Whose Reform? – Teachers’ Voices from Silence

Eila Estola, senior researcher
Leena Syrjälä, professor

Abstract:
This paper explores school reforms as a moral voice, which speaks in a different language in each context. We used the comprehensive school reform in Finland as an example and asked how teachers talk about it. Five discourses were identified: the silence, the irony, the submission, the active resistance and the opportunities. The sixth discourse, ‘the commitment’, was used when teachers talked about changes in their classrooms with the language of relationships. We argue that school reforms and changes in the classrooms are not identical, because they base on different morality. Hearing teachers’ voices in school reforms still in our present time is a big challenge both to the administration and scholars.

In the 1970s, the Department of Education in Helsinki was housed in an old two-floor building close to the Market Square and the Cathedral. I always felt confined there and was not really inspired by my minor subject studies. It was spring, and many things were going on at the university. We were all becoming increasingly aware of the radical student policies. The canteen was a much more interesting place than the cramped old library. While I was studying for my final exam in educational science, I heard that the comprehensive school committee were writing their report upstairs, and that professor Koskenniemi usually asked a few questions about this statewide school reform in his oral examination. I therefore had to find out personally about this major upheaval of school life in the 1970s. Afterwards, I have often wondered how far from the reality of school life students of educational science were at that time and suspected that the committee working upstairs never got closer to real life than the students downstairs - and we knew nothing. For me, the school reform remained a mystery, and I have spent a lifetime trying to shed light on that mystery, fully aware that there are no correct solutions.

This is how Leena, the older of us, recalls her experiences of the major school reform as a young student. While analyzing teacher biographies for the past few years, we have often come across people who have labelled us as outmoded opponents of change. Such comments have been provoked especially by our stories of teachers who tell about their vocation, love of children and joy
of work. Our opponents claim we have only received stories from elderly school mistresses nostalgic for the good old times. Although we have also described the conflicts and battles of teachers in the turmoil of school reform, we have been criticized for romanticizing the careers of some exceptional teachers, which actually involve no change but rather stagnation and standstill.

We therefore posed ourselves this question: are we still as far from the real world of school life and the real changes as we were as young students? Do we understand sufficiently well what the efforts to change school really mean and how teachers perceive school reforms? Gudmundsdottir has described school reforms as messages from politicians to teachers and into classrooms. The reception of messages has been described (Cuban 1993) as a hurricane that makes the surface of the sea churn with waves, but leaves the deeper layers calm.

While analyzing the biographical story of one teacher, Helena (Estola & Syrjälä 2000), we realized that although the justifications for change may be external to school and also echo the cultural traditions and the political situation, real change can only take place when teachers integrate the idea of change into their own intentions. Helena did not spontaneously tell about school reforms, until we asked her about them. Nevertheless, Helena had been developing her work more than most others, but she talked about the changes she had accomplished in her own personal style and through actions taking place in her classroom.

We hence considered it interesting to find out what, if anything, teachers say about changes and school reforms. The idea of school reform as a message encouraged us to analyze change as a moral voice, which speaks in a different language in each context. Our assumption was based on the findings that have made a distinction between the administrative language of justice and teachers’ language of care (Noddings 1992; Thayer-Bacon 1998). The former has also been called the language of the father and the latter the language of the mother. The language of administration is the language of justice, which aims at action compatible with certain collective principles or rules, while the basic principles of the language of care are relatedness and responsiveness. We therefore asked how teachers (most of whom are women) describe school reforms and changes in the classrooms and how they ‘translate’ the moral language of administration into their own language of teachers.

We decided to focus on the comprehensive school reform which was the biggest reform of educational policy ever implemented in Finland. The reform basically aimed to enhance educational equality in a welfare state by providing all children equal opportunities for social progress regardless of where they lived and what social status they had. Prior to that, Finland had had a parallel school system, which included elementary school for 8 years and an optional junior
secondary school, for which volunteers applied and wrote an entrance examination. Finnish children start school at the age of 7, and there is no compulsory pre-school or kindergarten.

This profound reform of the structure of elementary school took place in the 1970s, when the 9-year comprehensive school system was implemented. The state was to take care of all citizens and to provide welfare for all. The comprehensive school reform aimed to solve the problems of basic education in a manner almost opposite to those applied elsewhere in Europe, with the exception of easternmost Europe. The development of comprehensive school over the following decades can be divided into three stages.

Volanen and Mäkinen (1997) and Volanen (2000) have discovered three stages in the comprehensive school reform. The first stage was the transitional comprehensive school with a streaming system from 1972 to about 1985. This was followed by the mature comprehensive school, where streaming was replaced by special instruction, up till the early 1990s. The third stage of comprehensive school, however, has been more teacher-oriented, and the contribution of teachers to change has been regarded as increasingly important. A further typical feature has been the severe cuts on financial resources justified by the economic recession.

The first stage of the comprehensive school reform was a clearly politico-administrative reform, which was implemented by issuing administrative directives. The reform was planned and implemented through extensive committee work, and the Finnish parliament finally passed a law and a statute on comprehensive school. The reform was accomplished as a technical procedure, in-service education was provided and new materials were made available to teachers.

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Reading Stories

We read teachers’ autobiographies with an eye on how teachers talk about school reforms and changes. Our approach is narrative and hence inherently concerned with change (Clandinin & Connelly 2000). Geertz (1995, 1-2) claimed that nothing can ever be described as a static thing because everything keeps changing –‘there seems to be no place to stand so as to locate just what has altered and how’. The stories were produced by teachers for a research project in

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1 From 2001 onwards, municipalities will be obliged to provide pre-school education for all children aged 6. The children, however, have no obligation to attend.
different ways and in response to different instructions (see Teachers in Change). Part of the material came from interviews, while another part consisted of written autobiographies. Some of the stories were produced in response to a general instruction to tell about their lives. Some material came from a biographical writing competition, for which the participants were encouraged to write especially about the changes in their work consequent to changes in society and school.

Having read more than a hundred stories, we were astonished at how little these teachers talked about the comprehensive school reform or any other school reform. Instead, they described in detail changes at the classroom level instigated by factors other than administrative reforms. We especially noticed that the teachers commented on these changes emotionally and argumentatively, sometimes with a sense of discordance and disappointment, sometimes with fervour and enthusiasm, as if the rhythm of the narrative had reflected the variable rhythm of everyday teaching (cf. Connelly et al. 1997).

The autobiographies were retrospective, and we should bear in mind that they were events are always interpreted in the contemporary light, and the ‘purpose of and audience for the retellings may color what is told’ (Mitchell & Weber 1999, 12). We had, however, stories told for different purposes and addressed to different organizations, and we can hence consider the outcome of the analysis sufficiently diverse. We also had stories told by male and female teachers of different grades and of different ages, living in different parts of Finland (though a large majority were women). We picked up those in which the teachers at least briefly described the comprehensive school reform. As a result we had 18 stories, 2 by men and 16 by women. We have four teachers as ‘key’ stories whom we call by (pseudonymous) names. The solution has its pitfalls, it might make the anonymous stories seem less important. This was not our aim, neither was bothering readers by too many names. The key stories were selected in order to present different views and ways they describe the school reforms and to emphasize that school reforms as well as all the changes at the classroom level are part of the teacher’s personal, biographical story (Gudmundsdottir & Flem 2000).

‘Voice’ is a concept that has been used to refer to very many things (Elbaz 1991; Freeman 1994). For us, ‘voice’ is a metaphor applicable to teachers, who act in contexts where they hear and participate in different discourses. Also Wertsch (1991, 51-52) has been inspiring for as he writes: ‘Meaning can come into existence only when two voices come into contact: when the voice of the listener responds to the voice of the speaker’. Teachers are implementing the comprehensive school reform through the discourses in which they participate or through the voices they use. We, as researchers, wish to continue this chain: having listened to the voices of teachers,
we aim to generate meanings for these teacher stories through our own academic discourse by reflecting on what the stories mean to us, rather than what the stories meant to the teachers (Moje 2000).

We approached our material based on Freeman’s (1994) argumentation that researchers should analyze language as a socially constructed discourse. The substance of teacher stories is shaped by the way in which they are told. Freeman suggests that, apart from assuming teachers’ knowledge to be evident in the language they use (representative use of language), we should pay more attention to how data are presented in language. ‘The presentational view assumes that language is both the vehicle and the substance of participants’ meanings. …Thus in this presentational approach, the teacher’s words are taken for what they are as well for what they say. To work with language data one must look at not only what is said but also how it is said.’ (Freeman 1994, 83). According to Freeman, we need three approaches to understand how teachers construct their knowledge through language. Firstly, we should analyze linguistic expressions, for ‘language depends on a speech community to create and sustain meanings’ (p. 85). If, therefore, the language of administration is different, teachers have to translate it into their own language. How is that done? Secondly, we should consider the ‘voice’, and thirdly, we should find out where the voice comes from. ‘If voice is a fabric of language, one needs to examine the references and sources for the various threads out of which it is woven.’ (p. 87)

The metaphor of voice also inherently implies that not all voices are equally loud. Teacher research has frequently shown that teachers’ voices may not be audible (Elbaz 1991). We were especially intrigued by this idea of silence and inaudible voice. Could researchers be sensitive enough to hear even the nearly inaudible voices? We wanted to try.

The paper of Rogers et al. (1999) helped us to read the stories in a way that brought us closer to topics that are difficult to talk about or hard to identify. The authors highlight the need to analyze language and discourse. They point out that language is used to express such things as the process of remembering, uncertainty, the process of imagining, identifying, and selecting. We also paid attention to metaphors, which may explicate something that is otherwise unsayable. Lakoff & Johnson (1999) have described metaphors as language with a material background, which is why they reflect well the human experiences. Metaphors are ‘dense descriptions’, which effectively reflect the narrator’s experiences in symbolic language or by juxtaposing two different phenomena. Teachers described themselves as runners with ‘muscles full of lactic acid’ or as a choir who ‘sang to the conductor’s cue’, while one teacher said she ‘felt completely bogged down by the formal teaching methods’.
The analysis has proceeded from the whole to the parts and back to a whole. We started by reading the stories from the viewpoint of the transitions in the school reform, concentrating on the introduction of comprehensive school, the period of establishment and the reversal in the developmental trends. We also identified the themes discussed by the teachers in their narratives. After that, we applied the ideas of Freeman and Rogers et al. to our analysis of the teachers’ stories about the school reform. Since we consider life a narrative that is being told (Bruner 1987), we also read the stories produced by individual teachers as narratives of multi-voiced discourse. The parts acquire their meaning through the whole (cf. Clandinin & Connelly 2000). We used two contexts as reference and background for individual episodes or descriptions: the official narrative of the comprehensive school reform and the individual narrator’s own story. In this way, we ensured that both types of discourse were covered in the analysis.

We will first concentrate on how the teachers ‘answer’ on the public, administrative rhetoric of the comprehensive school reform. After that, we will illustrate by a few examples the teachers’ ‘own’ way of talking about changes in the classroom.

‘Everybody Can Learn Everything’ – Constrained by the Public Rhetoric

Many teachers’ stories about the comprehensive school reform commented on the public discourse. The reform was approached from three perspectives. Firstly, there was discourse about the goals and objectives of comprehensive school. Secondly, there were stories about the belief that in-service education could serve as a tool for implementing the reform. Thirdly, there were descriptions about the changes in the substance and methods of instruction brought about by the reform, which were expected to establish the reform in the classrooms.

According to the teachers, however, the reform was not so simple. Teachers live in the world of a different practice. The administrative practice and its moral language could not be directly translated into the language of practical instruction, where different moral rules prevail (cf. Silfverberg 1996). Teachers’ stories were woven into a discourse that tries to explain the public discourse and to make it understandable to themselves.

The structural reform promoted by the administrative discourse was partly a terminological reform. One upper secondary school teacher described this as follows: ‘The new school was described in a new terminology: “discipline” was replaced by “optimal working conditions” and “class schedule” by “work plan”. Even ”school”, a word with such an honourable tradition, was replaced by junior and senior ”level”.’ Teachers considered the new
terminology a means of the public rhetoric to alter the traditional premises of teaching. For the writer, the word ‘school’ had a clearly more profound meaning that the more technical and performance-oriented ‘level’. Teachers were concerned about what they were and what they were expected to be, and possibly also that school life, in the long run, would really be transformed into a technical performance. This is often the key issue in discussions of stability and change. The new terms were probably the most concrete indication of the tendency described by Hargreaves (1997) that teachers have been expected to change themselves and their work, as if change were a mere technical solution.

One teacher described the official propaganda in favor of comprehensive school, which, ‘in retrospect, was very naïve’: the principles of comprehensive school were publicly advocated by the director general of the National Board for Education and other officials. The education was given to large crowds and was hardly useful at all. All discussion remained at a general level and never addressed the problems that occupied teachers. No-one cared about the real situation of teachers and pupils, nor did the teachers’ union help.

Teachers’ ways of telling of the school reform can be considered comments on the voices of administration and media. We identified five ways of telling about the school reform. Although the categories were sometimes mixed with each other, we make an effort to perform them one by one. The discourses were: the silence, the irony, the submission, the active resistance and the opportunities.

1. The silence
At first, we recognized the silence. Rogers et al. (1999) argue that the discourse of silence is the most elusive language of the unsayable. The mere absence of some information does not necessarily indicate silence. This comment is especially relevant to our research, where so many teachers said nothing about the school reform in their stories. What does this mean? What kind of response to the administrative discourse of reform is non-response? Silence is also an interesting moral question, as it is related to the general ability to hear voices in society. It is also very clearly a matter related to power (Lather 1991, Wertsch 1990). Could we even postulate that the voices of teachers are voices of women, which are intentionally not heard or understood. Ås (2000) has

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2 The teachers adopted some cultural ways of presenting their own voices about the school reform which then discussed with the voices of public rhetoric.
analyzed the ways of oppression women, and one of her arguments is the practice of making women invisible. The voice of someone who is invisible is certainly not very loud.

The most striking silence was the failure of many teachers to say anything at all about the comprehensive school reform. By silence, speakers can make their interlocutor, in this case the public discourse, poignantly aware of their refusal to listen to the interlocutor’s voice. In our case it had serious consequences on the amount of the stories we could analyze further. In some stories, the complete silence was punctuated by a single brief remark: ’the comprehensive school reform came’, but such a comment is like silence in that the speaker never went on to comment further, but moved on to another topic.

Even those teachers who told about the transitional phase of the reform only seldom told anything about the mature years of comprehensive school reforms. In those few comments they described it as a good time for teachers: the groups of pupils were small, the financial resources were good and there were enough materials and tools. The silence about this period probably indicates that teachers concentrated on their work in serious silence. Although interpreting the specific meaning of silence is difficult, we want to argue that it is an efficient way of expression and earns to be reflected on.

2. The irony

An ironic tone probably indicates that the narrator finds the public rhetoric unrealistic. The public discourse used at the early stages of comprehensive school is considered exaggerating and promotional by several informants. Maija, a former civic school teacher wrote: ’The leading idea of comprehensive school was that everybody can learn everything. Only teachers understand how utopian that idea is. All of a sudden, every pupil was to be linguistically and mathematically talented and to reach a high level knowledge in all subjects. Special instruction was like a magic wand that was whisked to clear the learner’s path of rocks and tree stumps. No-one was to stand out from the crowd or to be better than the others. That was democracy.’

According to Maija, the language used to advertise comprehensive school was unrealistic. The pupils were to be talented ’all of a sudden’ and ’were to’ reach a high level in all subjects. Maija’s ironic comments and metaphors she used is a response to the finger-pointing public discourse. Special instruction, the magic wand, would eliminate the differences between individual pupils and help to establish democracy. Maija’s story presents the reform as a process whereby politicians tried to persuade teachers to see problems where they themselves wanted to see
them (Rust 1993, 18). Maija’s story also shows that the public rhetoric of marketing campaigns was used to persuade teachers to view the problems of learning and teaching from the political perspective. We can also infer that no-one asked the teachers about their view of the problems and their solutions.

One topic of public discourse was the changes in curricula and teaching methods. The teachers told about the changes in subjects, such as the introduction of the first foreign language on grade 3 and the availability of technical work and textile work to both girls and boys. The descriptions mostly lack involvement, and the narrators seem to have an outsider’s perspective to the topic, although the system of subjects, for example, certainly had direct consequences for their daily work. ‘New math’, however, inspired a few scathing comments: ‘And we went to the extremes with some nonsensical experiments. For example, the pupils were not taught the multiplication table systematically, but pieces on paper were pinned up on the walls and the children were expected to pick them up just like that. And all mathematical instruction went wide off the mark. The new math and the set theory and things were so alien to real life that the kids got completely lost. And we, too, had a hard time with the math.’

The teller, Laura, a primary school teacher discusses the failure of the experimental education advocated in the public discourse. The message of her story is that the teachers tried to follow the instructions, although, based on their experiential knowledge, they doubted the success of such ‘nonsensical’ projects. The teachers also had a ‘hard time’ with the experiment. Another teacher recalls the same thing, pointing out that the new math was ‘buried in silence’. New mathematics was actually also dropped from the official curriculum.

3. The submission

A submissive tone may reflect the ways of women to respond to authoritarian and patriarchal administration, trying to survive in difficult and challenging situations. ‘Teachers made a huge effort in this contradictory situation, trying to live up to the demands of both contemporary and future society and the challenges posed to them. Moreover, the majority of teachers were, and still are, women’, wrote Maija pointing out the gender and power issues inside the school reform.

We argued earlier that in-service education was expected to provide a solution to the problems of the transitional stage. In the next Maija’s quote the voice of submission has simultaneously an ironic sound. ‘We learnt new things, acquired education, went out for the weekends to listen to people wiser than ourselves, who were often unprepared and underestimated their audience. We did whatever we were ordered and never complained, and no-one ever
wondered if we had enough resources for all that.’ The efforts of teachers are here described as earnest, but the quote also implies that administrators looked down on teachers, underestimating them and denying the real problem, i.e. the possible burnout of teachers.

The rhythm of stories sometimes seem to reflect the fast pace at which the public discourse envisioned the change to take place. One male primary school teacher gave this breathless account and told (again with a bit ironic sound) about their hectic efforts to ‘translate’ the public rhetoric into the language of classroom practice: ‘There were multiple-choice tests, there was the spiral method, there was the question of fixed-grade or alternative instruction, and always something new on the way, and the teachers were like race runners with their muscles full of lactic acid, painfully struggling on.’

Our informants were sometimes uncertain about a given state of affairs: ‘I guess I was, by my natural disposition, ahead of my time’, said one teacher, and another said: ‘our task was probably to test the new school for all its shortcomings’. These expressions imply uncertainty as well as the possibility and even probability of holding a different view. Evasions were sometimes identifiable in expressed emotion or opinion. One teacher wrote as follows: ‘I do not really understand why we should have a reform for the sake of reform’. The words ‘not really’ signal uncertainty. The sentence implies that the writer suspects the problem is her failure to understand, which also is a typical women way of thinking according to Ås.

Teachers had to respond to the public discourse defending themselves, often as outsiders rather than subjects. No-one ever asked teachers how they were coping, but they were left alone to wrestle with their feelings of inadequacy amidst the reforms (see Nias 1993). Maija put it: ‘In the middle of all this, they forgot all about teachers, who, after all, were the ones to carry out this reform. There was naturally also matter-of-fact information, but it was mostly drowned in the hype. The teachers did a huge effort in this contradictory situation, trying to respond to the demands of both present and future society and all the challenges posed to them’.

4. The active resistance

Some informants responded to the public rhetoric by active resistance’ reflecting the speaker’s detachment: ‘you can say what you want, but we will act like this’. Such comments were often included in the stories about how comprehensive school was advertised as a school without homework, where pupils would learn everything without any effort or work. As far as this matter was concerned, teachers acted in their classrooms based on their own knowledge and moral, knowing perfectly well that children actually learn different things in a slightly different ways. The
discourse of resistance also included teachers’ serious argumentations in which they comment reform trying to make their own perspectives visible.

In the next fragment Maija engaged in a dialogue with the image of teachers propagated by the media. ‘It was precisely at that time that the public media also attacked the school and the teachers. The students’ association started spreading the ‘student’s red book’, which was very provocative about the despotism of teachers. It was easy enough to find a pop singer who had been neglected by a teacher and given a bad mark in music, though he was such a star now. Listening to him, you probably agreed with the teacher. The television also recruited people to produce documents or sketches of teachers as military monsters waving a pointer, shabbily dressed and with their hair done up in a bun, who sent pupils flying into the corner or under the desk. In reality, however, the teacher is like an actor on stage, facing an ever critical audience and therefore fashionable and well-coiffured.’

The comprehensive school reform was presented as discourse about teachers as monsters and tyrants unable to understand children. Maija’s comment is serious, well argued and based on personal experience. Teachers have to carefully consider their appearance and behavior. This has also been pointed out by Mitchell & Weber (1999).

Maija then went on: ‘Newspapers published reports about the new comprehensive school: no-one will have to repeat a grade, no-one will be failed in exams, and therefore no-one will need to study. That lulled the pupils into a false notion of laziness and negligence’. This theme was brought up by many teachers. ‘Comprehensive school is a happy school’, they proclaimed. ‘Everybody can learn everything at comprehensive school, though there is no homework.’ Teachers told about their feelings of guilt under the public scrutiny of the administrators and the media. Pupils would certainly learn if teachers could teach them well enough. Ingrid Carlgren (1997) has described this phenomenon in the course of the Swedish school reform. According to her, teachers have been subjugated in the reforms, and their experiences have not been taken seriously. The reformers have insisted on discussion about what professional knowledge should be rather than what it is. ‘Teachers are expected to do and know something other they do and know’.

(p. 48 original italics).

There is concern that can be heard in teachers’ stories during the decades: teachers argue against the policy which seems to narrow teachers’ role. The male teacher wrote: ‘If I am correct in my interpretation that teaching is becoming more important than education, it may happen that the whole infrastructure of teachers’ work turns upside down. As far as I can see, that would seriously
undermine the position of teachers, and the prospect is certainly not a pleasant one. We have a good school system and we have been investing a lot of effort in gradually developing it within the current framework, though we have sometimes felt very inadequate.'

The quote also presents the comprehensive school system in a good light. We will now concentrate on this topic.

5. The opportunities

When telling about the reform there was also discourse of opportunities, and without that the comprehensive school reform might appear in an unnecessarily gloomy light. Underneath the advertising or accusing rhetoric, teachers also discovered positive aspects, opportunities for change, a new kind of freedom and a new kind of openness and exchange of professional ideas in further education. In the stories the opportunities, difficulties and challenges were told in the same, mixed story and the same teachers used different discourses.

The overall goal of educational policy, i.e. equality in education, was unanimously advocated as an important moral principle: *The comprehensive school reform was a necessary prerequisite for equality. In the old times, many of the talented children in remote regions had no opportunities for education. Comprehensive school placed all children on the same starting line*. This was a comment by Maija who had herself acquired teacher education in the midst of major hardships during the post-war period of poverty. Without exception, all teachers advocated the goal of equality. This also reflects the contemporary political ideal of a welfare state. Teachers presented the goal of the reform as ‘necessary’ or, as above, something that warrants ‘absolute’ commitment, because ‘all children were to be given equal opportunities for education regardless of their parents’ place of residence, economic status or education’. The manner of writing reflects the teachers’ serious attitude towards this public discourse. no deprecatory comments, no irony, no disapproval.

Despite all their comments on the lack of realism in the public rhetoric, some teachers admitted that the reform ultimately gave them more freedom and encouraged them even to take up topics that had not been discussed before. *The comprehensive school reform resulted in a liberation, and that made it possible to adopt a different role. We had the new math experiment and these teacher meetings and educational sessions, and I found them positive*, wrote Inkeri.

One teacher considered the mature years: ‘The system of streaming was replaced by the idealistic view that “everybody can learn everything”. I disagreed then, and I disagree even more now. In other ways, however, the situation at school was ideal. The group size became smaller. When you have sixteen pupils in a group, you get to know each one of them personally’. Even this
teacher starts by pointing out the lack of realism of the public rhetoric, but then goes on contentedly to comment on the things that made teaching easier. This description highlights the importance of the close teacher – pupil relations, which became possible in the smaller groups (Thayer-Bacon 1998). Teachers were now better able to respond to the needs of individual pupils. It is possible to read between the lines that there was less stress and more time to concentrate on teaching (cf. Olson et al. 1999).

At the same time when the material resources became better some stories comment on the new substance of the comprehensive school as a victory of commercialism. Laura, a female primary school teacher told: 'Along with the comprehensive school reform, textbooks were naturally also reformed, and that was partly a good thing. ...But, but... very soon it began to seem that textbooks are a good marketing niche for the publishers. I must admit that many the teacher’s guides were really good, but was it necessary to publish new ones so often?’ Did the comprehensive school reform also benefit people aiming to profit financially from the school system?

‘I Could Have an Opinion of My Own About Teaching’ – The Discourse of the Commitment

When opening the door to the classroom we hear different stories about what is changing and how different it seems from the discourse of the school reform. This discourse we call ‘the commitment’. The importance of the personal motivation and the connections to the teacher’s identity become obvious. Teachers told about their efforts to develop curricula, teaching methods, and co-operation with the parents with the.

In this paragraph we will have a look more to what and how teachers told about the ‘voice’ that motivates and make them involved teachers with the developmental work. In general, the voices were heard from several directions. What is common to all narratives of change, however, that this voice is stimulating, encouraging and calling (cf. Hargreaves 1997). The quote in the title was a comment by Kirsti, a secondary school teacher who was able to attend in-service education in the late 1980s, which was 'notably different from the coercive training at the beginning of comprehensive school'.

While attending the course, Kirsti was encouraged to think what she personally wanted from teaching, what she expected the pupils to want, and how she could make these two sets of expectations mutually compatible in foreign language instruction. She was presented a ‘revolutionary array of new matters to be thought about and applied in class...I really began to
think about things and, for the first time, it occurred to me that I could have some opinions about teaching. Up till then I had been like a good girl, listening to the instructions and advice from higher up and feeling guilty for not being able to accomplish everything. I had believed that outsiders really know better than the teachers what we should teach and how’.

Kirsti gives a true and serious account of the impact of in-service education on her. Without irony or understatement, she tells about a feeling of empowerment and a new kind of confidence in her own resources. Prior to that, she had considered herself subject to the administration and forced to ‘listen like a good girl’, because there was no other way. She had lacked faith in her own competence. This lack of courage should be viewed against the background of the public discourse and the moral voice of administration. Teachers were viewed as implementers rather than developers of the reform.

Temporally, the quotation refers to the mature stage of comprehensive school, when many teachers took off time to pursue further studies. In-service education had finally established a better interface with teaching. Teacher – pupil interaction was considered important, and outsiders were sponsoring development projects. Gordon’s book about the wise teacher and educational courses based on these guidelines were described by many teachers as having opened their eyes to the importance of teacher – pupil interaction.

Personal change was sometimes also triggered by the media. Laura told about the time before comprehensive school: “Back in the 1960s, I once read in the newspaper about a study which had indicated that 80 % of 4-year-olds have creative talent. At the age of 8 only 40 % are creatively talented, and at the age of 20 only 3 % are still creative…This news really hit home. I decided: that will not happen in my class. I began to read about creativity. I enrolled on a course. I nurtured creativity at all times, during every lesson, in all things I did. Based on this, I began to alter my own attitude and my way of working with the children. I felt I was growing and renewing mentally, and my work seemed meaningful and rewarding. I worked much harder than previously, but that was not important. I tried to give the children personal experiences and considered it important that everybody should have feelings of success. I built a home for active hands. One day, I hauled the teacher’s desk down from the podium. I remember that the school inspector wondered about that. Some time later I had the podium removed altogether and brought in a large carpet, a ‘magic carpet’. We gathered on that carpet to read stories. The parents even consented to have their children bring small cushion to school. I am sure the children learnt better. And what was most important: school was fun.
Laura is telling a story of change, describing her commitment and willingness to even face other people’s astonishment to promote her cause (cf. Lauriala 1997). Having identified the problem, she began to study and make changes. It was a major change to take the teacher’s desk down from the podium. Only later did she dare to remove the podium altogether. Laura’s story is multi-voiced, including the astonished comments by the inspector and probably also the parents, who ‘consented…’

When teachers told stories of change in the classroom, it was evident that this change never coincided with the official school reforms. Many teachers had accomplished changes in their classrooms that are only later introduced by the official discourse as topics for public discussion. The motivation may date back to their own teacher education as it was in Laura’s case. ‘At one point, there was this public discussion about integrated education. I was confused and desperately tried to see what was new in this issue. Then I realized: they were the same principles of Aukusti Salo that I had learnt at seminar and had been applying ever since. It was a blessed thing they were discussed more widely now and were gaining wider acceptance’.

This teacher comments on public discussion and points out that the ‘new’ topic was actually old and familiar to her. While reading the narratives, we came across several similar comments. Gudmundsdottir and Flem (2000) have also noticed the same phenomenon in Norwegian classrooms. Teachers implement changes long before they are ‘publicly’ advocated. This also put school reforms in a new light and offers a challenge: How could school reforms establish a dialogue where teachers’ voices would be really heard. Or can they ever?

**Discussing Discussions of Reforms and Changes**

This inquiry addressed reform as a moral voice to which teachers have to respond. Thus, when we analyze school reforms as moral voices and messages into classrooms, we should ask what kind of messages they are. We used as an example the biggest reform of educational policy ever accomplished in Finland and teachers’ comments concerning it. We described the modes of telling and demonstrated the diversity and mutual differences in the teacher narratives. We became convinced that the comprehensive school reform was a one-way message to the teachers and the voices of teachers were not heard. The reform used advertising rhetoric supported by media in which teachers were seen as technicians or even as non-professionals who did not understand or knew anything about the education. This ‘forced’ teachers to apply different reacting and defensive discourses.

Despite the efforts to change the administrative culture, it seems that the situation has not
According to many teachers, the current stage of development of business orientation and the related administrative discourse are taking the school system into a wrong direction and again teachers’ voices are silenced. One teacher asks: ‘What will happen to the average teacher in an average school?’ The narrator is worried that only the best and most successful individuals are appreciated or even accepted in society. The teacher’s argumentation echoes with Volanen (2000) when he points out argues that when there has been a change towards decentralization in the administrative culture and an idea of a service-providing school with alternative options available to pupils, yet the direction of development has been reversed. This is because many supporting systems such as the special instruction, has been decreased or cut off. This has enhanced the role of the parents and hence the direct impacts of differences in social status on education and educational choices.

In the western countries, justice is often equated with the maximization of financial profit, and decisions are made accordingly. For teachers, therefore, reform has mostly meant larger classes, less money for special education, fewer subsidies, etc. The everyday work of teachers, however, is based on a justice where the children’s needs are the primary criterion (Thayer-Bacon 1998). Teachers evaluate changes in terms of the effects they have on the interpersonal relations in the classroom, especially between the teachers and children. Often changes are part of teachers’ silent practical knowledge, and teachers sometimes underrate them (Walsh et al. 1991). In order to make reforms real changes, it is not enough to pay attention to teachers’ knowledge, values and background, but also their hopes, intentions, and wishes for the future must be taken into account including the fact that changes include some improvised elements (Clandinin & Connelly 1998, 155-156). Reforms should, therefore, be approached as moral issues, always in relation to teacher’s personal and professional values.

The way of presenting changes in the classroom is the discourse of commitment and differs from the ways of presenting the official school reform. It is the language which present changes connected with the relationships and emotions. The changes in the classrooms were sometimes related to reforms, but they were always filtered through the teacher’s own identity and moral horizon (Taylor 1989). These stories were not directly related to the public rhetoric, although occasional references were made to such matters as the ‘inspector’s astonishment’ or the ‘parents’ consent’, the latter of which seems to imply that the teacher was not even sure of the parents’ attitude to change.

Teachers’ moral is its own distinctive ‘whole’, its own language of practice, which does not follow the rules and moral schools (cf.Hansen1998; Johnson 1989). The main emphasis
in the school reforms is to produce a dialogue between the languages of administration and teachers. Teachers may also be embarrassed by the fact that reforms seldom address the problems they encounter in their daily work. At the present, there are both national and international signs indicating that teachers’ voices are even less audible than before in the discussion of reforms. This may ultimately turn out to be a problem. Although more and more people realize that the keys to change are held by the teachers themselves, it may happen that administration and everyday teaching continue to diverge. The ongoing process of globalization and the furious pursuit of economic profit will probably result in increasingly business-based school administration. Who has the strength to go on speaking for ever if nobody listens? Who is taking teachers seriously? This is also a challenge to us as researchers.

References


It is problematic to translate some words of the Finnish school system to English because the same word can have so different meanings. For that reason a short explanation. Before the compulsory comprehensive school system we had parallel school system. All the children first had to have four years primary school and after that they could choose either the more practice orientated civic school ( ) or the academic orientated middle school ( 5 years). After the middle school the youngsters had possibility to apply to upper secondary school and only after to study at the university. The middle schools and upper secondary schools were fee-paying schools. After the comprehensive school reform the public school became available for every one. The primary and secondary school made totally 9 (6 +3) years of schooling, free of charge. After that the youngsters chose either universities or different vocational training tracks. In 199??? The division between lower and upper stages was put an end and 9 years long united comprehensive school was established.

Gordon’s book XXXXX??? is based on transactional analysis and was translated into Finnish in the 1970s. It became a popular practical guide book for teachers.

The reason why teachers spoke more about the early than the later stages of the comprehensive school reform may be that the early stages were more revolutionary, threatening and, in retrospect, possibly even more exciting. This seems to gain support from the finding that people usually tell about the turning-points in their life. Gradually, however, the reform lost its edge, its rhetoric was forgotten, and teaching continued in classrooms, changing and developing within the framework of the ‘regularities’ of classroom work and in the ways outlined by teachers after having harnessed the discourse of the reform to serve their own intentions.