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Vocational Teachers Taking the Lead

- Vocational Teachers as First-teachers in School Improvement

In 2013 the Swedish government launched a reform on career services for teachers, the so-called first-teacher reform. It introduced first-teachers as a new category of teachers involved with school improvement. My paper explores and analyses three examples of how vocational teachers work as first-teachers in local school improvement by addressing the following questions: What is the impact on the direction and content of school improvement through vocational teachers as first-teachers? Which issues and content-related aspects are at the heart of their work? Two methods have been used: semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The theoretical framework consists of Lee Shulman & Judith Shulman's frame for conceptualising teacher learning and school improvement through four different kinds of "capital". Preliminary findings indicate that the focus of school improvement has shifted from a "top-down" perspective to change "from below". The first-teachers stress a systematic approach, visualisation of practices, education and the creation of clusters. Some tentative conclusions are that the visualisation of practices leads to a new awareness and mind-set concerning e.g. assessment and the relationship between school and work-place. The overarching goals and values – "moral capital" – are more clearly defined and shared all over the school because of the engagement and work "from below", where the first-teachers become the transferring link between school management and teams of teachers. "Instructional capital" and "curricular capital" are reinforced because teaching practices are highlighted. Finally "venture capital" is promoted by co-operation and visible outcomes increase the willingness to change.