

**PERSONAL WAYS INTO AND FORWARD IN  
LANGUAGE TEACHING<sup>1</sup>**

**Dil Eğitiminde İçsel ve İlerici Kişisel Yollar**

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**Abstract**

This article will discuss 'the perspective of the personal' in education (Pope & Denicolo, 2001) through the presentation of research on Swedish EFL teachers' experiences of teacher training and continuing professional development, part of a more extended and eclectic study on language teachers' personal theories and experiences of change (Apelgren, 2001). Drawing on the constructivist stance of 'teacher-the-storyteller' (Pope, 1995; Pope & Denicolo, 2001), the research concerns teachers' personal theories about their paths into the teaching profession and the constructivist view of teachers as active, meaning-seeking human beings open to change and development. The result presented in this article consists of career-rivers and two interviews with 14 teachers from a cohort of 70 teachers. Responded validation was used for the first interview draft before the second interview as well as on the final analyses and results. A combination of constructivist and phenomenological analytical tools was used in the analyses: content analysis and empirical phenomenological psychological analysis (Apelgren, 2001 and 2010). By identifying 'general pedagogic intentionality', foreign language teachers' ways of developing and changing could be described. The results showed four major themes in the way the teachers had experienced change and development. It also revealed that the way an individual teacher changes, depends to great extent on personal factors.

**Key words:** *Continuing professional development, Constructivist stance in teacher training*

**Özet**

Bu çalışma İsveç İngilizce öğretmenlerinin öğretmen eğitimi ve sürekli mesleki gelişim deneyimleri sırasında edindiklerini (kişisel bakış açısı) incelemektedir. Pope, (1995); Pope & Denicolo, (2000) in hikaye anlatan öğretmenler oluşturmacı görüşüne bağlı kalan araştırmacı öğretmenlerin öğretmenliğe geçişte oluşturdukları kişisel kuramları ve değişikliğe ve değişime açık, aktif anlam arayan öğretmen görüşleri ile ilgilenmiştir. Sonuçlar 70 öğretmen arasından seçilen 14 öğretmenden elde edilmiştir. Veri karşılıklı doğrulama yolu ile toplanmıştır. Ayrıca içerik analizi ve deneysel phenomenological psychological analiz yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Sonuçlar öğretmenlerin deneyim geçirdikleri ve değiştirdikleri ve geliştirdikleri dört ana konu olduğunu ortaya koydu. Sonuçlar ayrıca, öğretmenlerin değişiminin büyük bir oranla kişisel faktörlere bağlı olduğunu gösterdi.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Sürekli mesleki gelişim, öğretmen eğitiminde oluşturmacı yaklaşım*

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## 1. Introduction

It is not what happens around him that makes a man experienced; it is the successive construing and reconstruing of what happens, as it happens, that enriches the experience of his life. (George Kelly, 1963, p.73)

Drawing on Kelly's quotation above on experience and the fact that the research presented here concerns Swedish EFL teachers' experiences, there are reasons to comment on the relation between time, change and experience. For change to be possible at all there has to be input that initiates something new. The new input must be facilitated, that is it must be made possible for the individual to either accept or reject. If accepted, a constructivist 'fit' between the individual world view and the new input has occurred. There is a relation between time and change. Experiences at one time (t 1) are compared to experiences at another time (t 2), and if different, change is said to have occurred. Change can thus be said to be the process by which these different times are connected. This implies that change cannot be experienced or described directly, since it is the mediation of observed differences. Furthermore, there is a relation between change and permanence, insofar that a person makes sense of an event by connecting this event to already experienced events.

Making sense or putting meaning to an experience is *personal*, insofar that it is the person who decides what is relevant and meaningful or what is not. Meaning is also *social*, in the way that a person's construction of meaning is informed by social interactions with other people, which help to shape a person's understanding. Furthermore, meaning is *contextual* in the sense that meaning is construed in certain contexts and time, which will influence a person's construction of meaning. The above discussion entails that change and development are experienced differently by different people. At the same time there are commonalities within the experiences people have, which suggests different orientations of change and development.

To give an overview of studies and research in the area of professional development and change is an almost impossible task, and it is not the aim of this article. Instead, the perspective is narrowed down to one specific area of research around teaching as a profession, that of teacher thinking, and in particular to research connected to pre-service training and continuing professional development, as experienced by Swedish EFL teachers (Apelgren, 2001). In the following section key concepts of professionalism, development and change are outlined and discussed along with notions of reflection and teacher thinking in order to pose questions such as: 'How are teacher knowledge and reflective practice formed, shaped, reformed and reshaped during the years?' and 'In what way are those changes professional and personal?'

## 2. PROFESSIONAL TEACHING, DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

### 2.1 Teacher professionalism

In the last few decades, teacher professionalism has been the focus of a variety of research stretching from the biographical and narrative point of view of professionalism to more systemic macro policy analyses. Professional knowledge, whether viewed from a more individual or collective perspective, has often been connected to scholarship, scientific studies and higher education. Recent policy studies have noted a shift back towards an increased subject instructional theory base from a previously more research-based knowledge foundation of teacher professionalism (Beach & Bagley, 2013). One

could therefore argue that the apprenticeship approach to teacher education and teaching has re-emerged, which has implications for professional teaching practice. Furlong (2005), referring to the British context, notes that the state has taken over and thereby marginalized the autonomy of the professional teacher.

It has been pointed out that teachers in most countries across the world are experiencing a similar change through state reforms of national curricula, national tests and quality inspections of schools in order to raise standards and promote parental choice (Day and Smethem, 2009; Beach & Bagley, 2013; Carr & Skinner 2009). The unintended consequence of the above may be that teachers experience less autonomy and thereby their individual and collective professional and personal identities are challenged.

In spite of the bleak description above, there is research indicating a difference between intended, imposed and attained educational change. Day & Smethem (2009), for example, report on extensive research in England where as many as 75 % of the participating teachers were found able to keep their teaching autonomy and “maintaining their commitment to their broad educational ideals, and that this was due in part to the support received from headteachers and colleagues and in part to their sense of vocation” (p.123). The kind of studies reported above, are important to frame more local case studies such as the current one.

This article, being a case study, is thus closer to the first type of studies of professionalism. It concerns research that focuses on individual teachers’ personal experiences of teaching; how they are described, how they are modified and how they are reconstrued (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Elbaz, 1990; Klechtemans, 1993; Pope & Scott, 1984; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011). Further, it relates to professionalism as a link between personal and professional knowledge and as part of the teaching career (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000; Huberman, 1993; Kompf, 1993; Denicolo & Pope, 1990; Southerland, Howard & Markauskaite, 2010). van Veen, Slegers, Bergen & Klaassen (2001:176) prefer the term ‘professionalism’ and “defines the term as part of expertise, a combination of craftsmanship and mastership, in which craftsmanship refers to having a thorough mastery of instrumental skills in the domain of subject content, instruction, educational theory, and school organisation”. This definition is close to how professionalism is defined in this study, where professionalism in the teaching profession means competencies and qualifications required for a teacher to be able to successfully carry out a profession, in this case teaching.

In language teaching, professionalism has also during the years been discussed from different perspectives: from a social and personal constructive perspective (Roberts, 1998; Yaxley, 1991; Xu & Cornelly, 2009), through classroom-based narratives (Richards, 1998; Woods, 1996), with a focus on pedagogical content knowledge (Gudmundsdottir, 1991; Park & Oliver, 2008; Ruohotie-Lyhty 2013) or as action research (Wallace, 1996). Another orientation is towards a phenomenological understanding of language teachers’ perceptions and experiences (Apelgren, 2001). All these studies share the objective of trying to describe professionalism from the point of view of the professionals, the teachers themselves, rather than from an official policy perspective. Teachers are governed by official policy documents, such as National Curriculum, but also by traditions and practice both during their training and in their school practice. As has been pointed out, the ownership of professionalism may be open for a review. This is of importance for this article as the teacher, as a professional, is at the core of it. The research should be seen as being in line with the above-mentioned studies and the tradition of teacher thinking.

## 2.2 Pedagogical content knowledge

The knowledge teachers acquire is a combination of formal knowledge, through pre-service and in-service courses, and their personal knowledge and experiences of practice. The interaction between the formal and the personal form the unique pedagogical knowledge of each teacher. That is why it is essential not to lose the personal aspect of pedagogical knowledge, especially as it is difficult to know which of the two is the most influential factor for change and development. It seems to be the acceptance of a constructed knowledge that has led researchers, such as Shulman (1987), to argue for a better understanding of the knowledge base of teaching. Hashweh (2005) and Park and Oliver (2008) have continued to develop Shulman's concepts and idea. For language teachers, the pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) comprises language proficiency, language analytical knowledge, cultural- and sociolinguistic knowledge and language didactic knowledge (Apelgren, 2001). Especially the language didactic knowledge is of interest as it is both process knowledge, which departs from learning rather than teaching, and transformative knowledge, i.e. from knowing a language to teaching a language. The latter embraces capacities to make things explicit, to structure the subject, to select and to distinguish temporal aspects. Drawing on research in chemistry, Park and Oliver (2008) report how teachers' understanding of students' misconceptions are an important part of PCK. In the case of foreign language teaching this is included in capacities to make things explicit and to be able to 'read' students' difficulties and ways of understanding. This acknowledges that reflection is a vital tool in the development of PCK and as a teacher.

In recent years, studies have discussed the pedagogical and professional knowledge as learning and as "the development of a professional identity" (Freisen & Besley, 2013:23), that is, the developing of professional identity is shaped by personal and social development. It has been pointed out that "teachers acquire most of their knowledge in interaction with a variety of systems" (Gholami & Husu, 2010:1520) and that the teaching community of practice, i.e. collaboration with colleagues, theory and research about teaching and learning as well as one's own experiences and understandings shape this knowledge (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2013; Rozelle, J. & Wilson, S., 2012).

Starting teaching and the first years of teaching have been the focus of many studies in which they are described as important for teacher development (Craig, 2013; Freisen & Besly, 2013; Fullan, 1991; Huberman, 1993; Parker, 2010). It is during those first years that the teachers establish their own teaching roles. Craig (2013) refers to 'the nature of teacher knowledge' and the paradigmatic change that has occurred in research as well as in other people's recognition of teacher knowledge as something understood 'from the inside out', from the teachers' stories, and not only from 'the outside in', from external experts and policy makers.

## 2.3 Professional development and change

The constructivist notion of teaching emphasizes teaching as a learning process closely connected to change and development. Denicolo (1997, p.342) describes this relationship as "...symbiotic, the activities of teaching and learning are best intimately combined, each gaining from the other". It is an ongoing process of construing and reinterpretation of experiences. The concepts of change and development are important in understanding teaching. When talking about change one assumes something new, whereas when discussing development one presumes active growth of something already there. Both

concepts have bearing on teachers' professional lives. They are also important concepts for the understanding of teachers' thinking and experiences. When a person's relation to the world change, the change in this relation implies growing and developing, which is a learning process. Although change and growth can be analysed and described in general terms as abstractions they are highly personal matters which take place "within a complete person" (Roberts, 1998, p.310). This implies that a change in one dimension or aspect affects other aspects of this person's life.

As suggested above, the change process is a core issue of professional knowledge insofar that it connects the personal with the cultural and social aspects of professionalism and it assumes that people are active and participating in their own professional development. Normative change means fundamental change on different levels. Pennington (1996) makes a distinction between 'input', for example in-service training or literature, and 'intake', the individual teacher's internalisation of the input. Pennington argues that attempts to change teachers will only have an impact:

...in areas where the input is valued and salient to the individual, and where it is congruent with, and interpretable within, the teachers' own world of thought and action. (Pennington, 1996, p.340)

In addition, Woods (1996) points out that it is essential to understand that teachers cannot change their beliefs "at will", which implies that "teacher change can be encouraged but not mandated" (Woods, 1996, p.293). Beijaard et al (2000) discuss in the same way when they describe how teachers may develop strategies as a protection against what they regard as a 'threat'. However, as they conclude "people are able to further develop, adjust, or even radically change their self-image. There are no reasons to assume that teachers are exceptions to this rule". The above discussion highlights once more the importance of involving the whole person in the learning process of change, that is - to proceed from the teacher's perspective and allow for growth and development. In this process, reflection is crucial (Dewey, 1933) which several researchers have highlighted in their research (Gelfuso & Dennis, 2013; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Parker, 2010; Roberts, 1998).

The concepts discussed above must be regarded as generic for the teaching profession as a whole: reflective practice, pedagogical knowledge, didactic knowledge. Also the constructivist nature of professional development and change has a bearing on the profession of foreign language teaching. The main shift in recent decades, both in teacher training and in theories of language and language teaching/learning, has been a change of direction from teaching towards learning. This indicates a turn from transmitted 'known' and objective subject knowledge to a subjective, personal and constructive subject knowledge. The concept of 'didactic competence' is at the heart of teacher professionalism in its focus on the relation and intention between teacher, teaching and subject. This relation ultimately influences what will happen in the classroom, as it is based on the individual teacher's conceptualisation of what is included in the subject he or she teaches, how this subject is best taught and learnt, as well as how the teacher views his or her teacher role. 'Reflection' is another key concept of a professional role, as it gives the teacher an opportunity to view and review his or her teaching. Reflection presumes an ability to look back at one's teaching (analytic self-reflection), as well as an ability to critically and constructively draw from one's experiences (normative reflection); the second ability being as important as the first one. When one discovers new knowledge or understanding about one's own teaching and thought processes, one has articulated that knowledge, which makes it possible to see alternative ways. This awareness of one's

own alternatives can be an aid for the teacher to act and react in different ways. In addition, development and change are seen as essential features of professionalism. A distinction was made between imposed and superficial change imported from outside (top-down change) and changes which were drawn and identified by the teachers themselves (bottom-up change); the latter being more durable and fundamental, as this is internalised in the teachers' personal theory of teaching, or by referring to the title of the book *Transformative Education* where the authors draw our attention to "productive change which is intrinsic to the person instead of imposed from without" (Pope and Denicolo 2001, p.xi).

### **3. METHOD**

#### **3.1 Participants**

14 teachers from a cohort of 70 teachers took part in the interview study presented here. The teachers came from 10 different schools (two men and twelve women) and most of the teachers were very experienced, in the sense that he or she had undergone teacher training and taught for five or more years (Huberman, 1993). The most common age group was 31-40 years old (5 teachers) followed by the 41-50 age group (4 teachers) and the 51-60 age group (3 teachers). Only one teacher was between 21-30 years old and only one was over 60 years old. Six of the teachers had taught English for more than 20 years, four teachers had taught between 11 and 15 years and one teacher had taught English between 6 and 10 years. Three of the teachers were recently qualified English teachers, but only one (in the age group 21-30) had not been teaching before and could be described as inexperienced. All the teachers had attended the same university for their teacher training.

#### **3.2 Data and data collection tools**

The research was set up as a cumulative study, starting with a questionnaire survey. The decision to use a questionnaire was based on the possibility of attaining a background of general views and getting a broad picture of *what* and *how* language teachers in one particular local educational area had experienced changes during their careers. The questionnaire results are not included in this article.

The first interview began with a career-river, which the participants themselves draw and which was to be the starting point for the career stories (career-river as a technique has previously been used within Personal Construct Psychology, (Denicolo and Pope, 1990; Pope & Denicolo, 2001). As an introduction to the taped teaching stories, the individual teacher was asked to think back over his or her career in terms of a winding river in which each bend represented an experience that has influenced his or her direction. The interviewee was then asked to draw that river and write a few words about the experiences. The teacher spent around 20-30 minutes alone before the career story that followed. The metaphorical term of a river expresses the flow of the teachers' experiences over time. The rivers come to function as the agenda or structure for the individual story, which gives the teacher more freedom to direct it. This strategy meant that the content of the stories differed depending on the participants' choice of focus.

The second interview with the teachers took place after the participants had had the opportunity to comment on the transcripts. The second interview was a focused interview with set questions concerning four areas, which had emerged as themes from the career stories. The aim for the second interview was to deepen the understanding of the

teachers' experiences in relation to the above-mentioned topic areas. Both the career stories and the focused interviews were taped and later transcribed verbatim.

### 3.3 Data analyses

The first interview was an instructed narrative conversation based on their own drawings of career rivers/snakes, where the participants told "their" teaching career stories focused around experiences of teaching, subject matter issues and change and development. The data were analysed using content analysis and empirical phenomenological psychological analysis. All in all 334 statements/quotations were isolated as examples of specific themes to be further explored in the second interview. In addition, these quotations formed the basis of the narrative descriptions in the study. Data from the two interview transcripts were read and reread as to be able to describe commonalities related to common themes explored. In the next stage, the statements were grouped into separate themes of experiences of teaching and change, so-called 'specific intentionality'(van Manen, 1990). This refers to directness of thinking here and now and to our direct experiences of certain phenomena, in this case teachers' reflections and experiences of teaching foreign languages and developing as a foreign language teacher. In the final stage, the extracts were reduced into thematic categories called 'general pedagogic intentionality', where the extensive interview data were reduced to different orientations towards foreign language teaching (Apelgren, 2001 and 2010).

In a traditional phenomenological analysis, the researcher continues to fine-tune the interpretation in order to reach the essence of the phenomenon. In my study, the phenomenological results were placed within a constructivist framework. The categories of general pedagogical intentionality were therefore returned to the participants for comments, in order to include the teachers themselves in the process. The intention was also to show that there is a potential in using a combination of logical analysis with a qualitative analysis of empirical and personal data.

## 4. FINDINGS

As with most professions, some teachers in the study describe an early determination on their part to become a teacher. Here though, experiences and paths into the teaching profession start from language studies at university level and teacher training. As indicated above, the results are not presented on an individual level, where the different teachers represent a case each. Instead, different experiences are presented in the results on a phenomenal level. First, the teachers' memories and experiences of their teacher training are portrayed, following a chronological structure where the teachers are put into groups depending on when they trained to become a teacher: during the seventies, the eighties and the nineties. Secondly, the focus is on different ways into teaching EFL after completing teacher training. The structure here is thematic, and presented around qualitatively different ways of what it is like to develop into or take on the role of a language teacher. Three different paths into the teaching profession have derived from the data: (1) the self-made teacher, (2) the moulded teacher, and (3) the allied teacher. Thirdly, different ways of experiencing change in EFL teaching, originated from the phenomenological analysis, are presented; (1) gaining inspiration from external sources (2) adapting to new directives, (3) interacting with colleagues, and (4) adopting the perspectives from experienced teachers.

#### 4.1 Looking back at language studies and teacher training

The education and training for subject teachers in Sweden has changed over the years, but there are certain features that have been compulsory independently of time of training. This implies that all the teachers have undergone similarly structured education and training. In short, all of them have studied their subjects at language departments within their disciplines at the university, have studied curriculum theory and subject didactics at a department of education, yet their experiences of courses and training differ both depending on personal preference and time of training.

##### 4.1.1 *Teacher training in the seventies*

Maybe somewhat surprisingly, few of the teachers who trained during the seventies focus very much on their language studies in their descriptions. In the cases where their language studies are mentioned, it is in relation to how much they loved their languages and their language studies, but with very few references to teaching and a career in teaching. For most of the teachers it would appear that the subject studies are not in their immediate memories, when they recall how they became teachers. The teacher training, on the other hand, features frequently in the teachers' accounts, mostly as a very positive experience. All of the teachers in this group commented on how difficult, and desirable, it was to get a place at what was then called a teacher training college. Teachers remember that they learnt a lot about teaching through advice from their tutors and different classroom visits:

- I was very impressed by the teacher training course. I thought the tutors were effective, that they had a lot of practical suggestions and we visited many different kinds of classes (Isabelle)

The teacher role at the time was teacher-centred and authoritative. This role also emphasised the teacher as a controller, both in the sense of 'being in control' and 'controlling the pupils' learning'. The preferred teaching style, which the teachers were trained in, was teaching from the front with memorised, almost rehearsed, and timed lessons: "You wrote a plan of the lesson. It should be ten minutes warming up, then it should be this and that. So it was exactly rehearsed." (Lisa). In short, what the teachers describe is very structured teaching, where the teacher decided everything and the pupils were seen more as a collective. This is not always seen as something negative. One teacher recalls how the structure in model teaching made them feel safe and functioned as a safeguard when they started teaching. The content was strongly regulated by the National Curriculum and focused on grammar.

The teacher training in the seventies as described by the participants can best be understood as a positive learning experience. There seems to be neither a clash between the different parts of teacher training nor between the teachers' expectations about the training. It is interesting to see that these teachers' memories correspond well to the officially described teacher training in the seventies. To a great extent, it was training within the positivist paradigm, based on a structural syllabus.

##### 4.1.2 **Teacher training in the eighties**

The teachers trained during the eighties had a much more mixed view of their studies and training than the previous group. It seems that the actual training at university is less important, and instead school-based mentors are regarded as very significant. In fact



all the teachers in this group praised their mentors and had often chosen to come to their particular supervisor. This has often led to a long and fruitful personal as well as professional relationship, which several teachers have described in the interviews:

- My mentor, who I still see frequently, I thought she was fantastic. So my practical period was very good. I got involved with school projects. It was very good. I felt that I got a very good education. (Richard)

- Even if you had studied methodology, then he could put it into practice; 'this is what we do and this is how it is'. He knew so much as well, and we worked so well together that I guess he could let go a little. Yes, we have a lot of similar ideas him and me. And as regards material, I feel that he has taught me an awful lot. (Sara)

The quotations above indicate that the supervision during the school placements is of most importance. However, not everyone received enthusiastic and positive mentoring during their placements, which made one teacher question how much influence and what kind of regulations the teacher training colleges had and indeed have on their mentors.

Some of the teachers were also impressed by their tutoring at the language departments, and felt that the teacher training at the same university, especially curriculum studies did not attain the same standard as the language departments. Subject didactics, however, is much more positively remembered as a useful subject that connected the university subject to the teaching subject:

- I had a tutor who was an extraordinary person. He has influenced me with flexible and different types of activities, pupil activities. He was a terrific pedagogue. He was maybe the person who made the most impression on me and who influenced me most during my training. (Elisabeth)

There seems to be a personal preference, indicating that what for some was experienced as important and influential training, for others was regarded as institutional and rather old-fashioned teacher training.

It is interesting to note that the teacher trainees of the eighties describe subject didactics in much the same way as did the trainees in the seventies. Communicative language teaching (CLT), the prevalent approach in the eighties, is described as recurring elements, mostly in the form of group work and communicative oral exercises, in otherwise teacher-directed and planned teaching from the front. The teaching is structured with plans and timetables for the lessons, with grammar and vocabulary exercises based on texts from a textbook. Homework was set on what had been prepared in class, and tested the next lesson.

The teachers who underwent their teacher training during the eighties seems to have experienced the programme as consisting of three different and separate parts - subject theory, subject didactics and curriculum theory - instead of three inter-connected parts of a teaching programme. The critical views from these teachers should be seen as a reaction to what they had learnt theoretically about collaboration and working together, and what they experienced as a missing part of their own education. In short they saw a discrepancy between theory and practice, which made them more critical to their training than the previous group.

#### 4.1.3 Teacher training in the nineties

The teachers who did their teacher training in the nineties are a mixed group with different paths into teacher training college. One of the teachers came more or less straight from school into the programme. The other two teachers started the programme after several years of work in teaching or other occupations. Although they all qualified in the mid-1990s their backgrounds affect their experiences, which have impact on how they view their language studies and teacher training. These teachers are much more critical to the whole programme. They feel a tension and sometimes a discrepancy between the three main subjects on the programme: subject theory, curriculum theory and subject didactics. This discrepancy is felt in several ways. Firstly, it is interesting to see that the subject studies are regarded and remembered as a positive experience from which they have learnt very much for later “use” and for Mary the language studies were also a “personal development”, which added to the satisfaction:

- When I studied my subjects I believed it was a personal development for ME. I had the opportunity to study, and I started to study so late. I was 32 years old when I started my studies in Swedish and English. I had studied part-time before, but to study full-time felt like a real luxury, and I felt how I developed as a person. (Mary)

The world of languages, as experienced above is contrasted to the world of reality, that is, ordinary pupils in ordinary secondary schools. Mary describes vividly how she brought with her “the view of knowledge from university” and how she had to “step down to a totally different level”, and how this came as “a bit of a shock” at first (Mary). Secondly, curriculum studies are described as “a fantasy world” (Marion) and “a very embellished picture of reality” (Mary), not concrete enough and not “connected to reality” (Carole).

The teachers’ experiences of subject didactics show similarities to the previous two groups, which may seem strange if one considers the changes in approach generally to language teaching, where CLT is the aim of foreign language teaching stated in the Swedish national curricula since the eighties. The teachers describe how they were taught to plan their teaching in accordance with certain patterns and structures, often based on the textbook. The predominant teaching style was teacher-centred with teaching from the front which is described as “old-fashioned” (Marion). They recalled having discussed problem-based learning, but more as a theory than a practical method in the classroom.

In short, the teachers in this group show a disparate picture of their teacher training in language education. They are happy with their subject studies, but believe that there is no real bridge between these studies and the studies in language didactic and curriculum studies at the teaching department. Instead they believe that “the school placement gave the knowledge” of how to become a language teacher (Marion). The teacher trainees experience that their school mentors in some respect had taken over much of the responsibility for the trainees’ practical didactics from the teaching department and the university tutors.

The teachers who underwent teacher training in the nineties seem to be the least content with their training. This is put down to mainly two things. Firstly, the teachers experience discrepancies in theory (what they have learnt at the teaching department) and practice (the teaching reality), which leads to them feeling unprepared for their teaching.

Secondly, the teacher training is not felt to be a comprehensive programme, in spite of extensive reforms in teacher training towards an integrated view on the teacher training.

## **4.2 First years of teaching**

Most of the teachers in the interviews dwelt for a considerable time on the first years of teaching. To a certain extent, these experiences go back to their final term in their training, that is, to their school placement. The first years of working in a profession are important to understand how a person prefers or chooses to develop.

When the teachers recalled their memories and described their first years of teaching, three different paths into the teaching profession were found in relation to their development as a language teacher. In short, these ways correspond to an image of oneself as: (1) a self-made teacher, (2) a moulded teacher, and (3) an allied teacher. The teachers should not, however, be considered as fitting into one of these three types, because most of them would only partially do so. Rather they may be described as showing a closer resemblance to one of the three or being oriented towards one of them. The orientations below derive from the teacher's own voices in the narratives.

### **4.2.1 The self-made teacher**

For some of the teachers, teaching is something "you learn yourself" which means that you "can't just stop and say that I am a fully-fledged teacher" (Amanda). For those teachers a learning process seems to be built into the profession. Teaching is very much equivalent to continuous learning.

- I believe it is important that we who work within the school as an organisation, that we believe in learning. /---/ We should not just believe that when we finish our training, we have finished our education. I am now going to teach for 30 years. Something happens all the time, in all areas: in research on learning, in our subjects and as regards [teaching] approaches and methods. (Amanda)

Richard describes the first years of teaching as "my years of hard struggle" where the personal aim was "to construct an understanding of oneself [as a teacher]", which ultimately led to the situation where "one made oneself into a teacher" (Richard). The sometimes hard struggle of reflective awareness during the first years is described as rewarding as it led to a development in their teacher role:

- It meant that I became...after that period I knew who I was as a teacher. I don't need to think of myself as a person, but I can concentrate on pedagogy and the welfare of my pupils without myself being in ...yes, in the centre. (Richard)

A second characteristic of these teachers is that they often come back to how they learn from their own experience, and proceed from there. Encountering new things and getting inspiration from many different sources are other important features for these teachers. This implies an active seeking of knowledge and a willingness to learn and share this with colleagues:

- I don't think I miss any chance of further training [in-service training], or to read

something, I don't. I don't think I do anyway. I read and cut out articles and send them around; pedagogic reflections and a lot of critical thoughts about what is happening. (Monica)

The teachers cannot always remember where they encountered new ideas; most of the time their descriptions show a blurred picture of the source but a clear picture of the impact on the teachers' thinking. One teacher describes how new ideas appear as "signals" (Fraser), which a tentative teacher picks up and in a way decodes and includes. What these teachers are describing shows similarity to the notion of 'the reflective practitioner' in the sense that reflection is an ongoing learning process (Schön, 1983).

#### **4.2.2 The moulded teacher**

The teachers in this group all knew early in life that they wanted to take up a teaching career, which the quotations below indicate:

- Already in the lower grammar school, I knew indeed that I wanted to become a teacher. (Barbara)
- The fact that I was to become a teacher; that I knew already in primary school. Yes, I knew it already then. (Sara)

These teachers describe themselves as determined people who set out their goals and went out and achieved them. The most prominent characteristic of this group is how they have been inspired and helped by older and much more experienced teachers, where the relationship has been that of a novice-expert, starting during their training. This relationship seems to have led to a handing down of expertise to the inexperienced teacher, which in some cases indicates that knowledge is taken over or being taught and that the teacher changes with every new 'expert':

- I think that it [the teaching] changes every time I have come under someone's wings. I have altered my teaching an awful lot in accordance with their experiences. Yes, they have experiences of good teaching methods that I then get for free. (Sara)

Sara's descriptions about how she 'changes' every time she encounters a new model teacher show signs of a conformist teacher role, as well as mentor dependence and a resemblance to the traditional model of apprenticeship in teacher training.

For teachers who had undergone training quite recently, the impact of the mentor was felt as very important, especially as they found an alternative way of viewing teaching. Mary indicates how her picture of a language teacher as someone who "stands in front of the class and teaches and motivates pupils who read and who you could have discussions with" changed dramatically when she met her school mentor. She describes how she had wanted something different from the traditional teacher role, but not knowing what to substitute it with until she met her mentor and saw how he was working.

Mary's moulding is different from Sara's, insofar that Mary's point of departure is her own personal theories, although maybe not yet explicit theories. It is also different as it concerns overall activities and values of language teaching, rather than teaching performance.

One teacher talks about how she “established connections” with her former tutor at the teacher training college and through that relationship had been invited to work with different tasks within teacher training, as well as testing new materials and approaches. Recently this relationship has taken her into writing textbooks and working with school radio programmes. This is again very different from Sara’s and Mary’s descriptions above. This being a mentor relationship, which helped the teachers to develop and make a career in teaching, rather than being taught or adopting a senior teacher’s methods or ideas. Although different, all three teachers show commonalities in the way they have been inspired and influenced by older and more experienced teachers, who have helped them to develop in their teaching.

#### **4.2.3 The allied teacher**

The third group of teachers describe how collaboration with others has had a huge impact on their development into the teachers they are today. In some respect, this can be regarded as their having developed together as a team or group. These teachers also quite frequently refer to family and private matters in their narratives about their careers, which indicates that private and professional matters are closely related. Starting a family for example is described as huge bends in the rivers and as “the most dramatic thing you experience in life” (Cathy). Having established close, working relationships with colleagues can help in situations where it is difficult to juggle private issues with professional ones. One of the teachers describes how, at her first teaching appointment, she came to work with a group of female teachers and how they worked and developed closely together.

Holly’s early and intense experiences of collaborative work may have influenced her attitudes some twenty years later when she reacts to the local educational area’s idea of competing schools. Instead of accepting the new ideas she engages in collaboration between EFL departments at all upper secondary schools in the area:

- We said that we didn’t want to compete with each other. What would we gain by that? We are not salespersons or something like that. We would rather collaborate. So we then started to meet spontaneously and tried to make common criteria and discuss common problems. (Holly)

An intense and close collaborative relationship with colleagues can develop into lifelong friendship, which one of the teachers recounts when she says that “they are still my friends” after twenty-five years. She worked during the early and mid-seventies together with a group of other female language teachers with mainly male vocational students, which she describes as being “immensely intensive years” (Cathy), although very rewarding and exciting years. Cathy believes that those eight years she taught these students have had a huge impact on her attitude towards less able pupils as well as her attitude towards teaching in general, which she regards as teamwork rather than ‘a lone wolf’s work’.

One teacher insists that teaching is a profession that requires independence as well as “sharing” (Carole). Carole, who has taught for four years, describes how at her school they teach with “open doors”, where they have cross-curricular collaboration around different themes. It is important, she says, to help each other as the job is sometimes tough and requires a lot of the teachers, which can be difficult if you have to face that alone.

### **4.3 Professional development and personal change**

As previously discussed, change and development are experienced differently by different people. At the same time, there are commonalities within the experiences people have which suggest that there are possible different orientations. The findings highlight four main categories of descriptions for the ways teachers change professionally: (1) gaining inspiration from external sources, (2) adapting to new directives, (3) interacting with colleagues, and (4) adopting perspectives from more experienced teachers.

#### **4.3.1 Gaining inspiration from external sources**

The main input in this category is in-service training and courses as the initiation for individual change and development in teaching. The results suggest that external initiation over all was the most common factor for the teachers. With regard to types of continuing professional development, this input corresponds best to traditional in-service training, which in its character is individual-oriented. Typical features of this kind of change are that the participants individually 'pick and choose' aspects of presented input to internalise with their present system. It is often described as 'adding' something new to one's teaching. Teaching methods are in the focus of most of the descriptions. In addition, more process-oriented courses, such as problem-based learning, are mentioned as bringing about changes on a deeper and more fundamental level. When the participants described reasons for in-service training and courses, they emphasised stimulation and personal development as important factors, which indicates that external courses are important not only for their content, but equally important for teachers' need of stimulation and personal development.

#### **4.3.2 Adapting to new directives**

Local schools and local educational areas in Sweden have the main responsibility for teachers' professional development. Their directions, in combination with official directives, have influenced the kind of in-service training the teachers have been offered. Thus, one way of changing is to adapt to different local and national directives, such as local educational plans and National Curriculum. 'Adapting', means adjusting to new conditions, fitting in and making things suitable for its purpose. This suggests giving something up and taking something else on board, in order to respond to external demands. The demands could either be extrinsic, that is defined and provided by local or national agencies, or they could be intrinsic, that is defined by the teachers themselves in relation to what they would gain by adapting. An example of the latter is how one teacher in her narrative describes how she has changed to "the demands" of the new curriculum in order to "raise her salary".

It may be suggested that the teachers' rather autonomous work in direct contact with their students would make them less prone to imposed changes, and therefore maybe less inclined to adapt to new directives, unless these are in line with personal objectives. However, the teachers' narratives give details of changes which could be described as adaptation to new directives, especially in relation to different forms of evaluation and collaboration.

#### **4.3.3 Interacting with colleagues**

Interacting with other teachers is one of the two most important features of initiating changes for the teachers in this study. This way of changing, highlights the daily interaction as essential for development work. Earlier, different paths into the teaching profession were described and one of the ways outlined was 'the allied teacher'. This category corresponds well to the way of changing referred to here, which is based on interaction and collaboration with colleagues on voluntary grounds, rather than on administrative grounds. Teaching as a profession is regarded as a mixture of independence (autonomy and voluntarism) and sharing (communication and interaction). There is, within the narratives, a huge span of different kinds of interactions, ranging from informal regular encounters with colleagues to organised teamwork.

#### **4.3.4 Adopting the perspectives from more experienced teachers**

Initiation from colleagues can include mentor-directed initiation to change. Previously, the category 'the moulded teacher' was described as one way of gaining entrance to the language teaching profession. 'Moulded' teachers are inspired and helped by older and more experienced teachers, who more or less guide them into the profession. This means, changing in accordance with the focus in the experienced teachers' methods and ideas, rather than gaining inspiration from external agencies and collegial interaction. In some cases 'adopting' means that the teachers within this category hold on to a 'novice-expert' perspective, which is more prevalent in teacher training than in the teacher profession.

### **5. CONCLUSION AND REFLECTIVE COMMENTS**

In this article, EFL teachers have looked back at their training and early teaching. It was pointed out that particularly their views on teacher training differed with regard to when the teachers underwent teacher training. Teacher training in the seventies is remembered by most of the teachers as a positive learning experience for their prospective profession. Teachers who underwent training in the eighties are still positive about their school placements, but show a more mixed picture of their studies in subject didactics and curriculum theory. The third group, who studied during the nineties, are quite negative about their studies. These results correspond quite well to how teacher professionalism is viewed in Sweden and in many other European countries today, where teachers' status and position are discussed (Beach & Bagley, 2013; Carr & Skinner 2009; Day and Smethem, 2009; Furlong, 2005).

When describing their paths into the teaching profession and what has influenced them in their development as a teacher, three different ways of getting into the profession were found. The first group was described as 'self-made' teachers, i.e. teachers who wanted to try things themselves and who saw teaching as life-long learning rather than a completed education. Experimentation seems to be in focus for these teachers. The second group is in many ways the first group's counterpart, inasmuch as what these teachers find important are help and directives from older and more experienced teachers and mentors. They are 'moulded' into their teaching career in an expert/novice relation. Their orientation is direction, rather than experimentation. The third group of teachers find that they develop and learn best together with other colleagues, with whom they create alliances. They could therefore be described as group-made or 'allied' teachers, who feel that they best develop in collaboration with others. Rozelle and Wilson (2012) and Gholami and Husu (2011) found similar orientations in their research.

There are, as described in this article, different directions in the way teachers change and experience change. In accordance with the phenomenological concept of intentionality, thematic categories of the teachers' experiences have been presented. Themes, as abstractions and constructions, always have certain limitations. In the focus on capturing the phenomena under investigation, part of the contextual and personal aspects may be lost, in favour for simplification and reduction. Nonetheless, they can serve to portray teachers' intentionalities of EFL teaching and change, and thereby be regarded as 'possible' or 'plausible' directions of experiencing foreign language teaching and change in teaching in general. The categories are collective descriptions of some ways of experiencing change in foreign language teaching. These categories of descriptions have been drawn from the participants' accounts and must therefore be said to represent individual teachers' direction in teaching.

This article has brought forward the idea of general pedagogic intentionality as a way of describing language teachers' orientation of teaching and ways of changing. The way an individual teacher changes, depends to great extent on personal factors which will guide how changes come about. The choice of listening and learning from external agencies, curriculum demands, collegial interaction or experienced teachers' expertise, is a personal and selective choice which is governed by past experiences. It can be seen in this way: "we carry around our past with us in our construing", as suggested by Butt and Burr (1992, p.63). This implies that the interpretation and the choice of focus in an interpretation lie with the individual teacher and his or her ways of making sense.

As pointed out earlier, change and development concern learning and knowing and can thus be described as processes of how we relate ourselves to events around us. The teachers in this study may have come across the same kind of events, such as a certain teaching approach, common national curricula and the same in-service training, just to mention a few professional events. Similarly, they may have in common experiences of more personal kinds like having families, going through a divorce or being bereaved. Some of them may even be of the same age and sex, finished their studies in the same year and have taught the same number of years. All these common features still do not mean that these people construe the above events in the same way, since their personal history and their construct systems are different. Therefore, the teachers have not experienced the same thing. Kelly describes experience as personal - it is what we allow to happen to us as individuals and in what we choose to invest, not what is going on around us (Kelly, 1963).

When the teachers, in a responded validation process, were asked to choose the descriptions, which best corresponded to how they believed they have changed and developed, their personal experiences guided their choices. Although most of the teachers choose one main category, some also described additional and complementary categories.

The teachers' narratives show how issues of change and development are primarily related to attending in-service training and external courses, in spite of extensive descriptions of collaborative work among different groups of teachers at individual schools. Self-made teachers gain inspiration to change from external agencies, which they 'pick and choose' from and bring into their teaching. Some of the teachers indicate that they change through interaction with colleagues in the first place. These teachers also described earlier paths into the teaching profession through interaction with colleagues (allied teachers) or more experienced teachers (moulded teachers). In most cases the individual orientations are similar in the different data, including the respondent validation. On the whole, the teachers seemed to find it quite easy to choose



from the categories of descriptions provided. It is important to note though, that what the teachers were asked to provide, and indeed what they did provide, were to indicate the description that was “most consistent” with how they have changed and developed during their careers - not *the way* they have changed and developed.

Taking part in a study where one explores one’s own thinking does have an impact on most people, teachers or not. Especially if techniques, such as “narratives” and career rivers are used, as these can be described as the reconstruction of the experience as lived by the teller - it is not a matter of an “icon image” or a “mirror of reality”. To relive certain parts of one’s life, also those parts that can be regarded as belonging to one’s professional life can be an emotional experience in several ways.

When the categories of descriptions returned to the teachers, they were also asked to comment on the experiences and the effects of taking part in a study that made them go back in memory and recollect their career. All the teachers, except one, mentioned several aspects of that experience. Five of the fourteen teachers mentioned how their partaking in the study had encouraged them to reflect on their teaching. It is apparent in the answers, as in the data as such, that not enough time is given to reflection on teaching, both the immediate teaching encounter and the past experiences of teaching. “You rarely think back on your years as a teacher”, says one of the teachers, indicating that this had given her a perspective on how she had changed her teaching. Another teacher described how reflection has made her think of her teacher role:

I realised that although I have changed methods a lot, I still have the same view of my job as a teacher. I think I have become more humble than earlier and also more relaxed. (Holly)

The realisation of fundamental core constructs or “basic idea” about teaching and the teacher’s role is something that several teachers mention in their answers.

The opportunity to sit down and recollect past experiences with someone else listening is regarded as “stimulating” and “satisfying”. This is especially true for those who are close to the end of their careers and have experienced many changes in their professional lives. Also those in mid-career describe how talking about and structuring their own teaching has made them more aware of their professional role:

- It was interesting and helpful to focus on my own career this way. The life-story perspective adds to how I see myself as a professional person. (Amanda)

In addition, it has made them aware of their everyday teaching. Elisabeth, for example, uses the expression “clear my mind”, which indicates a possibility for the teacher to stop and move behind the actual practice; to reflect and recollect in an attempt to construct a personal professional view on the everyday teaching which leads to a professional perspective. Gaining a perspective means allowing the present to encounter the past, as well as realising how the past influences one’s thinking. This could lead to awareness on different levels.

There is a strong sense of gratitude in the comments on the experiences of taking part in the study. The constructive process of reflection and recollection of lived experiences can come close to the concepts of empowering and emancipation. Part of this is the positive feeling the teachers experience of someone listening to their voices.

I've enjoyed it. To humans in general and teachers specifically, it is a great comfort that maybe someone, somewhere cares about the forgotten Trinity; teachers - students - and the learning process. (Fraser)

One teacher expresses lack of interest in teaching as a profession in general, insofar that "no one has ever shown any interest in my profession". The teachers therefore believe that research such as the present study is "obviously an interesting angle of research, when it touches on so many teachers' experiences". One teacher describes how she intends to use the different categories for the discussion about EFL teaching with her colleagues.

In their writings, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) connect voices of lived experiences to growth and development. They state:

...our principal interest in experience is the growth and transformation in the life stories we, our students and research participants author. [As a researcher] we try to gain experience of our experience through constructing narratives of that experience.

(Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p.418)

This is close to the lived experience the participants have described in this study. Reflection and recollection lead to a connection between the past and the present, which will make people realise that they view life through the "goggles" (Pope, 1985) they are wearing. This may lead to an awareness of new as well as fundamental perspectives.

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