”Magistrander” – Teachers linking school and university: experiences from The University of Dalarna, Sweden.

Paper presented at the NFPF congress in Tallinn, 7–9 March, 2002

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Abstract.
”Magistrander” – Teachers linking school and university: experiences from the University of Dalarna, Sweden

For some time, a debate has been going on in Sweden on how to link schools and universities to create more efficient and mutually beneficial co-operation. A pilot scheme at the University of Dalarna, financed by the State and local authorities, has created special posts for teachers allowing them to work part time in school and part time at the university. The teachers involved become “magistrander”, post-graduate students working towards a Master’s degree. Initiatives of this type raise some important questions:

- What impact, if any, does this type of programme have on teachers’ skills and on activities taking place in schools?
- Does it affect courses and research at the university taking part in this co-operation?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss expectations and results based on experiences from the University of Dalarna.
UNIVERSITY AND SCHOOL WORKING TOGETHER FOR PROGRESS IN EDUCATION

A debate has been going on for some time now in Sweden on how to link schools and universities together to enable them to collaborate in a more efficient and mutually beneficial manner. It has been claimed that contact between the academic world and the school world will become increasingly important, the main reasons being, for example, to disseminate information on research findings and to adjust teacher training programmes to suit new needs. This has led to what is described in Sweden today as the “third task” of universities, sometimes described in the following way:

An open dialogue between the academic world and the outside community improves conditions for the utilization of knowledge generated by research and, thereby, contributes to the development of that society. This dialogue must, therefore, be intensified/…/ (Gov. Bill: 1996/97:5).

For schools, questions of “diffusion, accessibility and the usefulness of research results for teachers and others are difficult and persistent questions”. (National Swedish Agency for Education, 1995). Hultman and Hörberg (1994) showed, for example, in a review of research on the utilization of knowledge in schools that research-based knowledge had a low impact on practice. They indicated several possible reasons for this: the knowledge is not accessible; teachers do not have the necessary time to acquire the knowledge; they do not always have the necessary competence or few points of contact exist between researchers and practitioners. One way to handle this problem might be to create special posts for teachers allowing them to work part time in school and part time at the university. The teachers involved become “magistrander”. Initiatives of this type raise some questions:

- What is the ideal image of a “magistrand”?
- What impact, if any, does this type of activity have on teachers’ skills and on the activities that take place in schools?
- Does it affect courses and research at the university taking part in this joint project?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss those questions on the basis of experience gained at the University of Dalarna.

The discussion conducted in this paper mainly derives from my involvement over the last few years in a “magistrand” programme, a Master’s programme carried out at the University of Dalarna. Primarily, it consists of a series of seminars in which various different aspects of the “magistrand” role and the assignments that these “teacher students” work with have been studied. In November 2001, for instance, a two-day seminar took place in which the fundamental theme was the “magistrand” role in itself. In some cases I have also acted as supervisor for essays, discussions with individual “teacher students”, taken part in meetings with “magistrander’s” school management, carried out simple investigations in which these “student teachers” have made written reports on how they see their role. At the same time, it is not possible to claim that this paper is based on a systematically conducted study in the traditional meaning of the term, but the discussion, nevertheless, has a clear empirical basis.

The basis for my interpretation builds on what might be called a social constructivist idea that data that can be collected more or less systematically are “woven” together into a more or less coherent picture, admittedly one of many possible ones, of the phenomenon being studied. What we can acquire knowledge about derives from the assumption that it is the experiences
made by people that form a basis for how they construct their reality (see for example, Berger and Luckman, 1979) and that, in specific cases, are seen as constituting that reality. The so-called Thomas theorem\(^1\) expresses it in the following way: “If something is defined as real, it becomes reality in its consequences” (Brante. 1993:23)\(^2\). This implies that the way in which reality is actually constructed is of no importance only how it is perceived by those involved in the situation in question. It is, therefore, not reality in an objective sense which can be expressed but only the subjective apprehension of that reality as expressed in the statements of those involved. This, however, is not without interest if we take the Thomas theorem as our point of departure, since it is from their own view of reality that the actors involved actually act. It should, thus, be possible for the picture presented to constitute a more or less coherent picture of how the activities pursued are perceived and can, thus, form the basis for a dialogue among those affected about how the activities of which they are a part may be understood but also about how those activities may be further developed.

THE “MAGISTRAND” – THE TEACHER STUDENT AS A LINK CONNECTING SEPARATE WORLDS

In order to better understand what role the "magistrand", the teacher student, can play and what effects the introduction of a “magistrand” system may have in various respects, the following sections of this paper will first describe some of the fundamental ideas which led to the start of the project. Then the question of whether and, in that case, how “magistrander” influence work in their own schools and, after that, the corresponding questions seen from the point of view of the university will be taken up. In conclusion, some aspects of the viability of the “magistrander” concept will be discussed, that is: how reasonable is the assumption that the “magistrand” enterprise will survive in accordance with the aims formulated at the outset? Might, perhaps, a different role and other aims for the “magistrand” concept be more feasible?

Some underlying ideas on the “magistrand” role as an ideal type

Fullan (2000), for instance, conducts a discussion on large-scale, as opposed to small-scale strategies for change\(^3\). Large-scale strategies might then be compared to the changes carried out in the entire school system, which are based on decisions taken on the national level, for example when a new national curriculum is introduced. These top-down changes are then expected to permeate the entire school system. Although I do not intend to go into this problem in any detail here, it would seem that it usually takes a long time for such changes to be generally accepted on a broad front in the day-to-day school activities and, sometimes, some of the expected effects never occur at all. At the same time, it is clear that this type of alternative for change always gives rise to effects of some kind. In Sweden, this type of strategy has then been combined with a small-scale strategy for change with a strong, bottom-up influence in which Government authorities, for instance by making various types of grants to projects, hope to be able to stimulate local development, which, in its turn, may serve as a good example and inspire others to carry out similar changes. Seen in this light, the “magistrand” concept should be regarded as an element of a small-scale strategy.

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\(^2\) This, however, is a more complicated problem than would seem here but I refrain from developing it here, as, in this context, it would be superfluous.

\(^3\) I interpret this as meaning that Fullan had previously been an advocate of the small-scale but that he now begins to doubt the capacity of this strategy to achieve success and now advocates large-scale solutions, instead.
The term, “magistrand” was introduced in the late 90s by the National Swedish Agency for Higher Education in connection with the allocation of resources to teacher training programmes in order to reinforce links to research in the programmes. (Pettersson 2001). The term is analogous with the term, “doktorand” for doctoral students, meaning that, just as the “doktorand” is expected to take a PhD degree, the “magistrand” is expected to take a Master’s degree in a corresponding fashion. Eligible to apply for “magistrand” posts, in the present case, are the teachers at primary, secondary and upper-secondary level who are involved in the school-based activities included in the teacher training programmes at the University of Dalarna and who take an active interest in pedagogical development work within their own schools. The “magistrand” is usually employed 25% of his/her working week by means of a time-limited project post.

Of the 20 or so “magistrander” employed at the University of Dalarna, in the year 2001, four of them were funded by the State, two of them specializing in the basic values of primary, secondary and upper secondary schools and two in the internationalization of the aforesaid schools. Other “magistrander” were financed by their own local education authorities to varying extents but, as a rule, the duration of their employment was also limited in time. Their role may be typically and ideally be described as follows (see fig.1).

![Figure 1. The role of the Magistrand](image)

In theory, the role of “magistrand” gives the teacher the opportunity more systematically than otherwise, to examine his/her own working day and professional role at the same time as they can conduct practical development work together with other teachers and researchers. This intention seems to have had a certain impact in several places.

/…/right from the start when we “magistrander” were appointed, there was a clearly expressed requirement concerning our work, namely that we should speed up the development of work teams in schools. The vision that is supposed to act as the guiding star for our work is the so-called A-environment. ("Magistrander")

In order to enable the “magistrand” to play the role expressed, in this case, by the University of Dalarna, it is important that the people who are given the opportunity to act as “magistrander” should have a pronounced interest in pedagogical development work of many different kinds and, perhaps, also some previous experience of such work. An ideal situation
would, instead, probably be that the “magistrand’s” work was related either to the educational development of a school, a school management area or of an entire local education authority. There are also a number of cases in which it has been possible to concretize such lines of thought and where this type of activity has been introduced.

Our interpretation of this task is that we:
1. Must make the process of development towards an environment visible for all staff at x (name deleted)
2. Show the work team possible ways and means of achieving this development in schools.

With the help of work team leaders in the schools we have offered the work team at x (name deleted) the chance to take part in an action research project in which the basic idea is that the participants learn from others and each other. The point of departure is their daily activities and the work team’s own questions and problems. At present, we meet all the work teams that have expressed an interest in more information and tell them how we can think of working (“Magistrander”).

This, in its turn, requires that the entire operation be organized in a suitable way so that the “magistrander” can be involved in the local school development projects that are initiated. There are also examples, today, of “magistrander” who participate in such developments in a fairly systematic manner but there are also cases where they have only been involved to a minor extent.

Being a “magistrand” also means that he/she must read certain courses adapted to individual needs and that he/she works on an investigation, which is documented in the form of a written report, for instance, an essay, usually at C or D level. This also seems to work well, as a rule.

We have started on the course in Pedagogics at C level and at the moment we are doing the course on research methods and a course on the teacher’s learning process. These courses fit in very well with the “magistrand” assignment we have embarked on and the learning process course has been chosen with our assignment in mind. /…/ (“Magistrander”)

“Magistrand” appointments are also intended to provide opportunities for teachers actively employed in schools at every level, for example, to be involved in building up a research environment closely linked to established practice and to teacher training programmes. The “magistrand” may then be seen as a link between school and university.

The opportunity in our evaluation and follow-up work for our local education authority to seek forms for co-ordination and collaboration with the University of Dalarna is interesting. (“Magistrand”)

The work forms vary but a uniting link in the “magistrand” project is a “magistrand” seminar, when “magistrander”, doctoral students and researchers meet regularly.

When the “magistrand” project started at the University of Dalarna, there were, naturally, many and varied expectations of what the role of “magistrand” would come to involve. One

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4 In the Swedish system of higher education, the courses are called 20, 40 60 or 80 credits or A, B, C, or D level. This indicates the level at which the courses are considered to be and the previous stage must be completed before the student is allowed to proceed to the next.
of the “magistrander” for instance, expresses it in the following manner “It didn’t turn out as I had imagined, at all but it was fine, anyway.” The question, however, is whether it is possible to practice the role in the way the ideal conception of it gives rise to, that is: does it make any impact on school and university activities or does it merely lead to a disjointed and stressed life for teachers already under great pressure?

Do the “magistrand’s” activities make any impression on the “home front”? 
The strategy that the work of a “magistrand” would mainly be based on efforts to promote school development on the home front is problematic for many reasons. One problem is his/her status, that is: the degree of confidence and freedom to act enjoyed by the “magistrand” within his/her own organization, partly among colleagues and, partly, the support given to the “magistrand” from the school management. After having been involved in a number of so-called school development projects in recent years, my experience indicates that an important factor affecting the success of such projects is whether the school management is prepared to give active support in various ways to pedagogical development work. The manner in which this support may be given seems, however, not to be completely self-evident and it is likely that forms and content may vary depending on the conditions pertaining in each individual case. Although much research has been devoted to the role of school management and the way schools are governed, knowledge concerning the role school managers actually play to influence and develop the work and running of the school, nevertheless, still seems to be rather limited, a fact which can probably be explained by the extremely complex causes and effects involved.

In the work carried out, thus far, at the University of Dalarna, we have been able to note a fairly high degree of variation between how school managers in the various different local education authorities have acted. In one case, the entire management group took an active interest in the activities of the “magistrander”, an interest that gave rise to a broad discussion and also a number of concrete initiatives to develop the work of that particular school. In another case, it would appear that the local education authority supports and is positive towards the “magistrand” concept but that the “magistrander” themselves, are, nevertheless, in practice largely left to their own devices. A third example might be the local authority where the management of a school expresses clear desires concerning what the “magistrander” should work with but where those desires conflict to some extent with those of the “magistrander” and where the school managers’ demands and expectations appear to be unrealistically high. In yet another case, the “magistrand” has worked on questions to do with his/her school’s internationalization, work that has resulted in several pupil exchange projects between various different countries. What, however, is striking is how important support for the “magistrand” from the school management seems to be if any visible progress can be made, the significance of which lies outside the individual “magistrand’s” sphere of interest.

Another question is at what “level” in the organization or, in other words, within what field of activity the “magistrand” is working. Some of them, for example, are hardly involved in any organized school development work. Some of them work on tasks mainly to do with their own studies but sometimes, they work in their own teaching groups, also. In some cases, they feel that being able to start from the beginning and develop their ideas in peace and quiet has been an advantage. In one case, interest in a project about developing a pedagogical work method has also been expressed by other local schools, which will be offered the opportunity to join the project at a later date. There may, also, be some risk that an activity may not progress beyond being some sort of in-service training benefiting only the individual

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“magistrand” and the pupils directly affected by the project. In such cases, the problem is that the development of the school as a whole is only marginally affected. The result, thus, risks being individual to a high degree, while making, at the same time, a low degree of collective impact. In the cases where the “magistrander” have a high degree of credibility with their colleagues, chances probably exist for their work on school development to spread and give rise to positive effects beyond the field of activity initiated by the “magistrand”. It may also have the opposite effect, when the “magistrand” does not enjoy the respect of colleagues, leading, instead, to isolation and, perhaps, even opposition. Only in a few cases, have the “magistrander” been able to acquire or, in other words, to create for themselves, a role covering not only their own sphere of activity but where, instead, they have been able to play a role either in some particular field of study, special education, for example, or been able to participate in organizing and implementing more systemized school development work.

There may also be reason to pay attention to the procedures applying when the local authority selects applicants for these posts or, in the case of Government funded “magistrander”, when they are selected by the University. In the cases where someone, for some reason, sees his/her “magistrand” post as a personal project or if he/she wants to get away from the daily routines of school for a time, there is cause for some misgiving. An individual teacher may, of course, sometimes need to get away from school in order to gain new strength and new inspiration and then make a comeback and make a valuable contribution. Nevertheless, it seems doubtful whether the “magistrand” system should be used for such persons; instead, efforts should be made to find other types of solution for such cases. The “magistrand” concept must, after all, be seen as a manifestation of the endeavour to create collective development processes within both school and university.

How have the activities of the University of Dalarna been affected?
The question is whether some 20 “magistrander”, who spend only part of their time at the University among about 4000 other students, can possibly affect the activities carried on there? Seen in that light, the answer would seem obvious. It cannot be possible for so few people to exercise more than a marginal influence. At the same time, these “magistrander” have a special role to play: they can also be seen as representatives of their own local authorities and their own school management, who are also partners collaborating with the teacher training programme at the University via the so-called partner schools, that is: local authorities who are also members of the so-called Council of the Dalarna Centre for Educational Development. The University, thus, has a special motive for paying extra

5 The so-called partner schools take a detailed responsibility for training teachers by making so-called school-based educators available.
6 Dalarna Centre for Educational Development (PUD) was established in January 1998, initially in co-operation with 15 local education authorities in the province of Dalarna, with the teachers’ and school-leaders’ unions and the Student Union at Dalarna University. At present, the organization has thirty-five member-organizations. PUD was based on the principles of a close link between practice and theory and of collaboration between equal partners. PUD works as a hub in a network organization. The council and its executive committee are the organs for formal decision-making. There is only a small annual fee for the members, but they are charged cost price when they make use of the services of PUD. The main significance of PUD is to function as a “link of contact” between the field, i.e. representatives of the municipalities and schools, and the University, i.e. teachers and researchers at the University. Such contacts have been difficult to establish previously, since there was no receiver organization at the University beyond individual contacts already established. (Lundgren, M., & Melin, R., & Oldroyd, D. 2001.)
attention to the needs of the “magistrander” and the demands those needs impose and, perhaps for this reason, these students are able to play a role beyond that of the “ordinary” students.

As has already been made clear, the “magistrand” role may be considered to consist of three separate elements, which at the same time are mutually dependent on each other. The “magistrand” is expected, for instance, to make various contributions to school development projects, thereby also contributing to formulating problems that might form a basis for initiating research and development projects of various kinds and which, in their turn, may be assumed to be relevant for teachers in their daily work. In their turn, these points of departure form the basis of the studies the “magistrand” undertakes at the University. This implies that their studies must be adapted as far as possible in order to support and aid understanding of the processes taking place in school as an organization, thereby, at the same time, increasing readiness to take an active part in developing these processes. With that, something of an ideal situation develops, the necessary conditions for carrying on what might be called action research\(^7\). The choice of field of interest is, of course, in its turn, dependent on what deliberations the “magistrand” may have together with his/her employer. This means, at the same time, that the “magistrand” has a significant role to play in introducing new problem areas at the University, areas which, in their turn, may come to affect the content of the teacher training programmes and the research conducted there. This implies that the University must also offer research environments open to welcoming “magistrander” and their ideas. Otherwise, there is an obvious risk that they and the local authorities they represent will consider the University to be an unattractive partner for collaboration and that they will seek other paths to take.

**SOME CONCLUSIONS CONCERNING THE ”MAGISTRAND” CONCEPT AND ITS “VIABILITY”**

What conclusions may, then, be drawn from the discussion conducted in the above sections? Firstly, it would seem that the “magistrander” who have participated in the project thus far have been, on the whole, relatively satisfied with the opportunities this has offered and that being a “magistrand” has been seen as valuable on a personal level. At the same time, the “magistrander’s” opportunities for personal development are dependent not only on his/her own ambitions but also on the help and support the person in question can get from the University. This, in its turn, means that the opportunities that the “magistrand” has to develop within the field of interest he/she represents will be largely dependent on what the University can offer. In those cases where the necessary conditions already exist, for example: if the relevant courses have already been developed or if research scholars or research groups are already active within the “magistrand’s” sphere of interest, then fewer problems may be expected. Often, however, this would not seem to be the case and, if the University is unable to adapt to this, then some of the fundamental principles underlying the “magistrand” operation will disappear.

In order for the “magistrand” operation to function in the way intended, meeting venues must be established (Issacs, 1999; Ståhl, 1998) where meetings between “magistrander”, teachers and researchers can take place continuously. This must be achieved in such a way that the

\(^7\) Obviously, the claim that action research would be the ideal forum in which to conduct research on education is not undisputed. Such research methods have, if anything, been questioned and the critics maintain that the role of the researcher is not also to attempt to influence the object of his/her study but, rather, as an outside observer, to describe and interpret what takes place.
“magistrand” experiences natural ties with the University, which can hardly happen unless there are people who will undertake to ensure that these venues function over a period of time, an undertaking which may involve anything from rooms to content.

Several of the “magistrander” have wondered whether they can become “post magistrander”, that is: whether continued contact with the University is possible after their “magistrand” appointment has expired. It would therefore, appear to be a smart strategy on the part of the University not only to run a “magistrand” project but also to organize a “post magistrand” operation in order to maintain the contacts that have already been established with these teachers. This can naturally be achieved in several different ways. Perhaps the simplest one would be to invite and encourage the “post magistrander” to take part in seminars and courses. Another way would be for them to participate in the tuition given and make a direct and active contribution to it. A third and more far-reaching example would be to run school development projects of various kinds in collaboration with these “post magistrander”, where they were offered the opportunity to be included in the research teams now being built up at the University. In this lies, however, the inherent danger that good teachers either entirely or partially defect to the University.

Another experience is that neither the local authorities nor the University have been really prepared for what taking charge of these “magistrander” would involve. For the local authorities’ part, in many cases they have been uncertain both regarding the content of the “magistrand” role and its organizational status. Usually, the “magistrand” has had to take his/her normal teaching role as the starting point in order to create for him/herself a platform from which he/she can operate. In several cases, this has meant that the “magistrand” has had to feel his/her way but, in some cases, they have received help from an interested school management. At the same time, we can say that there has also been some uncertainty within the University about how the “magistrand” can play the role that was intended when the project started. It is also true to say that we have not always had the resources necessary to deal with the problems that sometimes have arisen. Nevertheless, it seems that, after almost three years of existence, the project is beginning to acquire a clearer structure and, slowly but surely, is beginning to find its true shape. Even though there have been problems, of which some have been solved, and other problems remain that are still awaiting a solution, so far as I can see, there are no serious reasons why the project should be terminated. It would seem, rather, that there is every possibility that the operation can be developed to the advantage of both school and University.
References