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Making teachers' pedagogical capital visible and useful

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to compare methods of working with pedagogical capital in teacher and mentor education. The authors make an account of the development of the concept of pedagogical capital and relate it to the theoretical context of practice theory. Empirical data will substantiate the theoretical discussion of teachers' pedagogical capital.

Design/methodology/approach – Comparative analyses of the authors' research and empirical data were undertaken.

Findings – Three dimensions of pedagogical capital have been identified: an experience content dimension, an analysis dimension and an acting dimension.

Research limitations/implications – The authors find potential in using and further developing the concept of pedagogical capital in its various dimensions and in relation to other similar concepts.

Practical implications – The authors' methods could be used for school development purposes as well as in teacher education.

Social implications – The aim of the paper is to underline the value of the contributions people can make to society as a whole and as teachers in school, in particular. The recognition of the ability to analyse and contribute is the essence of this work.

Originality/value – The value of the paper is the introduction and development of pedagogical capital in an international context. The value is also the common analyses of educational work in Sweden and Norway.

Keywords Practice theory, Teacher education, Mentor education, Pedagogical capital, School development, Sketching

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Initially, we want to establish two basic assumptions:

- (1) the development of society is dependent on the contributions of its members in a crucial way; and
- (2) the development of the school is dependent on the contributions of teachers, leaders and pupils.

Our own workplace experiences are that teachers' contributions in the shape of experiences or analyses of the school situation are neither encouraged nor utilised to the



extent they could be. Teachers' analyses concerning in which context schools exist and the tasks they ascribe the schools and themselves within this context (Bengtsson, 1998; Henningsson-Yousif and Viggósson, 2006) are important to work in school. Generally, school development can be defined as a deepening of work in school by analysing and balancing its relevance with the identified needs of pupils as well as of society using different perspectives (Henningsson-Yousif, 2006). The different ways teachers personally express themselves are of particular interest (Eisner, 1998; Rorty, 1997). There is a need for inquiry (Hargreaves, 1994) and exploration (Joyce *et al.*, 1999). What is expressed by an individual can be seen as a resource in the common explorative work, regardless of its origin in the individual. Hostrup Larsen (1987, p. 29) details the necessity for each person to be able to explain himself/herself:

It is also vital to be able to lift oneself ahead of the status quo and the logic explainable, in order to withhold a physical space, which is unattainable from the power of the lasting. Thus, it becomes possible to maintain what exists now as resources that can create the new in spite of the old.

Teachers have important analytical contributions to make. The word contribution infers there is something recognised to contribute to. If you contribute to something, you have something to offer. This contribution can be considered a gift, a problem, an insight, information or a disturbance, among other things. To ask for teachers contributions is to pay attention to, acknowledge and make it possible to utilise the analyses and experiences in work development situations.

This standpoint is related also to research that aims to democratic knowledge processes, "processes that start with and respect knowledge, experiences and conditions that are silenced in many contexts, especially in institutional education contexts" (Holmstrand and Härnsten, 2003, p. 256 authors' transl.). One way to describe the contribution of the individuals in these exploratory and democratic knowledge processes is the use of the concept of pedagogical capital. In this article, we put forward the importance of making use of these capitals.

It is not unusual for school heads to ask for teachers' opinions or perspectives using different methods during different school development arrangements. The manner in which school heads invite teachers to contribute their perspectives is important to achievements. Quite often, a teacher describes this event as an occasion to give their opinion (Henningsson-Yousif, 2003). One impression is that teachers do not attach much value to the occasion, and they might also lack belief in their own analyses and in their importance. Sometimes these attempts to ask for teachers' opinions are very seriously intended by the school head, and sometimes they might be used as or regarded as quasi-democratic actions. Teachers' responses might depend on their understandings of a situation. Similarly, the school heads' understanding of the school development situation and their interest in and knowledge of their teachers' perspectives will be vital (Smith and Ulvik, 2010; Roald, 2010).

Teachers are obligated to work within a set of values and rules. Teachers and leaders can interpret this circumstance in different ways, as anything from inhibiting creativity to encouraging change efforts. In Sweden, the concept

“deltagande målstyrning” (participating steering by objectives) was introduced in the 1990s (Smith and Ulvik, 2010; Roald, 2010). The idea was that teachers should interpret goals and use their liberty, so-called “free space” (Berg, 2003), within the system. It seems that a number of teachers never embraced or, perhaps, for different reasons, understood this idea (Henningsson-Yousif, 2003). One reason may have been distrust in the possibility to have a real influence on the development of the school; other explanations may be a lack of interest, comfort in routine or confusion. One consequence of not taking the opportunity to explore and take advantage of the free space might have contributed to or facilitated a new steering system that is more detailed and strict.

Based on this reasoning, there is a need to prepare teacher students for an active role in school development situations. One method of doing this is to ask for the students’ experiences and analyses and use these resources in the educational context. In Sweden and Norway, we have developed similar methods to encourage contributions of students’ resources; we refer to this as their pedagogical capital. In this article, we bring our experiences of and research on working with methods to make pedagogical capital both visible and useful. We will start by making an account of the initial work with the method of writing a document “pedagogical capital” in a Swedish teacher education context and its development into a concept. This concept will further be discussed, and two more methods to express pedagogical capital will be accounted for: sketching and practice stories. We will conclude by discussing these methods in relation to different dimensions of the concept of pedagogical capital.

Work with pedagogical capital – background

The concept “pedagogical capital” is still in development. Here, we will initially make an account of the background and growth of the concept over time. The development of the concept’s definition has been dependent on the contexts in which it has been used. The idea to use pedagogical capital as a metaphor for experiences and influences that teacher students brought with them to teacher education was initially created in a joint research project between teacher education institutions in Malmö and Copenhagen. In this project, different influences on the development of teacher students in the two countries were studied (Henningsson-Yousif, 2006; Henningsson-Yousif *et al.*, 2007). The idea of students’ possession of pedagogical capital developed into a feature in one of the teacher education programmes at Malmö University (Henningsson-Yousif and Viggósson, 2009; Viggósson, 2011). Some 400 students have, for a number of years, written documents named pedagogical capital. The writing of this document has been the start of a course in school development with the aim of preparing students for a well thought-through position in school in relation to colleagues, school heads and the political system. As a second feature, the students interview a teacher. This interview is recorded, transcribed and analysed. The students establish fictitious work teams with the assignment to construct a strategy for school development. In this work, the students make use of their written and unwritten pedagogical capital, the interviews, literature and seminars.

In writing their pedagogical capital, the students explore their backgrounds, influences, interests and perspectives in relation to school and teaching. The students write a document of approximately five pages, in which they choose elements and dimensions of their pedagogical capital. This document is available only to themselves and the educators of the course. The students also get an instruction with recommended things to write about:

Your life history, life experiences in general;

[...] your network, fellow students, friends, family, outdoor life, etc;

[...] sources of inspiration, idols, role models, literature, special events;

[...] the surrounding world in general, the society or the media;

[...] your own school teachers or other education; and

[...] significant work experiences.

With this task we want you to pay attention to resources in shape of people, experiences, etc. that you use or that could be considered of importance when it comes to the way you think about pedagogical work.

The students' writing of their capital is mainly for their own benefit. They write freely of childhood memories and of experiences and incidents from their life, work and education. To ask students to write their pedagogical capital is to challenge them in a very concrete way to explore their own reality and background and, perhaps, to deepen their understanding of their own acts in and perspectives on the world. There are ethical aspects to consider when people reveal personal stories; however, the students choose how much they want to reveal. The texts are never commented upon or judged by the educators in any way. The students make visible a great variety of backgrounds in other countries, as well as in different parts of Swedish society, and give evidence of extensive experience of life. It is important to recognise this fact as teacher educators; the students are not containers to fill.

Through writing their documents, the teacher students learn that pedagogical capital is relevant not only for themselves and the people they currently work with and will work with in the future, but also for teacher education and the creation of courses for teachers. Thus, one could also consider the teacher education institution expressing a vast and complex pedagogical capital. The responses from the students in the evaluations on this task are very positive (Viggósson, 2011). In other courses, the teacher students make use of some chosen part of their written pedagogical capital and return to it at the end of the course. They conduct an analysis regarding a possible impact on what has been learned and experienced in relation to their previously expressed pedagogical capital.

Pedagogical capital has been developed into a concept with a specific use, focusing on teacher students writing their pedagogical capital and the significance

of this both for teacher education and for the students themselves. In this form, it has become an integrated part of a teacher education programme (Viggósson, 2011).

The concept “pedagogical capital”

Pedagogical capital has further been developed in studies with teachers (Henningsson-Yousif, 2010, 2011, 2012). These studies focus on what pedagogical capital gets expressed when teachers or school heads are interviewed and asked to make sketches concerning their assignments in school or preschool. Thus, the concept has developed from being associated with experiences relevant to educational contexts to referring to what is activated and emerges in pedagogical situations from our individual resources. On the one hand, an interpretation of a situation as pedagogical might be based on it involving teaching and learning components; this is the most simplistic definition. However, on the other hand, a pedagogical situation could be defined as a situation in a larger context with presumptions of the nature of the context and the role of the participants. The perception and analysis of the context and the specific situation could be presumed to have an impact on the participants’ attitudes, feelings and possible impulses or perceived requirements to act.

The word capital indicates resources. These resources are not static; they are in movement. They are conscious, half-conscious or subconscious. They are partly shared by other people and partly unique. Pedagogical capital can be defined as resources of experiences, analyses, thoughts or emotions available in pedagogical situations. Pedagogical capital is not associated with educational achievement; instead, the focus lies on what gets expressed and the contribution this gives in different pedagogical situations, regardless of its origin. Whether it is regarded as valuable by the individuals themselves or their surroundings is an open question that is personally, culturally and socially conditioned.

How the pedagogical capital is expressed is dependent on how and when it is brought to life and on who evokes it. Whether people are free to express their capital or other aspects of their individual resources is another question. Our use of the word “capital” corresponds somewhat to Bourdieu’s concept of capital. While Bourdieu’s use of “capital” (the symbolic, the cultural, the social and the economical) as resources of symbolic value related to power and conquests of social positions (Carle, 2007), we use the concept of capital to express the value of individual resources in a democratic society (Holmstrand, L., 2006). The resemblance between the different ways of using the word capital is the emphases of value. The difference is the placement of capital in relation to its value on a market (Broady, 1998). Pedagogical capital exists and is brought to life whether or not there is something that could be defined as a market. Pedagogical capital exists where people exist, when they reflect on and/or judge themselves to be in pedagogical situations. Pedagogical capital exists even if no one else perceives it or asks for it. By using the word capital, the intention is to highlight its value. You could imagine undiscovered treasures. The idea is that everyone at any moment possesses a pedagogical capital that can be expressed and used in the person’s own life or as a contribution for a common purpose.

The capital does not need to have a specific content or to have been acquired in a certain manner; it exists on its own merits and is important in its own right. Man has a place among other people “across culture and history” (Hostrup Larsen, 1987, authors’ transl.).

The expressions of pedagogical capital are important to take in and utilise, regardless of their origin. There is no distinct line between the growth of pedagogical capital and the expression of this capital, but there is an advantage in separating these two. Analysing can be regarded as a dimension of the teacher’s pedagogical capital. This should not be understood as proposing that anything goes. Instead, all kinds of perspectives and analyses are worth considering with an open mind, but they should not necessarily be agreed with or acted upon (Ehn and Löfgren, 2001).

People’s experiences are sometimes compared with rucksacks or luggage, but this indicates something is more or less heavy to carry. However, by using the word capital, we aim to highlight the value and potential every individual holds. In the following, we will give examples of and briefly discuss two methods of working with and attempting to make pedagogical capital visible.

Sketching as a method to make pedagogical capital visible

We have now introduced the concept of pedagogical capital. One method to gain insight in to how, for example, teachers perceive and analyse their context and relations between different persons, elements and institutions is to ask them to visualise this by making sketches.

Sketching has been used both as a tool in research studies (Henningsson-Yousif, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2011, 2012) and as a method in educational situations. Initially, sketching was used as a complementary method in studies, with the aim to illustrate and clarify the interviewee’s perspective on her context and her assignment in relation to other parties in or around her work place (Henningsson-Yousif, 2006, 2010). The main purpose of these studies’ reports has been to make visible different ways of sketching perspectives and contexts in relation to teacher education, school and school development efforts.

In a study with seven secondary schoolteachers at one of the practice schools of Malmö University’s teacher education institution, sketching was used as the main research method (Henningsson-Yousif, 2011). The research objective was to study how the teachers regarded their responsibility and contribution in relation to the teacher educators on campus. On five occasions, the teachers made sketches on A3-sheets at the end of their workday. A theme was chosen for the sketching on each occasion. Having finished their drawings, the teachers commented on their own sketch and briefly discussed them in the group. The sketches all differ a great deal from one another and the possibilities lie there for a more profound understanding of the teachers’ worldviews and their analyses. Two examples illustrating the student’s situation are shown in Figures 1 and 2. In Figure 1, the student, here called Lisette, seems to be squeezed between tasks and demands from campus and from her practice at the partner school. Everybody evaluates the student. “This is a stressful situation”, said the teacher who made this sketch. Figure 2 shows the student at the centre of many relations and

contacts, and they have a certain communication. At the campus, the mentor is closest and at the top of a chain or, perhaps, hierarchy of steering documents, campus and education.

Birgerstam (2000, p. 49, author's transl.) stresses the possibilities in sketching as a way of searching and not taking anything for granted:

The professional sketcher is protective of his openness, curiosity and intuitive perspicuity in order to let his thought flow freely. He tries to avoid deciding what it is all about.

Not everyone is comfortable with sketching, but many tackle the task directly after some initial small talk. The sketches are expressions of pedagogical capital to value in their own right; they are not objects for correction or manipulation. In an educational context, such as in master's courses, sketching is used as a feature in discussions of ways of viewing school and teaching. The skill to use sketching as a tool of expression could be an object for qualification, but that has not been the case in our work.

One valid finding in all the studies (Henningsson-Yousif, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2011) is that the sketches within each study vary a great deal. No sketch is identical to another; in itself, that inspires to learn more both about the context and connections the teachers see and about the implications these worldviews and analyses could have for the construction of our school and educational systems as well as learning and teaching situations. Further research on the use of sketching as expression and an analysis dimension will be reported (Henningsson-Yousif, 2015).

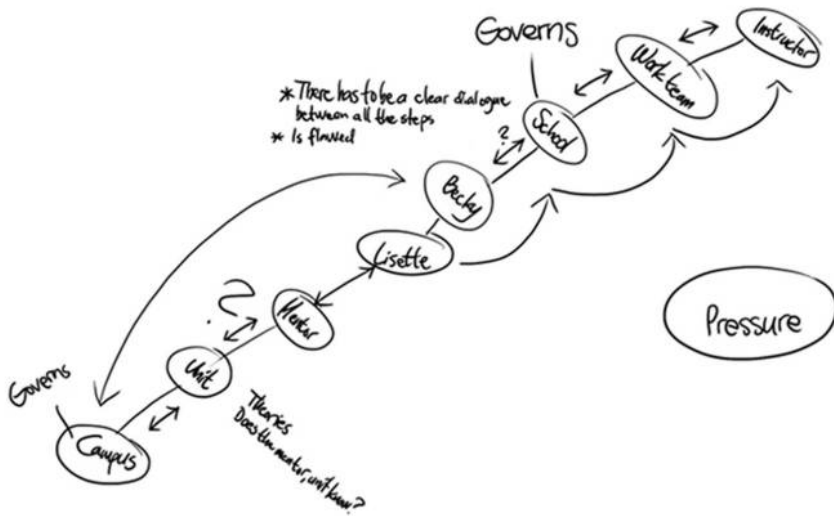


Figure 1. The sketch shows an imagined student teacher “Lisette” under pressure from both the campus part of the teacher education and her practice school (ibid 2011). The words within the sketch have been translated from Swedish

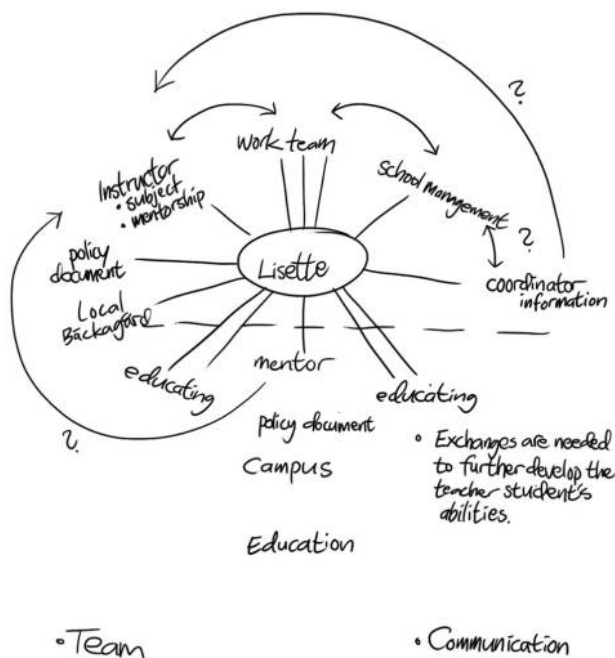


Figure 2. The sketch shows an imagined student teacher “Lisette” in the midst of arrangements, actors and artefacts, where communication between these is an issue to be addressed. The words within the sketch have been translated from Swedish

Stories as a method to make pedagogical capital visible

In recent decades, there has been an increasing focus on different narrative traditions (Clandinin and Conneli, 2000; McCwan and Egan, 1995; Mørch, 2004; Ødegaard and Birkeland, 2001; Smidt and Kopart, 1998). People throughout the ages have shared stories with each other. We communicate using stories to create shared understanding and meaning in life. The method of writing practice stories is grounded in a narrative tradition.

Since 1994, practice stories have been used as a method in educational situations in preschool-teacher education and in teacher education in Hedmark University College in Norway. The practice stories relate to students’ own experiences from working in kindergartens and schools. Situations in everyday life are described, either as a story about a situation the student experienced as challenging or interesting or as a story related to a topic that deals with themes such as children playing or interaction between children and adults. Activities in everyday life in kindergarten and school are being made visible and analysed through practice stories. In both approaches, the aim is to capture the relationship between theory and practice in pedagogical work.

Practice stories can emerge and be used in different ways such as a learning strategy (Fennefoss and Jansen, 2004), as a tool in the assessment of pedagogic work (Birkeland, 1998) or as a method of organisation development (Amundsen, 2003, 2009). The goal is to articulate stories from a perceived personal reality. The pedagogical capital can be made visible through the stories’ focus, contexts and

processes that are communicated in the text. The capital can also be made visible through dialogues about the story. Practice stories were used as a research method as well as a regular method in the mentor education at Hedmark University College in 2011. In a study on mentoring, 42 experienced teachers wrote practice stories concerning the mentor role while doing a mentor education. Parallel to the mentor education, they worked as teachers and as mentors for newly educated colleagues in their communities. The research aim was to study how the students mediated their responsibility and contribution in their role as a mentor for new teachers. This study is one part of a following study on the implementation of mentoring in the municipalities in Norway (Aasen, 2014). The students describe experiences from their mentor work in the practice stories. They also describe personal reflections on situations involving mentoring as well as the mentor role in their practice stories. These stories are shared and discussed in a group of students and teachers. The stories varied and provide the opportunity to discuss mentoring as a new introduction programme for new teachers. One valid finding in this study is that practice stories can create reflections on practice action (Aasen, 2014). Sharing stories of practice can provide support as well as reveal the challenging sides of pedagogical practice. As a method, practice stories can make visible the teachers' and mentors' pedagogical capital. These stories allow for critical reflection of students' and teachers' choices of action. Such a critical approach can allow for a greater awareness of interpretation and understanding of the profession.

Discussion

In our collaborative analysis, we have brought together experiences from different contexts of different methods of making pedagogical capital visible. Our methods have different theoretical relations but similar ideological groundings. The approaches are related regardless of their different aspects and uses of the pedagogical capital. In both examples – the sketching and the practice stories – the role and place of the teacher or mentor in the educational context was the focus. We have also addressed different situations and interests: school development processes, teacher education organisation and individual teacher and mentor development.

A comparison between our approaches and research focuses shows that the use of the concept pedagogical capital is relevant and that three dimensions of this capital emerge:

- (1) an experience content dimension;
- (2) an analysis dimension; and
- (3) an action dimension.

By using the word dimension, we have indicated that the concept *pedagogical capital* can be focused on in different ways and the different dimensions emerged as a result of those aspects of pedagogical capital that we were interested in. The dimensions are obviously connected with each other but not necessarily in a causal way. A person's experiences might have an impact on his/her analysis of a situation, and this analysis might influence a decision to act in a certain way. However, what

emerges is dependent on what activates the pedagogical capital in its different dimensions and under what circumstances. The capital takes shape when it is explicitly asked for, provoked or silently evoked. In our studies, our interest has been directed mainly at certain dimensions of pedagogical capital. However, it is debatable whether or not the elements and dimensions of the capital as they emerge in a situation are conscious and reflected on by the individual.

The experience content dimension

The experience content dimension has to do with the experiences – life, education and work – a person recounts and identifies with in pedagogical situations. In this article, we have made an account of how students write documents named “pedagogical capital” in Malmö. This is an experience content dimension of pedagogical capital. The students’ practice stories, written in the context of doing a mentor education in Norway, is another example in which a special experience content dimension of pedagogical capital is asked for. In an educational context, we have found that the awareness of being in possession of pedagogical capital contributes to a teacher’s reflection on, esteem of and use of this capital.

The analysis dimension

Analysis is defined here as a qualified judgement that includes both pulling factors apart and putting them together again in accordance to the individual’s special knowledge and perspective of the world. The analysis dimension of pedagogical capital is activated spontaneously or specifically asked for in perceived pedagogical situations. In the workplace context, teachers’ analyses are vital for the development of schools. Questions and speculations on reasons behind a teacher’s expressed pedagogical capital become subordinate to what is actually expressed by the teachers; the analyses are interesting in and of themselves.

In our studies, the analysis dimension is appealed to in interviews and is expressed in sketches and stories. Sketching is one method to express a momentary analysis of relations, connections and contexts that teachers make. Further, sketches give an indication of how people link things together, what they count on and what they regard as vital. By using practice stories, teachers can convey their perceptions and analyses of reality of working in a kindergarten or school.

The action dimension

Particularly in the Norwegian example, with practice stories, explanations and arguments for practical actions in educational situations were the focus. This indicates an action dimension of pedagogical capital, as action in itself can be seen as an expression of pedagogical capital. This action can be carried out consciously to some degree and it can be observed and interpreted in different ways from the outside.

Conclusion

Different dimensions are appealed to in different circumstances. The analysis dimension is particularly useful in school development contexts, while the content experience dimension is focused on in individual development situations. The action

dimension could be seen as a visible expression of pedagogical capital and an object of analysis in educational situations.

We see possibilities for teachers and school heads to use written documents of pedagogical capital, sketches and practice stories as development methods. At the same time, we foresee substantial difficulties in such processes. For a school head to ask for the genuine analyses takes much courage as it takes courage for teachers to express such analyses. To be able to discuss and possibly make use of various expressions of pedagogical capital is a great challenge (Henningsson-Yousif, 2012). To share one's own capital in a dialogue with fellow human beings can be a risky venture for involvement risks conflict. The opposite of recognition could be exclusion, invisibility, stigma or abuse of power (Honnet, 2003; Skoglund and Åmot, 2012). However, if there is no opportunity or will to tackle a conflict, different voices will not come forward. One possible next step is to work with and study processes where different expressions of pedagogical capital are being explicitly asked for and used in school development contexts.

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