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Critical Incidents and Turning Points in Female Teachers' Occupational Life stories

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ABSTRACT

Titel : Critical incidents and turning points in female teachers' occupational life stories

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The overall purpose of this study is to describe, analyse and contextualize some female teachers' professional experience and development using life history methodology. Researchers in the life history field examine how individuals talk about and story their experience and perceptions of the social context they inhabit. They acknowledge that there is a crucial interactive relationship between individual's lives, their perception and experiences, historical and social context and events (Cole and Knowles, 2001).

'Critical incidents' have emerged as an area of importance in life history research in educational settings. These events provoke the individual into selecting particular kinds of action, they in turn lead them in particular directions, and end up having implications for teachers' professional lives and identity (Goodson & Sikes, 2001). Critical incidents in teachers' professional lives can be used to pinpoint complex phenomena, for example 'teacher drop-out' (Casey, 1988; Casey & Apple, 1989) and 'teacher stress' (Troman, 2000; Woods and Troman, 2003). Important and actual phenomena to explore also in a nordic perspective.

The present paper mainly tries to compare and discuss the theoretical framework of 'Critical incident and Turning point'. Strauss (1962) talks about career development as a series of 'turning points'. These points in career development occur when individuals have to take stock, to re-evaluate, revise, resee and rejudge. He claims that turning-points are found in all parts of our lives including occupational career. Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) discern three different categories, though many turning-points are a combination of two or even all three types. The first category is *structural*. Such turning points are determined by external structures of the institutions involved. Other turning points are *self-initiated*, that is, the person concerned is instrumental in precipitating transformation, in response to range of factors in his/her personal life in the field. Finally turning points are *forced* on some one, by external events and/or actions by others.

The study is longitudinal and includes data produced with the informants both during their teacher education and first six years as teachers, a period of ten years. The empirical data include diaries, written narratives and interviews. By examining and contextualise teachers' personal stories about their career choice, teacher education and first six years in teaching, the researcher and the teachers, in collaboration, construct occupational life stories as a way to get deeper insight to teachers' professional development in a time of educational change.

Examples of 'Critical incidents and Turning points' will be presented mainly based on definitions made by Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) Measor (1985) Woods (1993ab). One of the research questions is what kind of critical incidents and turning points can be identified in teachers' working lives and in what way do they effects teachers' professional commitment, identity and career? Some findings indicate that critical incidents can be used to pinpoint important influences in teachers' professional development.

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