Folk High School Teachers’ Professional Development
– Supported by watching videos of their own teaching

Eva-Marie Harlin
Division of Education and Adult Learning, Department of Behavioural Sciences and Learning, Linköping University
e-mail: eva-marie.harlin@liu.se
phone: +46 (0) 13 28 22 43

Introduction
The specific role of the teacher is a feature that is often pointed out as a characteristic of the folk high schools in Sweden, as well as in the other Nordic countries. One aspect of this is the horizontal relationship between students and teachers. Another aspect has to do with the considerable freedom that teachers have when it comes to organizing educational activities at folk high schools, due to the absence of national curricula regulating the folk high schools (Larsson 2013; Paldanius 2014; Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016). Related to this, one can assume that folk high school teachers’ competence is of great importance. One important aspect of their profession is dealing with the complex and continually changing situation of their work. Paldanius (2014) says that folk high school teachers need practical wisdom and well-developed judgement in order to respond to a heterogeneous group and to the participants’ individual needs. To cope with these aims, folk high school teachers now and then need to be involved in different types of skill development.
Teachers of all kinds have to deal with questions about how to act in relation to those they are supposed to teach. For example, in the discussion about pedagogy, Liberg (2005) argues that education and learning involve sequences of communicative actions. Choices concerning how to design education are influenced partly by the purpose of education, something that Biesta (2013) also believes is of great importance, but they are also influenced by who the education is for. Related to this, Rønosen and Engelsen (2015) show that it is crucial that teachers’ professional development is situated in their own local context, and that this will take time. Teachers’ skills development must be structured, and the new knowledge must be processed. If this happens, it can also contribute to school development.

A common way of organising further education for teachers of all kinds, as well as for other professionals, is by various types of courses and workshops (Day & Sachs, 2004; Kelchtermans, 2004; Boyle, et al., 2005), activities that do not always relate to the participating teachers’ special situations. Teachers’ professional development is not necessarily about formal qualifications; instead it is more about stimulating reflections related to their own practical reality (Schön, 1983; Kelchtermans, 1993; Boyle et al, 2005; Glenn, 2012; Jütte et al., 2011). Egetenmayer and Käppling (2011) have an even wider view of this, indicating that the development of teachers also includes the development of their schools. This study aims to investigate in what ways video recordings of folk high school teachers’ own teaching can enhance this development. It asks what aspects of professional development folk high school teachers report after watching video recordings of their own teaching, and how this development influences their image of themselves as teachers.

Reflection on experiences
Folk high school teachers’ professional development is not limited to the formal competence of an academic education; it is also about developing an individual approach built on experience. Evans (2008) argues that teachers’ development can be divided into two categories, functional and attitudinal development. West (2010) and Maier-Gutheil and Hof (2011) indicate that self-observations influence both. Functional development concerns improving one’s teaching performance, while attitudinal development refers to reflections on attitudes and values (Evans, 2008). Folk high school teachers’ professional progress can be described as a process in which they develop through their interactions with participants. Reflection on such experiences can be seen as a negotiation between intentions and values, and therefore embodies the entire situation of an individual life (Billet & Sommerville, 2004; Billet, 2007; Olesen, 2007). Relevant tools and time for reflection are necessary to support this type of process.

Video as a tool for teachers’ professional development
Haw and Hadfield (2011) report that videos have been used in different types of practitioners’ research, to understand and improve professional practice. They indicate that videos can be perceived as a mirror, “a situation in which the observer makes their own images an object of their subjectivity” (ibid, p. 51) and that videos “can present alternative or contradictory ‘images’ of them and challenge their current conceptions” (ibid, p. 52). Hamilton (2012) states that video can “enable educators and preservice-teachers to relive specific teaching experiences and/or movements” (p. 14).

Research in the field of video viewing shows that teachers reflect more widely and deeply when they watch video recordings of
their own teaching (Calandra, et al., 2006; Calandra et al., 2009; Fox et al., 2007; Lazarus & Olivero, 2009; Wright, 2008; Rich & Hannafin, 2009; Säljö, 2009; Seidel et al., 2011; Harlin, 2010; 2014; Kleinknecht & Schneider, 2013). Several of the studies above indicate the value of a video-recorded lesson as a tool for reflection. This may be appropriate for different target groups, such as teacher educators, student teachers and in-service teachers. Calandra et al., (2009) showed that a student teacher “showed remarkably high levels of reflection during a final, video-enhanced interview/stimulated recall session” (p. 76). Other studies also show that student teachers who had the opportunity to video-record their teaching made longer and more pedagogically related reflections than students without this possibility (Wright, 2008; Rosaen et al, 2008; Harlin 2010; 2014). Sparks-Langer et al. (1990) argued that student teachers who worked with video changed their way of reflecting, especially with regards to describing the content of the lesson. To start with, they reflected mostly on themselves and how they behaved, but after more experience of watching videos, they changed perspective and started to reflect on the pupils in the classroom and their learning processes. Furthermore, Lokey-Vega and Brantley-Dias (2006) showed that newly employed teachers with limited teaching experience were supported in their professional development when they video-recorded their teaching. The video tool facilitated their ability to speak about what they actually did when they taught, and to discuss this with their colleagues. Wright (2008) described in his study with five informants, who also were newly employed teachers, in what ways video-watching influenced them. His informants video-recorded their teaching, and wrote reflection documents both before and after they watched the video. He analysed this data by using Dewey’s concepts: description, analysis and action, and he found that the teachers, with support from this video work, increased their ability to self-reflect. Wright also claimed that they “established an action-oriented goal to further their teaching activities” (p. 160). Harlin’s study (2010) has almost the same research design as Wright, and the findings showed that the student teachers made longer and deeper reflection documents with support from videos than from their memory of the lesson.

It could be problematic for a teacher to reflect on his or her own teaching. However, it is crucial for all teachers to be aware of how to act in the classroom and to have the ability to reflect on their actions afterwards. Korthagen and Vasalos (2005) claim that it is very often problematic situations that come into the teachers’ minds, and that their reflections can often be influenced by a self-critical attitude. Video-recorded lessons can present an alternative perspective, by showing concrete events in a complex, but for the teacher well-known, reality. However, the individual teacher’s ability to reflect is not a given; it is something that needs practice (Rodgers, 2002), and video work can enhance this.

The aforementioned selection of studies based on teachers’ work with video recordings is related to this study in various ways, even though none of them was performed in an adult education context. A wider and more complete overview of this field is given by Tripp and Rich (2012), Marsh and Mitchell (2014) and Gaudin and Chaliès (2015).

**A pragmatic and a symbolic interactionistic perspective**

Interaction with the world, which Dewey (1922, p. 9) called ‘transaction’, is an explanation of how we as individuals try to achieve balance in relation to our world. He believed that when something confuses or
surprises us, we start to reflect on the consequences of our actions. For Dewey, doing and thinking could never be separated, and he argued against a dualistic view that separates theory and practice. As a result of our reflections, it is possible to develop more functional habits (Biesta & Burbules, 2003), habits that will work well in the specific context. Teachers’ and other professionals’ development never ends; instead it can be seen as an ongoing process throughout the whole working life. From a pragmatic perspective, one’s meeting with the world will become more meaningful, and reflecting on experiences makes it possible to experiment with alternative actions.

Mead, one of the founders of symbolic interactionism, which has its origin in pragmatism, indicated that we always act in relation to others and ourselves in society, and that gestures and symbols play important roles (Mead, 1995; Charon, 2006). One of Mead’s most important contributions is his concept of perspective-taking. He proposed a theory that puts not only our acting in the foreground but also the social act. As humans we can participate in a common world with experiences that we share with each other. Mead argued that the completed action is one that integrates both the action but also thoughts and feelings. A central part of Mead’s theory is that we as individuals are formed by this interplay with others (von Wright, 2001). Mead (1995) separated the self into two parts, “I” and “me”, theoretical tools that make it possible to observe this interplay. “I” acts spontaneously in the moment, while “me” collects experiences. The part of the self that the teacher sees acting on the video is the teacher’s “I” but when the teacher starts to reflect it is with her or his “me”.

Rock (2001) indicates that we can have more than one “me”; therefore, in this study, I have chosen to discuss the teacher’s “professional-me”. When analysing the data, concepts and ideas about how to look at ourselves are borrowed from symbolic interactionism, but the analysis is based on pragmatic ideas.

Schön (1987) suggested that reflecting on experiences could increase teachers’ awareness of their teaching. The reflective practitioner’s approach is often used to understand how teachers can develop professionally. This can be described either as a routine action or a reflective action (Zeichner & Liljedahl, 1996). The idea of routine actions is that there are complete models to follow. A teacher who creates a curriculum in this way will not challenge her or his own ideas to identify new perspectives. Reflective actions instead are “careful considerations of any belief or practice in light of the reasons that support it and the further consequences to which it leads” (ibid, p. 9). By reflecting, a teacher may become aware of her or his habits, tacit knowledge, and the informal theories on which her or his actions are based (Schön, 1983).

Results from the research field of professional development, often called CPD (Continuing Professional Development), show that activities intended to support teachers’ development have the greatest potential if they are closely related to the teachers’ contexts (Kelchtermans, 2004).

Research design

The context for this study is the Swedish folk high school and a teacher programme connected with this adult education provider. Participants in folk high schools are adults and most of them attend different year-long courses. Teachers can be employed without passing a teaching exam, and certification is not required. Instead they can be employed based on other qualifications that are requested due to the particular profile of the folk high school. The idea of the folk high school
is based on the Nordic Popular Education tradition (Laginder et al., 2013) and the education is meant to be organised and defined by the participants’ interests (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016).

This research was performed as a follow-up study on eight informants chosen from a previous study (Harlin, 2010) that involved forty-three student teachers. These student teachers were already employed as teachers in different folk high schools but attended this teacher programme because they wanted to develop in their profession and to graduate as folk high school teachers. The student teachers were all asked to video-record one of their lessons at their own school, which they gave during the practical part of their education. Their task was to write reflection documents twice, first before they watched the video, and then afterwards. No instructions were given, so that all types of reflection would be considered equally important. The focus of the study design was to identify things that surprised them when they watched the video, compared with what they remembered from their memory of the lesson. What was sought was thus the difference between the two written documents. In the second reflection text, almost all of the student teachers, in addition to what they wrote about their actions, noted things they wanted to change in their teaching.

The eight teachers in this study were randomly selected from this group, and were now two years post-graduation from the teacher-training programme. Many earlier studies with video work in the research design are based on short-term effects on professional development; the aim of this study is instead to show long-term progress and thus to investigate if there has been a progress after two years. From a pragmatic view, the teachers’ learning and professional development can be seen as changed actions. It is also important to take into account that there are other things that have had an impact on their professional development.

On this second occasion, the teachers were asked to once again video-record one of their own lessons. Ethical guidelines from the Swedish Research Council (2012) were followed throughout the whole research. After they had watched the video, they were asked to reflect on their teaching in semi-structured qualitative interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The video-recording and the interview took place at each teacher’s folk high school. They worked at eight different folk high schools. Questions in the interviews focused on broad issues related to the teachers’ professional development — how the video recordings had affected their teaching, how they perceived themselves in the role of a folk high school teacher, and how they interacted with the participants in the classroom. The teachers were also asked to say something about how, on the video, they could see changes in their actions related to what they had written in their reflection document two years earlier. The data that were analysed in this present study, though, is not based on this earlier data, nor based on the recorded videos. Data that is analysed in this study is just from the interviews with the eight teachers.

The folk high school teachers described, with the video as a basis, in what ways they thought they had developed their teaching over the past two years. However, investigating only the importance or contribution of the video is slightly more complicated. The causality is here not assumed to be more than the respondents’ self-perceptions of what they consider to be an influence. The teachers stated that the video recordings certainly affected their professional development; but also other experiences, such as their education in the teacher programme, feedback from participants and colleagues, and personal life-events, had also contributed.
When analysing the data, however, it was possible to identify when the teachers talked more specifically about their actions in the classroom, related to the latest video watching. They also described consequences of their actions that they could see on the video. A question to take into account with self-studies and self-reports is whether they are reliable or not. Dinkelman (2003) has a broad definition of self-studies and says that different kinds of methods and tools can be included to strengthen the credibility, for example video recordings. There are differing opinions on whether self-studies are reliable or not. Goldberg (1985) points out some problems with this method but West et al. (1993) argue that self-studies can be reliable, especially when there is an audio recording or a video as a foundation for the informants’ reflections. Aspects that prove the result of this study are, for example, that the teachers were well motivated to develop their practice at the folk high school, and that they had some previous teaching experience. The recorded video made it possible for them to identify any difference between the teacher they saw acting on the video and the one they wanted to be, the difference between their “I” and their “professional-me”.

The qualitative analysis process attempted to identify patterns, similarities and differences in the teachers’ interpretations of their teaching (Larsson, 1986). Different categories, highlighting variations of actions and habits and the teachers’ interpretations of themselves, were sought to identify interesting patterns. These categories were then analysed with ideas drawn from pragmatism and symbolic interaction.

There are many reasons to discuss both quality and validity in qualitative research (Larsson, 2005; Tracy 2010). Tracy (2010) writes that tools, frameworks and criteria are not value-free and “our human instrument will show its initiate humanness by not being able to achieve everything all the time. The key is to be truthful with ourselves and our reader” (p. 849). Earlier a discussion was presented related to self-studies; another part of this study’s research design is the qualitative interviews. There can always be expectations of both parties during interviews; something that one has to deal with. A main point in qualitative studies though is that the emerging knowledge in interviews can be seen as a result of a co-construction in a meaningful dialogue.

Findings
Two themes are presented; the first addresses progress in professional development as a possible effect of watching video of one’s own teaching sessions, while the second addresses in what ways this progress could have influenced the folk high school teachers’ changed images of themselves.

Progress in professional development
This part refers to when the teachers, in the interviews, talked about their changed actions. It concerns in what ways they described how they had changed both their planning and implementation of teaching, and their reflections on how this influenced their professional development. The teachers said that the video tool enhanced their ability to reflect. Working with video, they said, contributed to a reflective habit, and their reflections on the recorded lessons were more specific with support from this tool.

Change is a theoretical tool according to Dewey (1922), and is his way of defining learning. He argues that learning is just changed actions, and in this study it is about the teachers’ learning. Some of the teachers said that the recorded video helped them see some aspects of their teaching that they had developed or changed. According to Mead (1995), this could be said to represent their
They said that they could relate this to the first video-recorded lesson two years earlier, when they saw something they wanted to change and reflected on how they wanted to act instead. When the teachers reflected on their actions they did so with the part of their self that Mead would call “me”, in this study called “professional-me”.

One idea that was raised in seven of the eight interviews was the intention to let the participants’ experiences be the focus of the learning process. The teachers identified different examples from the video where they could see that they really had achieved this, and they intended to continue to develop this way of teaching. Jakob, for example, spoke about the intention to allow the participants to influence the teaching more, and he was pleased to see that he had changed his teaching method to accommodate this: “So I also see that I, in a way, step back, and let others have more opportunity to act.” In that way the folk high school participants’ learning can be seen as something built on their earlier experiences. He also said that he could see an improvement compared to what he had observed in the video two years previously. He was now much more relaxed; something that is essential in order to reduce teacher control and assign more responsibility to the participants.

Some of the teachers also indicated that they were more pedagogically conscious today compared with two years previously; theories were more internalised in their practical work. This could sound very idealistic but Anneli presents an example of this. In the interview she said that she observed from the recorded video that she consciously formulated open questions she herself could not answer, which supported a dialogue among the participants confirming their knowledge. She and some of the other teachers said that their professional development could be described as a way of transferring problem-solving to the participants. In that way, the teachers involved the participants in the learning process in a progressive manner.

Another example of describing the teachers’ professional progress is that some of them talked about their development of pedagogical creativity. This creativity is something that they described as an opportunity to be flexible and to listen to the issues that are raised during a lesson. Jakob said, for instance, “Yes, I notice that I – actually I am very good in improvising and being flexible and finding out things quickly.” This could be understood as an ability to be more flexible in relation to the learning process that the participants are involved in.

Moving towards a less governing role was also something that the teachers noticed on the video and spoke about. As they reported, they were now more confident in their teaching and could better focus on those participants they saw needed extra help. When Elin watched the video, she saw a student to whom she showed special attention and she said, “It is so important; it is a problem if one student does not feel very well, or does not join in.” Elin shows here that she had developed a functional habit related to this participant, something that Biesta and Burbules (2003) and Schön (1987) say can be a result of reflections on actions.

Another aspect of professional development was shown in the interview with Anneli. She stated that she had also improved in how she interacted with the participants, even when they challenged her. Learning is not only about developing an understanding of a subject, she argued; learning is also about supporting social competence. Anneli described how she had developed her ability to manage relationships in a more professional way. Nowadays, for example, she did not avoid conflicts, but thought that coping with conflicts could contribute to the participants’ personal development.
The teachers stated that they were surprised to see they acted in such a professional way on the video, and that they could see an improvement compared to what they had observed on the video two years previously. One teacher however did not like to see herself on video. Instead of building up her confidence, it had the opposite effect. She explained that it had more to do with the way she looked rather than the way she taught.

**Changed image**

Watching the video was an experience the teachers described as valuable, giving them the opportunity to really see themselves in the teacher role. They commented that although it was unpleasant to watch themselves, their “I” in their professional role, it was a valuable experience and challenged their image of themselves, their “professional-me” (Mead, 1995; Rock, 2001; Haw & Hadfield, 2011). Some of the teachers stated that they usually reflected on situations that did not turn out well and seldom thought about good things related to their teaching. Watching the video weakened their critical attitudes and caused them to see the lesson in its entirety and not simply focus on details (West et al., 1993). The video contributed to a broader image of their teaching.

The video offers a way of creating distance from feelings (…) what is actually the real course of events in teaching or in a situation of teaching or in a learning situation (…) I do have a greater understanding and I think I have a more trained…eye to see and listen (Elin).

The teachers explained that while they were teaching, it was complicated to consider what had occurred, what was occurring at that moment, and what was going to occur. Many processes occur simultaneously, making it difficult to grasp the teaching process from the participants’ perspective. Astrid said after watching her lesson: “You think it is also seen and heard on the outside, the horrible mess that is up there.”

…it sounded as though I knew what I was doing. I didn’t feel like that in my head … very seldom it feels like you are so well prepared and that you know everything; rather things are going on at the same time, so I was very surprised at that … it was much more focused and relaxed than I thought, and that was of course very good; that was nice (Astrid).

Astrid found it valuable to see and have it confirmed that she performed in a well-structured manner.

Another teacher, Anneli, explained in the interview that after she had video-recorded the lesson she was worried that she had been unclear and that the content was confusing for the participants. The video, though, showed that she had clarified more than she thought.

I remember certain discussions that I had of which I thought, my God, they must have got lost a long time ago because I hardly can manage this. However, when I watched the video it wasn’t that bad, and as a matter of fact you could see that there was a clear thought (Anneli).

There were several examples in the interviews where the teachers spoke about how the video recordings, on both occasions, gave them an opportunity to really see themselves, their spontaneous “I”, in a concrete situation in the classroom. They expressed how they perceived themselves in their teaching situation when they saw the video, and nearly all of them could see a development compared to what they saw two years earlier.

Inger talked about how the video recordings had changed her image of herself. She said that she had been uncertain whether she
was a good teacher. After watching the second video, she was fairly clear about how she performed as a teacher: “I am not the best and there are always things to develop, but I am good, you know.” She indicated that this opportunity for self-observation had made her more conscious of her performance in the classroom,

I am more aware of my role as a teacher today than I was maybe two or three years ago, and that actually is what my confidence is about, that I know what I look like and I think this is how it has affected me, that I actually have video-recorded myself. You have experienced it and how it felt, and that it felt good even if you can always find things you should have done differently (Inger).

Before the teachers watched themselves on video they felt anxious that they might see quite a different teacher compared with the image they had of themselves. This could be interpreted to mean they were worried about the difference between their “professional-me” and their “I”. Even if everything they saw on the video was not perfect, the experience contributed to a more realistic image of how they performed as teachers, a changed “professional-me”. Thus, the video tool can influence teachers’ images of themselves and make it conform to their “I” they have seen on the recorded film.

Discussion
This study does not focus on how the folk high school teachers performed in the classroom; rather, the results concern their interpretations of how they performed. It includes their reflections on their own actions in the classroom, and their experienced consequences of this. ‘Perform’ here means something more than act. It can be seen as a result of reflecting upon actions, and the teachers’ choices of how to act are related to their earlier experiences. The findings show that reflections following one occasion of video-watching, two years ago, together with other experiences, influenced and changed part of the practice for the participating teachers, changes that Dewey (1922) would describe as learning. In the interviews, the teachers reported that their actions in the classroom showed traces of their first video reflections, and they said they had occasionally had these in mind during the period of two years. They presented several arguments for the value of this kind of work, when done in their own local context. These results correspond well with those of other studies presented in this article, for example the articles of Calandras et al. (2006; 2009). The teachers felt that the videoed teaching sessions challenged their illusions about themselves as teachers. They also said that it was really valuable to see how they performed in their classrooms, something that their participants have to cope with every day. They observed that they performed professionally, even though there were things they wanted to improve. Such observation can probably help to make them more confident as teachers, and also support them in their reflections on how to develop in the future.

The teachers said that the video tool had supported their professional development by giving them the opportunity to see their own actions, their spontaneously acting “I”, which could be a point of reflection on how they want to teach. The use of “I” for reflection is in line with Dewey’s idea of cumulative experience and Mead’s ideas about the development of self-awareness. It can also be related to studies indicating that self-observation supports teachers’ development both in terms of concrete actions in an educational context, and as an interpretation of life in general (West et al., 1993).

The videos enhanced the teachers’ awareness of the consequences of their actions,
and together with other things in their everyday teaching the teachers said that it contributed to an increased flexibility and creativity in their teaching. It also improved their ability to affirm participants’ needs, something that is part of their mission from the state that gives the schools funding (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016). The teachers said that they had increased the participants’ responsibility for their learning process. Seven of the eight teachers observed that they acted in a professional manner, and that gave them more confidence. Expanding on the ideas of Mead (1995), the results show that the video tool may contribute to teachers acquiring a changed image of themselves.

Thus, what the teachers talked about in the interviews can, from a symbolic interaction perspective, be interpreted as reflections on their images of themselves, their "professional-me", developed through ongoing interactions in the classroom (Mead, 1995; Charon, 2006). This can probably further influence how they, their “I”, will act in a classroom in the future.

As the teachers indicated, the videos give certain advantages when compared to reflection from memory only. The video has the potential to create a reflective habit, a habit that can challenge them in their everyday practice at the folk high school. Thus it can help to develop their teaching practice, which is one of the aims of CPD (Day & Sachs, 2004; Kelchtermans, 1993). A contributing reason for this may be that this study is closely related to the folk high school teachers’ own contexts. They could have undergone such improvement without the video tool; but the videos had a valuable role in supporting this professional development. Thus, a video-recorded lesson can be seen as something that enhances reflective actions. By using it, teachers will not only develop as individuals, but also contribute to the development of their workplace, the folk high school, as Egetenmayer and Käppling (2011) argue.

Rock (2001) claims that it is risky to generalise findings, and that doing so is contrary to fundamental ideas of symbolic interaction. He argues that each context is unique and therefore different contexts are not comparable. Larsson (2009), though, indicates that it may be possible to generalise the results; the teaching profession in different contexts has, after all, many common elements. The informants in this study worked in a folk high school, and even if there are different profiles, folk high schools are grounded in the same tradition and history, the idea of popular education (Laginder et al., 2013). They all have the same mission as given by the state (Swedish National Council of Adult Education, 2016).

Many professions in Sweden use videos for skills development, but it is rather uncommon among teachers. This is especially true about folk high school teachers. However, this study has already resulted in several folk high school teachers occasionally working with video recordings to assist with both individual and peer skill development. Maybe there is potential to let more teachers have the opportunity to work with video as a tool for reflection, in order to promote their professional development and also school development.

Noter

References


Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.


Harlin, E-M. (2014). Watching oneself teach – long-term effects of teachers’ reflec-


Kvinner,


