construction of a globalized educational narrative of a knowledge economy. Rizvi and Lingard (2006) argue that the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is one of the most dominant organizations in the creation of such a globalized narrative, but even the European Union (EU) is playing a more active role in promoting the development of the education systems of Europe in a more uniform direction.

The defining trademark of the knowledge economy, according to Sörlin and Vessuri (2007), is that “/.../ it is market-driven and performs according to a market ideology” (p. 3). In the knowledge economy, education is, above all, a way for individual states to compete in a global marketplace, and in the words of Dale (1999) “/.../ it could be argued that the clearest effects of globalization on education policy come from the consequences of states’ reorganization of their priorities to make them more competitive /.../” (p. 4). The consequence of this is that the purpose of the educational system is to generate competitive subjects with the skill to secure key positions in the global race for high quality jobs and property rights. In order to accomplish this, the reformation of the educational system according to market principles of competition and accountability become imperative. In his discussion of the education systems of Europe, Wielemans (2000) concludes that the economic system is increasingly affecting the educational systems, not just because the latter is subjugated under budgetary limitations but also because of the fact that “/.../ the local day-to-day administration of the schools conforms increasingly to the style and attitudes inherent to ‘business management’” (p. 26).

The Changing Nature of Education in the Nordic Countries

The Nordic Model of Education

During the years following the end of the Second World War an educational system evolved within the Nordic countries that in many ways differed from those of the rest of Europe. Centered in a social democratic order, a comprehensive school system was created on the basis of a rational discourse of science and a positive view of the state and the public sector as the best provider and organizer of education (Ofstedal Telhaug et al. 2006). This was particularly evident in the cases of Sweden and Norway and it became possible because those countries “/.../ embraced the tension between capital and labor, the free market and centralized planning, and consequently the tension existing between various classes in society” (Ofstedal Telhaug et al 2006 p. 249). This compromise, what Ofstedal Telhaug et al calls the definition of Nordic social democracy, was made possible because of the depoliticized nature of politics in which the right accepted the ambition of full employment and a strong welfare state and the left a moderate form of capitalism in order to create a society in which “/.../ class loyalties were subordinate to loyalty to the nation” (ibid). In line with thoughts like these, a political system developed in which the state became the natural provider of services which earlier, and in the rest of Europe, was considered to belong to the realm of the market or the civil society. That the educational system played a key role in the construction and preservation of this welfare state model became firmly established in the public consciousness and on the political agenda (Ofstedal Telhaug et al 2006).

The school system that developed under these political circumstances, and became known as the Nordic model in education, is explained by Carlgren et al (2006) in the following way:

A comprehensive school system in Nordic terms refers to a unified, unstreamed school system where all pupils, despite academic and economic backgrounds and resources, are enrolled in the same age-based school. The Nordic model further implies both theoretical and practical training and should, in principle, provide the students with the same structural possibilities for learning in terms of teacher competence, class size, text materials and other sources for structural support (Carlgren et al 2006 p. 301).

The overall purpose of the educational systems that developed in the Nordic countries was the education of democratically competent citizens based on the values of these particular societies. There is also an obvious meritocratic ambition in the fact that all children, regardless of socioeconomic affiliations, should be given the same educational possibilities. The ambition was to, as far as possible, reduce the impact of class divisions in society. The state, as provider of education, was considered the guarantee for equal opportunities for all citizens. In order to reach those goals, what Ofstedal Telhaug et al (2006) calls input management became a defining feature of the educational systems in that even if the financial resources spent on education increased, the money was often earmarked by central authorities and left little or no influence to local authorities concerning how they should be spent.

The Nordic educational systems also differed from the rest of Europe in that they were more influenced by “/.../ international reform/pedagogic theory [and] its

appreciation of the child's personal potential and the desire to place the pupil at the centre" (Oftedal Telhaug et al 2006 p. 254). Based on a psychological approach to pedagogy "the active child" and the individualized "the child in the centre" discourses were to become trademarks of Nordic education and would develop into a *learning by doing* approach that highlighted group work and encouraged pupils to be active agents in their own education. Oftedal Telhaug et al (2006) conclude that

Pedagogy was closely related to the psychology in attempting to acquire the didactic imperatives from psychological science and thereby utilizing the contemporary instrumentalism at the level of the classroom. This pedagogy criticized the school's use of external incentives such as grades and examinations, and argued for a teaching method based upon the pupil's own internal motivation (p. 255).

Globalization and the Changing Nature of Nordic Education since the 1990's

The characteristics of the Nordic model of education, sketched out above, are, of course, a simplification. The image of a highly centralized system in which equality of opportunity and the wish to promote individualized learning with a focus on the abilities of every child is, as has been stated, a defining feature of the classic educational model of the Nordic countries, but its aims have never been fully reached and shifts in dominant educational and/or political thought have made continuous change a necessary reality. However, never has the speed and extent of these changes been as dramatic as during the 1990s and early 2000s, the decade when the globalization debate took off for real (Scholte 2005).

Carlgren and Klette (2008) write about what they call a restructuring of education. By this they mean that changes in education includes a wide range of phenomena where, for the Nordic countries, the shift from a highly bureaucratic and state centric model to a highly decentralized model rooted in goal steering; the effort of making teaching a collaborative task and marketization and consumer orientation can be considered three typical examples. Oftedal Telhaug et al (2006) would call this a shift from input to output management. As it seems, the Nordic countries have been forced to accommodate thoughts in line with the global narrative of the knowledge economy championed by intergovernmental organizations like the OECD and the European Union. In a globalizing world the room for individual countries to pursue educational goals of their own choice is diminishing under the pressure of the need for all states to be competitive on a global market. Thus, according to Carlgren and Klette (2008), the changes in the Nordic model of education in recent years should be considered adjustments to a new social (globalizing) reality and not, as was the case when the Nordic model of education was first established, as a point of departure for social change in a wider perspective.

As has already been stated, there are similarities between the Nordic countries when it comes to education, not least in the existence of a compulsory and comprehensive school system. However, the changes currently occurring have affected the Nordic countries in different ways due to the contextual differences between them. Carlgren and Klette describes this in the following way:

In Norway, restructuring, in terms of goal steering and a redistributed economical system, is combined with a highly specified, detailed, and centralized NC [national curriculum] giving detailed instruction for teaching and learning at each and every grade. In Sweden and Finland, goal steering is implemented through a rather open NC in combination with a system of government formulated criteria for grading. Marketization in terms of competitiveness /.../ is emphasized in Sweden but not at all in Norway at the beginning of the decade (Carlgren & Klette 2008 p. 122).

So far, the ongoing changes, or the restructuring of the Nordic model of education have been discussed from a macro perspective. But changes in the way education is organized on a national level inevitably affect the professional conditions of teachers working in the schools of the educational system. What happens to teachers' perceptions about their professional role when education becomes a commodity and the choice of parents, and thereby the importance of models of evaluation and accountability, become decisive of what constitutes a successful school or a good education?

In a number of studies Swedish teachers express the opinion that what it means to be a teacher is undergoing profound changes. Both Lundström (2007) and Persson and Tallberg Broman (2002) conclude that there is a growing uncertainty among Swedish teachers about what they are supposed to accomplish and a feeling that they no longer can identify with what they feel society demands of them. Lundström, in his study of upper secondary teachers, argues that teachers can no longer concentrate upon what they feel is their primary undertaking, i.e. teaching their subject, but are forced to perform more unqualified administrative tasks and devote more and more time to 'social issues' concerning their students. Persson and Tallberg Broman, in their study of pre-school and compulsory school teachers, reach similar conclusions and argue that the teachers in their study claims that teaching in contemporary Sweden implies something different from what they were trained for during their pre-service education.

In order to understand how this growing uncertainty can be explained I carried out a smaller study in which I concluded that this uncertainty can be understood as a collision of two opposing discourses of teachers and teaching that is currently coexisting in Swedish society. One builds on the historical heritage of the Nordic model of education and the other is more influenced by the globalized narrative of a knowledge economy. The former is expressed through the national curriculum and finds its strongest supporters within the community of educational researchers, and the latter is primarily expressed through the public policy debate on education and is supported by politicians and, which may be a bit surprising, the teacher unions.

Colliding Discourses of Teachers and Teaching in Sweden

Some Points of Departure

The study referred to in this section was carried out as part of a Master Thesis in Educational Sciences, but it could also be regarded as a kind of pilot study for my upcoming PhD-Thesis. Its aim was to analyze the public school policy debate in Sweden in order to investigate if some dominant public narratives of teachers and teaching could be discovered. Starting out from a social constructivist point of departure and using a narrative theory of identity construction, I was interested in finding out what the participants in the public school policy debate said about teachers and teaching. This in

order to try to construct a public discourse of what teachers had to relate to when it comes to their construction of a professional identity.

As a theoretical point of departure I used the narrative theory of identity construction developed by the American sociologist Margret R. Somers (1994)¹. In short, she contends that we use stories to make sense of our place in the world. During the course of our lives we develop a story about ourselves, in relation to which we interpret and make sense of new experiences. This story, or ontological narrative, also tells us about what we can and cannot do in different situations that we may find ourselves. New experiences are, therefore, interpreted and made meaningful in relation to our ongoing ontological narrative. However, this personal narrative is dependent upon what Somers (1994) calls public narratives, that is, stories created by institutions larger than the individual, for example the media, political parties and so on. Nancy Ammerman (2003), an American sociologist of religion, explains the interrelation between ontological and public narratives in the following way:

We tell stories about our selves (both literary and through our behavior) that signal both our uniqueness and our membership, that exhibit the consistent themes that characterize us and the unfolding improvisation of the given situation. Each situation, in turn, has its own story, a public narrative shaped by the culture and institutions of which it is a part, with powerful persons and prescribed roles establishing the plot. /.../ Both the individual and the collectivity are structured and remade in those everyday interactions (Ammerman 2003 p. 215).

In other words, in order to understand how it is possible for individual teachers to make sense of their professional identity we must understand the public narratives of teachers and teaching which they must relate to in this process of identity formation. In order to understand the uncertainty expressed by Swedish teachers I agree with Somers when she states that “/.../ social action can only be intelligible if we recognize that people are guided to act by the structural and cultural relationships in which they are embedded and by the stories through which they constitute their identity” (Somers 1994 p. 624).

Taking this narrative approach as a point of departure I analyzed articles published in the debate or editorial pages of the largest Swedish newspapers during 2007, in order to investigate if any public narratives could be discovered and described. The analysis builds upon a total of 49 articles from *Svenska Dagbladet* and *Dagens Nyheter*, which are both liberal newspapers, and *Dalademokraten*², a smaller rural newspaper with a social democratic political position. The analysis was conducted in two separate stages. First all statements about teachers were identified, and in a second step I investigated how those statements were emplotted and selectively appropriated (Somers 1994) in different ways by different narrators. In other words, during the second stage of the analysis focus was given to what the different participants in the public school debate said about teachers and the school system and how they used this in order to tell a story that was favorable to their own objectives.

¹ In this paper I do not present any comprehensive presentation of this theory, but merely sketch out its general idea in a very simplified way. For a more thorough explanation see Somers (1994) or Ammerman (2003).

² This newspaper is much smaller and more locally based than the other newspapers. It was included in order to take in views from a wider selection of political positions since no nationwide newspaper has a social democratic editorial page.

The Decline of the Swedish School System³

As has already been mentioned above, the data reveals a clear and general public narrative about teachers and teaching in Sweden that is shared by virtually all participants in the public debate of education in Sweden, from the liberal Minister of Education to the social democratic opposition, liberal as well as social democratic editorials and the teacher unions. Only when it comes to explaining the reasons for the current situation does the story diverge into slightly different directions.

Not surprisingly, throughout the material there is a strong consensus regarding the importance of teachers. Several reasons are given for this. Jan Björklund, Swedish Minister of Education and Lars Leijonborg, Swedish Minister of Higher Education and Research, states that competent teachers are “/.../ a necessity if Sweden is to thrive in the age of globalization” (Björklund & Leijonborg 2007-04-20). They are supported in this by the editorial page of *Svenska Dagbladet* in which Anders Linder states that everyone seems to agree upon the centrality of competent teachers for the future status of Sweden as a knowledge society (Linder 2007-08-21). Areas in which teachers are considered specially important includes, for example, working against bullying and other forms of harassments (Thalén & Harnesk 2007-02-14), fostering democratically competent citizens (Fjelkner & Preizs 2007-10-16), being role models for children and teenagers (Rotschild 2007-12-27) and reaching adolescents on issues of sexual health (Fjelkner & Regnér 2007-11-07).

But even if teachers are considered important in a number of ways, it is evident in the school policy debate that they are not succeeding in meeting the expectations. The general theme of the material is that, for a number of reasons, the educational system of Sweden is in a state of decline. The editorial page of *Dalademokraten* claims that teachers are “/.../ lacking the knowledge necessary to stop bullying or to help children that are being abused at home” (2007-10-09). Another central line of argument in the material is the lack of sufficient subject skills among Swedish teachers and an inability to combine theory and practice in their teaching (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2007-01-12, Fjelkner 2007-02-13, Wiklund, 2007-08-14). Teachers are also considered unable to maintain discipline (Enkvist 2007-11-08), and to lack the skills of grading students in a way that is fair and possible for them to understand (Nyberg 2007-06-08).

In order to summarize the statements about teachers and teaching in the material, one could argue that the image of the educational system of Sweden is one in decline. Even if teachers are considered important, it is obvious that they are not considered able to perform in a satisfying way, resulting in schools in which there is a lack of learning, where weak students are left to their own destiny and where there is a lack of ability to uphold discipline and safety. But who is to blame? This is where the slight differences in the general public narrative start to show.

For the liberal politicians in the present government and the editorial pages of the liberal newspapers, the root of the current crisis is to be found in the Nordic model of education presented above. Decades of social democratic school policy have created a school system, and primarily a teacher education, infested with muddled ideologies focused on feel good activities and social competence instead of the education of teachers who are effective instructors with in-depth knowledge about the subjects that they teach.

³ In this section, only some examples from the analysis will be presented. For a more complete version see Lilja (2008). All quotes in this section are translated from Swedish by the author.

In this they are supported by the teacher unions (Björklund & Leijonborg 2007-04-20, Linder 2007-04-29, Ekdal 2007-06-22, Fjelkner 2007-02-13). Even the social democratic editorial page in *Dalademokraten* accuses teacher educations of being a central problem, but understandably, from a somewhat different perspective (Wiklund 2007-08-15).

Other problems which are mentioned, but given less attention than the underperforming teacher education, are more dependent upon who is doing the talking. For example, the teacher unions also blame the central government as well as the local municipalities for a lack of leadership and for decentralizing and thereby under-financing the educational system, resulting in lower wages for teachers and a declining professional status in general (Fjelkner & Preizs 2007-10-16). *Dalademokraten* argues that the establishment of school vouchers and private schools supported by taxpayers, and the competition this creates, have impoverished the public schools and created a class division in Swedish education that seriously undermines the quality of education for, mainly, working class children (Wiklund 2007-11-13).

The solutions proposed to these problems have strong connections to the global educational discourse, presented above as the knowledge economy, and its focus on market style solutions of accountability and competition in creating effective schools and teachers. The key solution argued for by a clear majority of the articles analyzed in this study is a restructuring of teacher educations so that the focus of student teachers is turned away from 'social issues' to a focus on effective teaching of clearly defined subjects. Teachers need to learn more if they are to be able to educate competitive subjects with the skills to secure key positions in the global race for high quality jobs and property rights, starting with improvements of the results of Swedish students in international evaluations such as PISA or TIMSS. In order to accomplish this, a teaching profession must be created that focuses on knowledge and discipline. It must be effective and depart from clear goals which can easily be evaluated. These are considered necessary adjustments in order to raise the professional status of teachers and for teacher educations to be able to recruit the best students (Linder 2007-04-29, Rebas 2007-06-28).

Teaching as a Complex Profession: An Opposing Discourse of Teacher Professionalism

As was developed upon shortly above, Swedish teachers reveal uncertainty when asked to describe the purpose of their profession. Lundström (2007) writes that the upper secondary teachers in his study express the view that they are not allowed to focus upon what they feel is their central task, but are being forced to devote more and more time to dealing with 'social issues' in relation to their students. In their article, Carlgren and Klette (2008) state that this view is shared by teachers from all Nordic countries. Thus, the changes suggested by Swedish politicians when it comes to a restructuring of the role of teachers, with a focus on teaching their subjects instead of dealing with 'social issues', should be welcome and not at all problematic. However, problems arise when this simplified version of teacher professionalism meets the demands of the national curriculum of Sweden, a text that, even if it can also be said to be a part of the ongoing restructuring of Swedish education, contains a far more complex description of teacher professionalism. It contains a still present legacy of what was described above as the Nordic model of education, in terms of teachers' responsibility to foster democratically competent citizens firmly based in the defining values of Swedish society.

Brynolf et al (2007) writes that according to the national curriculum the task of Swedish teachers comprises the transferring of norms, values and knowledge, developing students, creating good environments for learning, cooperate with different agents within as well as outside the school, evaluate, grade and inform about students' progression and developing the school itself. This means that teaching is a job that requires more than the skills necessary to teach a specific subject matter. There is, within Swedish educational research, strong support for this more complex teacher discourse. For example, both Säfström (2006) and Colnerud (2006) underline the importance of a moral dimension in teaching, both because it is necessary for making life in the classroom work, but also because the school has a normative mission when it comes to transferring certain values to all students. This makes it imperative that teachers reflect upon their own moral assumptions in order to develop a conscious professional ethic, since teachers in this respect are important role models for their students. Röse Martinsson (2006) argues that the job-description in the national curriculum requires that teachers *widen* their competencies in order to master the complexities of teaching in the society of today. Selander (2006) argues along the same lines when he claims that in order to meet the challenges of today, and a more complex professional situation, teachers must be willing to accept that they will need to master a wider range of skills and at the same time become more oriented toward the societies surrounding their schools. In order to manage this, Malm (2009) argues that teacher education must “/.../ focus much more on the personal processes involved in becoming a professional teacher; that is, teacher training programmes should comprise a well-grounded balance between the cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning to teach” (Malm 2009 p. 87).

To summarize, it can be argued that two opposing discourses of teachers and teaching coexist in contemporary Swedish society. One is championed by leading politicians, large newspaper editorials and to some extent even teacher unions. The other is expressed in the national curriculum and supported, at least publicly, by the community of educational researchers. The former is heavily influenced by a global economical/political narrative of a knowledge economy, where market style solutions are applied to educational problems in order to create an effective and competitive educational system for a global economy, while the latter is more based in the traditional Nordic model of education where the fostering of democratically competent citizens and the complexity of teaching, for example its moral dimensions, is highlighted.

Conclusion: Restructuring or Conserving the Role of Teachers?

There is no doubt that teachers in Sweden are affected by supranational pressures. The starting point of the discussion about the failing state of Swedish education is a relative decline of Swedish students in international evaluations, such as PISA. This is thought to jeopardize the future competitiveness of Sweden as an advanced knowledge economy, and it is in order to reverse this development that a restructuring of Swedish education is being conducted. This discourse of teachers and teaching, with its disaster-like rhetoric of a school system in deep crisis, I argue, is constructed in order to obtain support for transformations of the educational system and the teaching profession in a more neoliberal fashion. Teacher professionalism in this discourse is focused on being an effective instructor with clear and easily evaluable goals to obtain.

Given the theoretical perspective from which this study departs, this process of restructuring and the arguments on which it relies becomes problematic because they challenge another discourse where teacher professionalism is described in more complex ways. When teachers are faced with two opposing narratives of what their job is all about; one transferred by their teacher educators and closely related to the national curriculum and other documents constituting their job-description, and another, transferred by politicians and unions, saying that much of what they have been taught during their pre-service education is nothing but a rest of the muddled ideologies of the 1970s, it is not hard to understand that they feel uncertain about how to make sense of their work. Which public narrative shall they relate to? The one championed by the national curriculum and the research community or the one with the support of the public saying that teachers should focus on teaching children to read and write and to be disciplined, or something in between, whatever that is?

It could be argued that this collision of public discourses of the role of teachers complicates the construction of a coherent professional identity among Swedish teachers, the result being that teachers lock themselves within a conservative view of their profession, seriously hindering the development of the teaching profession necessary for a more globalized world. Hargreaves (2000) has argued that teacher professionalism in a postmodern society stands at a crossroad. One way leads to the development of a reformulated, wider and more open postmodern professionalism and the other is a way back to a pre-professional age where, under the pressures of marketization, teaching becomes a basically instrumental occupation, under total control of centrally proclaimed goals and accompanying evaluation mechanisms.

During 2008, several new steps have been taken in the process of restructuring the educational system of Sweden. In order to improve the status of teachers in society a governmental investigation has been presented that suggests a system of authorization where teachers, like doctors or lawyers, would be certified (SOU 2008:52) and another suggesting a full reconstruction of Swedish teacher education (SOU 2008:109). The future of teacher professionalism in Sweden is still to be decided. What kind of teacher professionalism is inscribed in the investigations mentioned above? How can they be understood in the light of wider changes in society and what kind of teacher professionalism is required in a postmodern society? These are all interesting questions in need of further research. But, if Swedish teachers are to be able to overcome the uncertainty surrounding their profession and become active agents in the creation of a teacher professionalism for a new society, the current situation, where many politicians and educational researchers have been locked in a somewhat antagonistic relationship, needs to be overcome. Only then can a positive and necessary reformulation of the role of teachers become a possibility.

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