

The Educational Practice of School-Age Educare Teachers Teaching Visual Art in Swedish Primary Schools

Marie Fahlén

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to increase the understanding of the challenges that Swedish school-age educare teachers with a certification in visual art experience in their everyday school practice. The study focus on the educational practice of teaching visual art from a holistic perspective which also includes the teachers' perception of their overall work situation and their professional identity. Due to dual professional roles, these teachers are not only required to meet the criteria formulated in the syllabus of the subject visual art, but also to achieve the goals for the educare centre (National Agency of Education, 2019). The method used is in-depth individual interviews with nine teachers, together with observations of visual art lectures and the physical and material environment. The results provide insights into what it means to work as a school-age educare teacher teaching visual art in primary schools, struggling with limited resources and identity conflicts. The study highlights how teachers often end up in a struggle between individual agency and social structures since they have to resist, adjust and negotiate to get acceptable work conditions.

Keywords: policy enactment; professional identity; school-age educare; visual art education

Introduction

The professional role of teachers in Swedish school-age educare (SAE-teachers) has undergone a major change due to teacher education reforms in 2011, which gave certification to teach a practical/aesthetic subject in years 1–6 of compulsory school (one semester of the teacher program).¹ As the responsible teacher for this subject, teachers are not only expected to teach, but also to make assessments and grade in year 6. In 2014, the first group of these “new” SAE-teachers graduated from Swedish universities.² One of the goals with the new teacher education was to create a professional identity focused on the school-age educare centre, together with a special competence in a practical/aesthetic subject (SOU, 2008:109). Historically, the Swedish school-age educare centres were oriented towards socially oriented education and care. Since the 1980 s, closer cooperation with schools gradually developed. However, the change in teacher education 2011 affects the professional identity of these teachers on a deeper level. At the same as conditions are created for developing a new and

1 They also have the opportunity to extend their degree by studying another practical/aesthetic subject, which makes them qualified to teach both subjects in years 1–6 of compulsory school.

2 In addition, since 2013, SAEC-teachers with an older education who received their degrees after 1977 have also been able to apply for teacher certification in these subjects.

independent professional identity where teachers can use and develop their competence in a practical/aesthetic subject, they now become even more of a link between the school and the educare centre. It poses great challenges since this new group of teachers gets a dual professional role, where they must keep a balance between two educational activities: the traditional socially oriented education in the educare centre and the goal-and results-driven school education (Andersson, 2013; Ackesjö, Nordäng, & Lindqvist, 2016). By being given two professional roles, they become “professional hybrids” (Croft, Currie, & Locket, 2015). In addition to questions about professional identity, the dual professional role raises questions about policy practice, how teachers perceive their task in relation to policy documents (Ball, Maguire, Braun, & Hoskins, 2011). Due to professional hybridity, their policy practice not only affects the syllabus of their practical/aesthetic subject but also the goals for the educare centre. While the practical/aesthetic subject is mandatory, a formal learning that is measured in grades and reviews (National Agency of Education [NAE], 2019, pp. 26–32), the activities in the educare centre are voluntary, based on a holistic perspective on the pupil which promotes informal learning and development that cannot be measured (ibid. pp. 22–25).

Aim and Research Questions

The topic of this article is SAE-teachers who received their degrees after 2011 with a certification in visual art. In the study, I will focus on the educational practice of teaching visual art. An important part of this is teachers’ interpretation of the subject visual art and the resources they have to conduct their teaching. The study is based on a holistic perspective which includes the teachers’ perception of their overall work situation and their professional identity. The following research questions will be addressed:

- *How do SAE-teachers experience their practice of teaching visual art, and what resources are provided to them to achieve the course objectives?*
- *How do they experience their work situation as a whole?*
- *What effects does the dual mission have on their professional identity?*

Theoretical Framework

The fact that the teachers in the study work in two different educational activities, and that they are given two professional roles, demonstrates professional hybridity. Croft, Currie, & Locket (2015) describe professional hybrids as situated between different organizational groups, where they are forced to move between these groups. They end up in a position where they are not only supposed to balance across boundaries between two different assignments; they are also expected to construct identities as a new professional work force. At the same time as the hybrid role can give potential strength moving between two different professional contexts that enables to view issues in the organization from two different perspectives, as well as ability to retain professional influence across multiple organizational areas, it contains identity conflicts. Croft, Currie, & Locket (2015) stresses the importance of a positive initial stage in