Author(s): Leivo, Marjaana; Isosomppi, Leena

Title: Building of the adult students' expertise and identity in the teacher's work which precedes the teacher education

Year: 2015

Version:

Please cite the original version:

Building of the adult students' expertise and identity in the teacher's work which precedes the teacher education

Marjaana Leivo and Leena Isosomppi
University of Jyväskylä
marjaana.leivo@chydenius.fi, leena.isosomppi@chydenius.fi

Abstract

This research describes adult students' significant learning experiences in teacher's work prior to teacher studies. The research material comprises of 39 essays written by the students of class teacher programme for adults in the beginning of the programme. The experiences at work has opened up the positive and tense sides of teaching and offered a realistic mirror to assess their own suitability for the profession. What was learned through practice created a bridge to studying the new theoretical material in teacher education. However, adult's learning in a school context and at the teacher education is different. Education should utilize and examine critically the knowledge of adult students they have acquired before the teacher studies.

Keywords: teacher education, adult student, significant learning experience
Main Conference Topic: Education, Teaching and E-learning

Introduction

In the universities there are more and more adult students who have earlier studies and versatile work experience (Moore 2003). The discussion which touches work has often been emphasized to examine merely the working life competences produced by the university studies. Lately the questions of learning at work have emerged as the identification and recognition of the previously acquired knowledge has started in the universities. The meaningful learning of the adults is connected with how their previously acquired knowledge is appreciated in the education. In the opinion of Beattie (2000, 19), this is also important because what is learned in the teacher education is always connected to what the students already know when they begin their education.

Class teacher students' learning and professional growth have often been studied as a process that takes place during the teacher training (Buitink 2009). The learning in the work before the teacher education and its relation to studying in the teacher education have instead been studied only a little. The recent study also illuminates those challenges which are in connection to the students' learning processes in two different contexts (for example, Hodkinson 2005; Jonasson 2014, 545). It is important to understand from the point of view of implementing and developing the teacher education what and how does the adult student learn in the teacher's work before the education. This article is based on the doctoral thesis research in Finnish language (Leivo 2010).

Teacher's expertise and identity

The challenges of the education are connected to how it is able to support the students in the reflection and conceptualizing of previous learning. The foundation of the teacher's professional knowledge is the integration of the practical and of formal, theoretical knowledge, which is processed in the education. The tacit knowledge and skills acquired by the adult students in the teacher's work should be possible to be made visible and at the same time to be conceptualized in the education. The combining of the theoretical and experiential

knowledge to each other requires reflective working and consciousness (Heikkinen, Jokinen & Tynjälä 2012).

In addition to the professional knowledge, the concept of expertise of this study is associated with the development of the teacher's expertise as the participation in the social practices at work and in the education. From a sociocultural starting point (Lave & Wenger 1991; Wenger 1998) learning is the building of the identity in the communities of practice. The adult student's practical and experiential knowledge which is acquired in the teacher's work is created as a result of working, of operation. The knowledge created as a consequence of learning at work is personal and informal tacit knowledge and knowing (Eraut 2004, 249; 125; Toom 2008a, 3, 52 –53).

In this article we examine the building of the teacher's professional identity as a 'polyphonic' construction and a process in the teacher's work with the help of the significances which are included in the individual teachers' experiences. The adult student can adopt different identities which depend on social situations and between which, however, there is always a connection (see Beijaard, Meijer & Verloop 2004).

Research tasks and methodology

The significance of the work experience which precedes the teacher education for the teacher's professionality was examined in the study that the article is based on. The study covered the experiences of the students of a university level (MA degree) class teachers' education programme aimed at adult students. The applicants for the class teachers' adult education need to have at least 100 study credits of the studies which are suitable for the degree subject, subject studies of pedagogics and at least four months of work experience in teaching. The majority of the students had already operated in different teaching work assignments for several years before the commencement of the class teacher education. A third of the students had a competency of kindergarten teacher. Some of the students were clearly changing their career and some had proceeded to the class teacher studies through the Open University.

The adult students differ from the students of an ordinary class teacher education programme as a group in regard to their age (23 –55 years) and their background of experience. The earlier studies and work experience shape their interpretations of teaching and the teacher's work. Thus the socializing to the teacher's profession has already started for them before the teacher education. The study questions were:

1) What are the adult students' significant learning experiences like in the teacher's work prior to the studies?

2) What do the adult students evaluate the significance of the teacher's work experience to be for the future studies?

The research material comprised of 39 essays written by the students of the class teacher programme for adults in the beginning of the programme. The research material was analyzed through an inductive thematic hermeneutical analysis.

Findings

The expertise and the identity connect with the persona

Working as an unqualified teacher strengthened the adult students' perception of the fact that the teacher's expertise and identity are tied up with their own personal properties. The students who work without the formal education as substitute teachers do not have a professional status on which they could build their own identity. The adult student's personal identity is strengthened in positive relations with the pupils, colleagues and the pupils' parents. Even though the work was also experienced as emotionally burdening, the significant learning in the work was connected to the feeling of becoming recognized as a teacher in these liaisons. This was seen as personal empowerment and as confidence in managing in the teacher's work also in the future (see Bogler & Somech 2004). The students' identity was connected to the personal properties that were experienced as strong by the adult students instead of the expert community (for example, Smith and Strahan 2004).

An ethical dimension unfolds in the identity

The practical theory which is built in the teacher's work included descriptions of the supervision of learning, of the pupils' individual learning needs and of taking care of the comprehensive growth and development. Children's and adolescents' psychological and social problems which have increased and the needs for the support for learning were seen in the stories as a part of the teacher's everyday work. In the identity speech of many adult students the caring relationship to the pupils was emphasized and the educator's responsibility was placed alongside teaching.

   The adult students who had long enough work experience built their professional identity as the teachers who value interaction and cooperation. Safety and the dimension which supports coping with the work were connected to the cooperation with colleagues. The home and school cooperation in turn was an area where the tense sides of teacher's work were revealed to the adult students. The significant learning pointed to the strengthening of the professional self-esteem in positive cases. The effect of negative experiences in turn was wounding for the professional self-esteem because the own professional identity of the individual as a part of being a "proper" teacher was being questioned (Kelchtermans 2007, 88). As unqualified teachers the adult students had also been subjected to this kind of professional questioning.

The expertise is built individually and experientially

The adult students worked as teachers relying on their earlier experiences and on the advice and instructions that had been received from the other teachers (see Maaranen 2008). In the accounts of the significant learning descriptions there were neither the examples of formal learning (for example the courses, literature) nor the voiced aims to learn. It seems that the workplace learning of an adult student is self-directed, spontaneous and informal learning, where the objective and goal are not often realized. The learning at work is thus, above all, implicit and reactive operation (among others, Eraut 2004, 250 –251).

   Working in any given work requires a newcomer to access the professional and social community of the work place. From the point of view of building the newcomer's identity, it is significant what kind of relationship exists between the newcomer and the colleagues, what kind of chance of following others working or receiving supervision from an experienced colleague one has (Blåka & Filstad 2007). Even though the adult students functioned as a part of the school community and experienced that their cooperative and social skills were developing, the work, however, was largely working alone. The adult students' significant

learning experiences did not really contain the essential reciprocal operation of the members of the community and working together in the practice community (Wenger 1998, 72 –85). The student who worked as a substitute teacher usually utilized the knowledge of the community by discussing with more experienced colleagues and by utilizing the routines and materials of the community. In significant learning experiences the expressions which would point to a key supervision by a more experienced colleague or to common problem solving process in learning as an expert only seldom emerged. Learning at work appeared mainly as a phenomenon which is related to unofficial and occasional cooperation relationships.

In the students' experiences the strong ethos of coping at work emerged instead. At school the substitute teacher at least first acts on the fringes of the community (Wenger 1998). The one without the regular work must manage with the pupils so well that, the "good teacher's" reputation is maintained and strengthened. Merely the properties of the school community do not affect how the adult student learns at work. In addition to the work community the personal properties of the newcomer also affect becoming a member of the community and learning in the community (Blåka & Filstad 2007, 60-67). Adapting to the prevailing conditions and remaining silent about the drawbacks was a typical way to function at school for many adult students.

The knowledge which forms at work is tacit and bound to the context

Particularly in long-term temporary posts the teacher's professional knowledge and skills seemed to develop in everyday, surprising problem-solving situations, primarily in the relations between a teacher and pupils and between a teacher and the parents. The tacit knowing which is constructed at work emerged in particular in the pedagogical relationship between a teacher and the pupils. The pedagogical content knowledge was seen in the adult student's work as a developing consciousness of the pupils' individual learning needs, of learning difficulties and of the significance of differentiation. The tacit knowing was not connected to the contents of the teaching (for example, Toom 2008b, 171–174).

The adult students' accounts only seldom contained the reflection of knowledge built through the operation which is central from the point of view of learning as an expert. Toom (2008b) confirms that tacit knowing is not reflective. It is bound to the context and the immediate reaction in the professional, surprising situation. The tacit knowledge increases though operation and through its reflection. (Toom 2008b, 52–53.) The identification of context based and personal knowledge constructed through work is not easy for an adult according to Malinen (2002, 69), because the truth-value of the personal knowledge for the individual is so strong. In the adult students' significant learning experiences the affective, social and moral sides of the personal knowledge also emerged (Toom 2008b, 166).

The link between theory and practice remains loose

The adult student's personal knowledge of the teacher's work can supposedly be built with the support of the previous pedagogical knowledge or other vocational knowledge as well as the contextual knowledge built at work. Practical knowledge built at work thus also contains a strong intellectual dimension. A central dimension of the teacher's professional knowledge, pedagogical or vocational knowledge and knowing (Bereiter 2002; Bereiter & Scardamalia 1993) were explicitly expressed in the material mainly only in connection with knowledge about the pupils and with some students as pedagogical knowledge which is related to the differentiation in teaching. In the adult students' practical theory where a pupil and the supervision of the pupil's learning process are distinctly considered, there is already a content dimension of a well-developed practical theory (Buitink 2009, 119). Some of the students

recounted that they had realized through their work experience that just practical knowledge is not enough, but that managing in the teacher's work also requires theoretical knowledge.

In spite of the fact that all the students already had completed the subject studies of pedagogics, they did not build their own professional identity in their stories from the point of view of the pedagogical knowledge or the subject knowledge. Teachers usually produce their professional identity in the ways in which they see themselves as experts of a subject, pedagogics and didactics (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt 2000, 751). The adult students' accounts only seldom contained references to the conceptual information acquired elsewhere.

The study confirmed the perspective of the fact that the unqualified teacher's orientation to the work is practical. Learning at work did not contain the necessary factors in transmitting theoretical and experiential knowledge, for example, the shared discussions, the analytical tasks and mentoring (for example, Tynjälä 2007, 29). The students did not talk about the situations related to the work where the connections between theory and practice would be deciphered together with the colleagues (see Le Maistre & Pare' 2004, 47). The experiences of learning at work had distinctly strengthened the adult students' image of the fact that the teacher's work can be done even for years without the mastery of professional knowledge. Thus the negative side of the practical learning can be the fact that disadvantageous ideas and routines are being adopted from the point of view of the future work (Hakkarainen & Paavola 2008; Tynjälä 2008).

The expressions which are related to theoretical knowledge and to self-regulation skills only seldom came out in the stories. The conceptual learning remains in the shadows in the practical work, in which case one can suppose that the theoretical, experiential and self-regulatory knowledge do not integrate at work (for example, Wenger 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder 2002). Reflective and meta-cognitive skills which are central in the teacher's work emerged mainly as the individual reflective attitudes of a few students. Reflection on one's own experiences and operation, which is central from the point of view of learning at work, or the reflective examination of the shared expertise which is constructed through participation do clearly not have possibilities during a busy school day (see Kwakman 2003).

The professional knowledge and identity are built in the fringes of the community

The work experience which is long-term enough at its best made it possible for an adult student to gradually socialize into the different school communities and to their values and operational cultures. According to Aarkrog (2009) the one coming in to the community develops in particular the identities which are suitable in a certain practice community. However, the communities differ in regard to what kind of opportunities for learning they provide. The newcomers first look, listen and also imitate the more experienced members. (Aarkrog 2009, 142–145.) Thus the learning of the adult student in different school communities can be understood at least partly as model learning. Also by being on the fringes of the community, the adult students can be socialized in the professional practices which may have promoting but also restricting dimensions for their professional growth. In the adult students' descriptions the professional growth was promoted by the atmosphere of the work community and by the emotional support and appreciation experienced in the community. These are central contextual factors which affect learning at work (Eraut 2004).

Dialogical examination of matters with experienced colleagues which is significant from the point of view of the development of thinking did not really feature in the results. The adult students did not describe situations which are related to the learning and in which the problems and conflicts at work would have been solved communally. The professional

knowledge needed at work is located in and forms in the interaction of the different contexts and situations (for example, Beijaard among others, 2004). It seems that in this field the adult students have only seldom participated in such social practices (for example, sharing the experiences, dialogical and critical questioning) which Griffiths and Guile (2003) consider necessary in the production of the new knowledge and in creating connections between the theory and practice.

It is essential in the process of the development of expertise whether the individuals have possibilities to exceed the limits of their own knowledge. One can suppose that in the teacher's work the adult students had met daily situations which challenged them to surpass the previous knowledge and skills. Cooperative planning, implementation or evaluation of the teaching with the colleagues, which are central in learning the professional skills, came forth in the results of this study mainly in the experiences of the adult students who have operated in special needs teaching or in preschool education.

Discussion

In sufficiently long-term and continuous practical work the teacher's field of work unfolded as realistic to the adult student. The idea of the teacher's work is not based merely on the own positive school experiences or memories of their own teachers. The students also talked about the challenges which are related to the teacher's work, for example, about the widening of the educational responsibility. It can be estimated that the adult students who have particularly long work experience can base their career choice on a realistic view of the teacher's work because the work has opened windows also onto to the conflicting and tense layers of the teacher's work. With the work experience even the adult student who has been working on just short temporary posts sees different schools, teachers and children and in this way can evaluate their own starting points and possibilities to be educated to be a teacher.

As well as the length of the work experience the school context also has significance in learning at work. Every school has their own kind of culture and structure as well as the interpretation of what is the school's mission or how a skillful teacher operates (Le Maistre & Pare' 2004). The adult students build their own teacher's identity in many kinds of negotiations in the interaction with other members of the community as a part of the varying socio-cultural contexts. In these environments the different layers of the identity are built in relation to how the adult student participates in the community (Billet 2004). Many studies confirm that it is challenging to connect learning in two different contexts, in the teacher's work and teacher education (Hodkinson 2005; Jonasson 2014.) The boundary of work and education is not essential as such. Instead, more attention should be paid to the negotiations in different contexts in which these boundaries are built (Jonasson 2014).

Conclusions

The challenge of the teacher education is to develop tools to identify the nature of the adult student's expertise and professional knowledge; what it brings and what it possibly restricts in studies. In the teacher education, the adult students need to be offered conceptual tools for the integration of experiential and theoretical knowledge as well as self-regulation. It is especially important to direct the student to realize the significance of the critical reflection of the earlier experiences, thinking and operation. Only in this way can the adult students build the high-quality professional knowledge in which the different types of knowledge have been integrated.

Brief biographies of the authors

Author 1

Marjaana Leivo, PhD (Education) works in University of Jyväskylä, Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius as a university teacher. She works with adult students in a teacher education and in a special teacher education programmes. Her research interests include teachers's professional development, adult pedagogics and inclusion.

Author 2

Leena Isosomppi, PhD (Education) works in University of Jyväskylä, Kokkola University Consortium Chydenius as a senior lecturer. Her interests relating to research focus on teachers' professional development, mentoring, adult pedagogics, inclusion and gender bias in education.

References

1.   Aarkrog, V. (2009). Learning in the workplace and the significance of school-based education: a study of learning in a Danish vocational education and training programme. International Journal of Lifelong Education, 24 (2), 137–147.
2.   Beattie, M. (2000). Narratives of Professional Learning: Becoming a Teacher and Learning to Teach. *Journal of Educational Enquiry,* 1 (2), 1–23.
3.   Beijaard, D., Verloop, N. & Vermunt, J. D. (2000). Teacher's perceptions of professional identity: an exploratory study from a personal knowledge perspective. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16 (7), 749–764.
4.   Beijaard, D., Meijer, P. C. & Verloop, N. (2004). Reconsidering research on teacher's professional identity. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 20 (3), 107–128.
5.   Bereiter, C. (2002). Education and mind in the knowledge age. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
6.   Bereiter, C. & Scardamalia, M. (1993). Surpassing Ourselves: An inquiry into the nature and implications of expertise. Chicago: Open Court.
7.   Billet, S. (2004). Workplace participatory practices: Conceptualising workplaces as learning environments. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 16 (6), 312 – 324.
8.   Blåka, G. & Filstad, C. (2007). How does a newcomer construct identity? A sosio-cultural approach to workplace learning. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 26 (1), 59–73.
9.   Bogler, R. & Somech, A. (2004). Influence of teacher empowerment on teachers' organizational commitment, professional commitment and organizational citizenship behavior in schools. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 20 (3), 277–289.
10. Buitink, J. (2009). What and how do student teachers learn during school-based teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 25 (1), 118–127.
11. Eraut, M. (2004). Informal learning in the workplace. *Studies in Continuing Education,* 26 (2), 247–273.
12. Griffiths, T. & Guile, D. (2003). "A Connective Model of Learning: The Implications for Work Process Knowledge." *European Educational Research Journal,* 2, 56–77.
13. Hakkarainen, K. & Paavola, S. (2008). Asiantuntijuuden kehittyminen, hiljainen tieto ja uuttaa luovat tietokäytännöt. In A. Toom, J. Onnismaa & A. Kajanto (Eds.) *Hiljainen tieto, tietämistä, toimimista, taitavuutta*. Aikuiskasvatuksen 47. vuosikirja. Helsinki: Kansanvalistusseura, 59–82.
14. Heikkinen, H. L. T., Jokinen, H. & Tynjälä, P. (2012). Teacher education and development as lifelong and lifewide learning. In H. L. T. Heikkinen & P. Tynjälä (Eds.) *Peer-Group Mentoring for Teacher Developmen*t. Milton Park: Routledge, 3-30.

15. Hodkinson, P. (2005). "Reconceptualising the Relations between College-based and Workplace Learning." *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 17 (8), 521–532.

16. Jonasson, C.(2014). Defining boundaries between school and work: teachers and students' attribution of quality to school-based vocational training. *Journal of Education and Work*, 27 (5), 544–563.

17. Kelchtermans, G. (2007). Ammatillinen sitoutuminen sopimusten takana – Opettajien itseymmärrys, haavoittuvuus ja reflektio. In E. Estola, H. L. T. Heikkinen & R. Räsänen (Eds.) *Ihmisen näköinen opettaja*. Oulun yliopisto. Acta Universitatis Ouluensis. E Scientiae Rerum Socialium 92, 75–99.

18. Kwakman, K. (2003). Factors affecting teachers' participation in professional learning activities. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 19 (2), 149–170.

19. Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

20. Le Maistre, C. & Pare', A. (2004). Learning in two communities: the challenge for universities and workplaces. *Journal of Workplace Learning*, 16 (1/2), 44–52.

21. Leivo, M. (2010). *Aikuisena opettajaksi. Aikuisopiskelijoiden merkittävät oppimiskokemukset opettajan työn ja opettajankoulutuksen vuorovaikutuksessa*. Diss. Jyväskylän yliopisto. Kokkolan yliopistokeskus Chydenius.

22. Maaranen, K., Kynäslahti, H. & Krokfors, L. (2008). Learning a teacher's work. *Journal of Workplace Learning,* 20 (2), 133–145.

23. Malinen, A. (2002). Opettajuus rakentuu ihmistuntijuudesta ja asiantuntijuudesta. Epistemologinen, eksistentiaalinen ja eettinen vastuu opettajan työssä. In P. Sallilla & A. Malinen (Eds.) *Opettajuus muutoksessa.* Aikuiskasvatuksen 43. vuosikirja. Helsinki: Kansanvalistusseura ja Aikuiskasvatuksen tutkimusseura, 63–92.

24. Moore, E. (2003). *Pitkä opintie. Aikuisiällä suoritettu yliopistotutkinto ja kou-lutuksellisen elämänkulun merkitys.* Joensuun yliopisto. Joensuun yliopiston yhteiskuntatieteellisiä julkaisuja 61.

25. Smith, T. V. & Strahan, D. (2004). Toward a Prototype of Expertise in Teaching: A descriptive Case Study. *Journal of Teacher Education,* 55 (4), 357–371.

26. Toom, A. (2008a). Hiljaista tietoa vai tietämistä? Näkökulmia hiljaisen tiedon käsitteen tarkasteluun. In A. Toom, J. Onnismaa & A. Kajanto (Eds.) *Hiljainen tieto. Tietämistä, toimimista, taitavuutta*. Aikuiskasvatuksen 47. vuosikirja. Helsinki: Kansanvalistusseura, 33–58.

27. Toom, A. (2008b). Hiljainen pedagoginen tietäminen opettajan työssä. In A. Toom, J. Onnismaa & A. Kajanto (Eds.) *Hiljainen tieto. Tietämistä, toimimista, taitavuutta*. Aikuiskasvatuksen 47. vuosikirja. Helsinki: Kansanvalistusseura, 163–186.

28. Tynjälä, P. (2007). Integratiivinen pedagogiikka osaamisen kehittämisessä. In H. Kotila, A. Mutanen & M. V. Volanen (Eds.) *Taidon tieto*. Helsinki: Edita, 11–36.

29. Tynjälä, P. (2008). Perspectives into learning at the workplace. *Educational Research Review,* 3 (2), 130–154.

30. Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice. Learning, Meaning and Identity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

31. Wenger, E., McDermott, R. & Snyder, V. M. (2002). *Cultivating Communities of Practice. A Guide to Managing Knowledge.* Boston: Harvard Business School. http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13665620410550295