Making space for collaboration at school and preschool: The places mother tongue teachers meet teachers of other subjects

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Recent changes in the Swedish Education Act aim at reducing time spent in reception classes, so that newly arrived pupils (at least partly) enter mainstream classes on arrival. A consequence is that educating newcomers has become the responsibility of all school staff. Expectations on the contribution of mother tongue teachers have increased, as well as presupposing extensive collaboration between bilingual support staff or mother tongue teachers and teachers of other school subjects.

The presentation focuses on the social practices in schools concerning mother tongue teachers and their potential participation in school development and collaboration with other staff, paying particular attention to the places where meetings occur. Three mother tongue teachers were followed a total of 15 days in a period of six months, to observe the opportunities for collaboration and communication in their working days. Two of these teachers also worked with so-called study guidance (tutoring of newcomer pupils in the various school subjects).

In the data, only 31 instances of interactive communication were observed, and three instances with a potential for more extensive collaboration. These three instances are analyzed to shed light on which factors may have played a part. Results suggest that among the significant aspects were: the place of interaction, the language, higher status of mother tongue at the school, a positive attitude in teachers involved, and interaction with an entire class and with other staff. Places of meeting were frequently corridors, the staff rooms, or other places that were not normally designated for regular teaching or planning activities. The places of interaction thus tended to underline the marginal position of the mother tongue teachers with respect to participation in school development.


