Teachers’ Professional Qualification – TPQ

The project focuses on how school and pre-school teachers’ professional qualification may develop in the tension between research-based and experience-based knowledge at college and in the workplace, as campus-based or workplace-based education.

Aim

Focusing on pre-school and school teachers, the aim of the project is to generate knowledge on:

The important factors relating to the preparation of teacher training across sites (college and work place), under different institutional arrangements (campus-based and workplace-based) and across professions (pre-school vs. primary and secondary schools), drawing on research-based and experience-based knowledge.

Background

National and international discourses on what constitutes a relevant professional qualification for pre-school and school teachers are the backdrop for the project. Our society is in constant change. This calls for an education that qualifies and prepares for continuous professional development at work and that encourages future teachers to critically reflect on the relevance of the skills they possess at any time. Such an education implies tensions and dilemmas. Research shows that teachers educators have a preference for theoretical and research-based knowledge. Both researchers and political authorities in Norway now stress the need for a teacher qualification that is more research-based. On the other hand, teachers in schools criticize teacher education programmes for offering professional qualifications that are of far too little practical relevance. Practice teachers emphasize knowledge as personal and contextual, and research is often described as irrelevant or of little practical use. In this tension teacher educators are set to try to find its form.

Status of knowledge

New reforms and new models challenge the conceptions of the mandate of teacher education, as well as the content and the organization. The concept research-based has multiple interpretations and the pedagogical consequences of new part-time models are complex. This might cause growing tension between teacher educators. How these tensions are interpreted and handled in the different contexts is important for student learning and development. This area of research has been inadequately understood in Norwegian teacher qualification.

The difference between research-based and experience-based education can initially be linked to different views of knowledge, what ought to be learnt and how learning should be organized in different learning environments. Although these terms are neither distinct nor analytically clear, it should be stressed that both theoretical knowledge and practical skills are crucial parts of teacher competence. This means that teachers have to unify the analytical, universal and research-based with the normative, particular and experience-based. International research links these stands to the different actors. The emphasis on both research and experience can make it difficult to understand how one can develop meaningful professional qualification using these concepts. It is important to clarify which phenomena each of the terms are referring to. Since the concepts are prominent in the policy documents, it will be of great interest to investigate how different actors relate them to empirical phenomena, as well as whether this is perceived differently in different institutional contexts.

Research questions

• Is there coherence between what education policy documents say about relevant professional qualification and what teacher educators, practice teachers and students attribute emphasize?
• Do the partners involved in teacher education have different views about what constitutes relevant teacher qualification?
• Is there consistency between what is suggested as relevant and the professional qualification that the students are actually offered?
• Is there a pattern of relationships and/or contradictions among the partners involved in school and pre-school teacher training, in campus-based and workplace-based institutions and across professions?

Methods

All TPQ’s sub-projects are concerned with the same overarching questions and seek to draw on each other’s findings, collaborate across sub-projects, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The project can therefore best be described as a longitudinal “equal status mixed methods design”.

Relevance to society

The project will contribute to knowledge that may broaden the understanding of how teacher training in more relevant ways can be organized and practiced, in the tension research-based and experience-based knowledge. A comparative perspective on pre-school and school teachers will expand knowledge generated from within-profession perspectives, and is therefore of interest for professionals, policy makers and providers of higher education.