

2 PERSONAL KNOWLEDGE OF BEING A TEACHER – autobiographical approach to teaching and education

“Romantics in science want neither to split living reality into its elementary components nor to represent the wealth of life’s concrete events in abstract models that lose the properties of the phenomena themselves. It is of the utmost importance to romantics to preserve the wealth of living reality, and they aspire to a science that retains this richness.” (174)

“Scientific observation is not merely pure description of separate facts. Its main goal is to view the event from as many perspectives as possible.” (177)

“The more we single out important relations during our description, the closer we come to the essence of the object, to an understanding of its qualities and rules of existence. And the more we preserve the whole wealth of its qualities, the closer we come to the inner laws that determine its existence.” (177–178)

(The extracts are from *The Making of Mind, A Personal Account of Soviet Psychology* by A. R. Lurià.)

2.1 Studying one's own teaching

Conceptualisation and interpretation of one's experience and the developing "teachership" based on such activity has been one of the most central starting points both in pre-service and in-service teacher education in the late 1980s and 1990s. The didactic literature has emphasised the view of the teacher as a reflecting professional, continuously reflecting upon him/herself and his or her work. The teachers have been supervised and guided to recall their experiences, consider and conceptualise them using the theoretical knowledge connected to their experiences as help. We have learned to see the teacher as a researcher who has a reflective approach to his or her work. (See for example Grant & Zeichner 1984; Knowles 1993; Ojanen 1993; 1996; 1997; Zeichner & Liston 1987.)

Developing teaching through reflecting experiences, according to Proctor (1993, 93, 94), includes the following five practices: looking back in a critical way, building up a body of professional knowledge (technical, strategic and ethical aspects), using the body of knowledge in a critical way in new situations, widening the range of criteria which will include the reflective/critical process, and building up a personal set of criteria as a result of the reflective/critical process.

The background of the reflective approach involves the notion that the activity, which conceptualises experiences with the help of scientific theories, interprets and analyses them, helps the teacher understand more deeply what he or she has experienced. Seeing his or her world and him/herself anew, in a different way, is thought to lead to qualitatively different and improved teaching and educational activity. Sinikka Ojanen (1997) defines the reflection of experience as "sharpening the intelligence." She writes:

"The adults' experiences do not take place as given. They are actively constructed, selectively filtered; the human being learns by studying his or her experience in the process that resembles problem solving. There exists a link between reflective teaching and the basic view on good teaching. The reflective teacher approaches learning as an uncertain, complex process that requires more creative solutions than a standard technique. The reflective teacher is rich in knowledge but his or her knowledge is personified, self-constructed and constantly enlarging. The critically reflective teacher is a willing and responsible researcher who tries to find out what the students experience, know and feel." (Ojanen 1997, 10, my translation.)

The idea of reflection as the “sharpening of intelligence,” makes us question what the human experience basically is? According to Ojanen the reflective teacher’s activity is some kind of intellectualisation of the profession, possession of reality linguistically. The experience is dealt with as if it would be written somewhere, as linguistic facts that can be brought up, “problematized,” solved and changed. The question of the nature of experiential knowledge, as linguistic/conceptual and non-linguistic/tacit knowledge, is interesting. The same is true concerning the question of how experiential knowledge can be observed or comprehended. What and how can one human being (teacher) know about the other’s (student) experience? Is a teacher able to discover what the students experience? What obstacles, restrictions and possibilities does the language and narration pose for inquiring into the experience?

The development of a teacher’s work through reflection often occurs using as a starting point problems and questions picked from the notes made by the teacher. This kind of a starting point leads to a problem solving process described by Ojanen. However, experiences and situations brought up by the teacher are often individual events or episodes that have come to mind, separate from the meaning of wholeness of the human being, from his or her life and professional and personal history. The activity where one inquires into one’s own experiences is a kind of reconstruction of the past in which, depending on a teacher’s age and work history, the materials range from a few lessons to several decades of work experience. How does the time lived, the number and chain of experiences affect the contents, interpretation, and narration of experience within the human being?

In this study, I regard the inquiring into teaching and learning of a foreign language as an autobiographical inquiry in which the subjects and research material of the study rise from the experiences of the researching teacher and students, from their subjective life-worlds. The inquiry takes place by assigning meanings to the experiences and making sense of the various events in the context of foreign language teaching. Autobiographical knowledge, as Bertaux (1981) states, is experiential and subjective knowledge of oneself. We have collected that knowledge in the course of our life history. It is not a direct reflection of what has happened or how things have been in our past, but it is our narrated description of the past events told or written retrospectively via memory (Bertaux 1981, 7–8). Such knowing is interesting and worth posing questions concerning the nesting and multi-layered nature of knowing oneself and others and the multiplicity of knowledge.

In this study I am the researcher and a teacher inquiring into my own teaching with the help of the autobiographical material collected by my students and myself. Next I will discuss the “teachership,” the knowledge and knowing concerning teacher’s work with the help of the following themes:

- Concepts used in autobiographical research
- Knowing in teaching and education
- Nature of experiential autobiographical knowledge
- Modes of autobiographical knowledge in teaching and education
- *I as the auto/biographical I*
- Possibilities and limits of knowing about oneself

2.2 Concepts used in autobiographical research

There are the several different concepts with almost similar meanings in use in life history research. The most common concepts are:

lifespan	autobiography	oral history	life-story
life-course	biography	life history	
auto/biography	personal history		

The concepts that describe life focusing on its content are a *lifespan* and *life-course*. *Lifespan* describes a biological or genetic view on the life of a human being. *Life-course* describes the process. It means the view of the life of a human being from the point of view of his or her life functions and consciousness in historical-societal circumstances. The concepts describing the method are a *biographic method*, a *biographic approach* and *biographic study*. When one wishes to emphasise the historical character of the research subject in particular, the concepts *oral history* or *life history* or *personal history* are used. The concept of biography refers to the outline of the life course that somebody else other than the person him/herself has written. The *autobiography* is the life description narrated by the person him/herself (Bertaux 1981, 7–11; Huotelin 1992, 16–18.)

The concept *life-story* refers to a person's free-form narration of his or her life, what he or she considers important, significant and worth narrating.

It is created in linguistic interaction of the narrator and the one(s) listening to the narration. An attempt is made to get the interviewee's own voice heard. The life-story reflects the narrator's personality, self-conception and identity. (Bertaux 1981, 7–11; Huotelin 1992, 16–18.) The *auto/biography* is a concept developed by Liz Stanley. It contains the thought of the many layers of the biographic study process. When a researcher reads and interprets written biographic material and writes about it, his or her own experienced world will be an essential part of that study process and cannot be excluded. Writing an autobiography, however, is writing to someone. In it, too, the worlds of the writing self and the others are nested. The reading and writing processes of auto/biographic study should, therefore, always include analytic self-reflexive activity. (Stanley 1993, 47–48.)

Life can be studied at least from the three following points of view: the life of an individual can be described from outside the human being. The phases of life and life events are described supported by the facts and documents, in other words what has taken place. In that case it is a question of 1) *objective life history/biography*. Life can also be studied through experiences and interpretations, in which case what is studied is an individual's picture of himself or herself and as he or she has thought or perceived it. In that case it is a question of 2) *subjective life history/biography*. As the result of inquiry into the form, expression or narration of the life of an individual, 3) a *narrated life history/biography* is created. (Huotelin 1992, 73.)

When life is studied as a subjective biography, the hermeneutic and phenomenological foundation of research can be considered justified. In an autobiographical study the intention is to analyse and interpret the contents of concepts and meanings of an individual life-course. The cultural and social reality is largely "pierced" by the meanings, and the life of communities exists through their meanings. The autobiography of the individual, his or her inner world, consists of meaningful structures, with the help of which the individual's consciousness directs its intentions, and the help of which the experience is organised into a meaningful wholeness. The subject of the study is the experience of a person's own consciousness, his or her subjective experience of the reality.

The phenomenological autobiographical study is the study of experience. In order to understand and describe the uniqueness and individual character

of experience, we need the concept of life-world. Citing Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, Huotelin (1992) defines *life-world* as follows:

“Life-world” refers to the conscious wholeness organised in an individual way in a human being within the framework of which the human being acts and thinks. The life-world includes from the point of view of all our human life, the significant elements, such as for example language, institutions of society, other people, nature and culture. The life-world is the subjective context of the individual activity in which, however, there exists objective at the same time. (Huotelin 1992, 19–20.)

Satulehto (1992), interpreting Husserl (1954), describes the life-world as a changing and culturally bound process of making meanings. We have constituted and constructed our life-world, manifested in our experiences, our human and historical world with our culturally bound ways of thinking and action, and we continuously do so through the process of making meanings. Through inquiring into our life-worlds, it is possible for us to cross the accustomed limits of our worlds and to reach for something from the essence of our experiences. (Satulehto 1992, 8–9 and 34–35.)

A starting point for the definition of the reality in the life-world is our subjective way to assign meanings to the phenomena encountered by us; we select and interpret the information entering our life-worlds in the framework of our meaning structures. Thus the same phenomenon appears different in each individual’s life-world. The life-world is the subjective wholeness of meanings created by the historical autobiographical development of each human being, in which each person’s individual way to give meanings to his or her experiences and to interpret reality, does not take place in the vacuum, but in the connection to other people. There is both subjectivity and historicity, and inter-subjectivity in the development and change of the wholeness of our life-worlds (Gadamer 1993, 247–248).

2.3 Knowing in teaching and education

In teaching and education, knowledge means knowing not only about the contents to be taught but also knowing about oneself, students, the commu-

nity, society, and world. Knowledge, including the knowledge of a foreign language, is personal and always contextualised, a part of quite specific relationships, cultures, and situations. Knowledge appears to us in books, networks, in various discussions, and encounters. Knowledge is most visible as conceptual knowledge in language, but knowledge and knowing is also nonverbal, intuitive and formless, and tacit (Polanyi 1962, 71–77, 95–100).

According to Maija Lehtovaara (1994), tacit knowing means becoming aware of and realising unities and integrated wholes from numerous cues or observations. Such tacit, integrative, mental action is involved especially when a person is forming a conception of him/herself. Although his or her observations are diverse, numerous and changing, the person understands him/herself as one unity. However, he/she is not able to fully verbalise that understanding. (Lehtovaara 1994, 64.) Moreover, knowing about others, a teacher's knowing about his or her students, for example, is partly intuitive. Even a very significant insight of the other (student) in a teaching situation may be created without an observation distinctly located, without acquired facts, without any chain of reasoning or without a cause-and-effect relation. However, this kind of knowing is not occasional but it is based on the viewer's (teacher) ability to be very strongly, completely present in the community and its activity.

Benner and Tanner (1987, 23) define intuition as “understanding without a rationale.” The human being understands or realises something without being able to track accurately how he or she has ended up in his or her conclusion. Intuitive knowing is a way of processing a characteristic of the human being, which, for example, the computer is not able to do. Benner and Tanner have identified the use of intuition in clinical judgement and have come to the result that intuitive thinking is characteristic of nurses who possess rather extensive work experience and are trained in their work. This suggests that acting and working with people promote the kind of thinking that is intuitive, and “detached from” the rigid conceptual rational thinking.

According to Benner and Tanner (1987), Dreyfus (1985) describes the use of intuition in decision-making as six different types of intuitive judgement: 1) pattern recognition, 2) similarity recognition, 3) commonsense understanding, 4) skilled know-how, 5) sense of salience and 6) deliberative rationality. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 23.) In the following, I will discuss the 6 types of intuitive judgement from the point of view of a teacher's work.

1) *Pattern recognition* is the ability to understand and identify relations and perceive entireties without determining in detail the situation before-

hand. This kind of activity is strongly bound to the context and a person's situation in life, and no criteria or lists of properties drawn up beforehand are able to completely capture the essential relationships or subtle variations in the pattern. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 24.) As far as I can see, this kind of understanding and perceiving of entities is especially valuable in such situations of the teacher's work which often require very quick decision-making.

2) *Similarity recognition* is the ability to understand or identify matters/dissimilarities that are somehow alike/"fuzzily" resemble each other in spite of the fact that when objectively observed, they are considerably different. Often it is a question of dissimilarities to be perceived during different times; something that is present is compared with that in the past. A person also perceives dissimilarity between present and past phenomena, although looking at it objectively it seems to be a question of similar phenomena. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 24–25.) In teaching, realising similarities and differences intuitively opens up opportunities to the acquisition of knowledge concerning the pupils' growth process and facilitates the identification of the problems crucial in finding solutions for ambiguous classroom/educational situations.

3) *Commonsense understanding* refers to a flexible way to understand phenomena in different varying situations. The precondition for this kind of understanding or thinking is a deep and profound grasp of the culture and language, which serves as the foundation to the fact that the individual understands a matter, event, the other etc., experientially, more widely than relying on what has been studied, read or heard. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 25–26.) In teaching, this kind of knowing takes place when the teacher does not restrict his or her action solely to what he or she has studied from books and/or in education, but accepts it also as valid and uses the know-how he or she has learned during all human encounters in his or her life history and work.

4) *Skilled know-how* means "knowing how" as separate from "knowing that." The very advanced levels of "knowing how" are based on embodied intelligence. The body takes the task of the skill. This kind of know-how often functions together with the visual perception or visual images. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 26–27.) The know-how based on embodied knowledge in teaching is valuable, especially when encountering very emotional matters. The skilful teacher senses and perceives the atmosphere of the class, for example, without questionnaires, from his or her own and the students' bodily being. Sometimes the student may be unable to verbalise his or her situation or, for one reason or another, cannot or does not want to tell about it. However, the

teacher can understand tones and seriousness, for example, and can act on the basis of that knowledge. On the other hand, the teacher can also, with his or her own body and entire being, communicate confidence and safety, in which case it is as if the body takes the task of the skill.

5) *Sense of salience* is the ability to live in a meaningful world such that events and matters stand out as more important or less important, more valuable or less valuable, and to respond effectively to a situation without resorting to rule-governed behaviour. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 27–28.) The teacher who has a sense of salience does not behave or act mechanically following the rules, but realizes that all observations are not as essential and therefore, he or she acts flexibly according to each situation from his or her own inner insight. The notion of the infinity continuum of experience forms the background of the sense of salience. Thus, it is not possible to regulate beforehand all the possible situations or events and individual experiences of them with lists of instructions or evaluation forms. The sense of salience, i.e. understanding of what is essential, and as the consequence a flexible activity in changing situations, require of the teacher a deep and profound grasp and knowledge of the human nature, commitment to situations, and holistic being with the students.

6) *Deliberative rationality* means the ability to vary different points of view in interpretation of situations, anticipating how the situation would change if a point of view was changed. (Benner & Tanner 1987, 28–29.) The deliberative rationality as a teacher's skill prevents narrowness in decision-making concerning educational situations.

The knowing included in a teacher's educational work can be further understood as relational and nested, the knowing that the teacher and student have produced together in cooperation. It includes the idea of knowing as a phenomenon in constant change. The knowing in different teaching and educational situations has not been restricted to what one person knows but the knowing of two or more persons related to each other is overlapping, nested. (Lyons 1990, 162; Webb & Blond 1995, 624.) The concept of knowing as being nested stemmed originally from caring work in which knowing about both the mind and body (embodied knowledge) and encountering these levels in caring situations is central. This kind of knowing is very complex and multi-layered. It contains conceptual and verbal knowledge (of a clinical picture, medication, nursing, care, patient's personal data, etc.), emotions (fear, anguish, joy, hope, etc.), and physical sensations (pain, sensitiveness to touch,

warmth, tension in muscles, etc.), which the nurse and the patient can both “sense” and thus know. The knowledge created in such situations is based on knowing with the body and mind. (Webb & Blond 1995, 622–624.)

Education and teaching involve encountering and helping a learning human being and thus, can be compared with nursing and caring. Moreover, they contain a knowing which includes the functions of the body and mind and which are difficult to define and verbalise exhaustively, but which caring promotes. The knowledge and knowing concerning teaching and education understood this way require a holistic conception of man as the foundation of a teacher’s work and “teachership.” Reflection in teaching, considering and discussing the experience thought this way cannot be carried out merely “as sharpening of intelligence.” Both the teaching work itself, knowing and the acquisition of knowledge in it should thus be a common inquiring and feeling activity in the community, where all participants’ (teacher’s and the students’) personal experiences and meanings concerning the entire human being, their identification and examining are continuously present.

In this study, learning is understood as changes in existing meaning structures and as the creation of new meaning structures in the life-world. Learning that is in accordance with this conception is best promoted by activity in which pedagogic situations are constructed upon the students’ experiences. The issues to be learned are not dealt with in an abstract and unknown or impersonal environment or without a context, but they are dealt with and discussed within the students’ life-worlds, in their realities. New knowledge that has been learned, the changed or completely new meaning structures will become part of the students’ realities, their life-worlds. If knowledge and knowing are understood as defined above, there is no knowledge without or outside the person who knows. Also linguistic knowledge and knowing about a language is personal, tied up with the individual autobiography and always, situation-, context- and culture-bound. (Experiential foreign language education, see Kohonen, Jaatinen, Kaikkonen & Lehtovaara 2001.)

2.4 Nature of experiential autobiographical knowledge

Teachers' and students' experiential knowledge of their learning is autobiographical knowledge, subjective knowledge of themselves "collected" in the course of their life histories. It is individual, lived and experienced, often incoherent, imperfect, and fragmentary. It is not a direct reflection on what has happened or how things have been in the past, but it is a narrated description of the past events told or written retrospectively via memory. (Jaatinen 2001a, 109.) According to Solas (1992)

"Autobiography may be described as a life-story of just one individual who is the central character of the life drama which unfolds. It presupposes that the person has developed an identity, individuality, and a consciousness in order to organise his or her own private history from the perspective of the present. As an idiosyncratic rendering of lived experience, it is personal both in its selection of events and in its expression of style. As such, the search for unity and coherence (order), characteristic of traditional forms of educational enquiry, gives way to disunity and incoherence (chaos) in life." (Solas 1992, 212.)

Even though the autobiographical knowledge is not an immediate accurate description of what really took place or how the matters were when they took place but rather a reconstructed experience, a "story" told orally or written afterwards based on the memory, the meaningful core of the story is preserved despite the fact that the narration is affected by many factors. (Huotelin 1992, 4.)

By creating a personal frame of reference our autobiographical knowledge or consciousness guides and controls our interpretation of reality including our experiences. Even though experience itself is unique and always different, the way of interpreting the experience has more stability in the course of life. When growing older and as a result of formal teaching in particular, the human being often learns different given models of how to "see" the reality. We are taught to see the world and ourselves in certain ways, through the others' eyes. Language and its concepts, in particular, contain such information. As a consequence we may lose the connection to our inner world, to our own genuine experience. In order to prevent the alienation it is possible to learn and help students, too, to peel away the layers of meaning that different learned

interpretations have brought to our description of the world. (Jaatinen 2001a, 109–110.)

Peeling away the layers of meaning and becoming more extensively and more profoundly conscious of our experience requires autobiographical inquiry. The experiences, whether they are or are not interpreted and understood, whether they are verbalised or non-verbalised, all have some effect on our lives and learning. By becoming acquainted with our lived, experiential past it is possible for us to gain the understanding of our inner worlds, listen to our own voices and find keys to development and change, and at least for a little more many-sided understanding of life, including learnership and teachership. (Jaatinen 2001a, 110.)

2.5 Modes of autobiographical knowledge in teaching and education

What can then be concretely studied if the subject of the study is a teacher's autobiographical knowledge? According to Knowles (1993, 78; 1994, 57) when dealing with the teacher's autobiographical knowledge we can inquire into his or her inner dialogue concerning school and teaching, his or her ideas and beliefs of these phenomena. The beginning teachers with little teaching experience seek the ground for their solutions in classroom situations from their earlier experiences as pupils or students. They have their own inner dialogue on how they (or some other student, a former classmate, for example) would have reacted or experienced a certain particular practice. The teachers with years of professional experience, too, often seek grounds for their decisions through the experiential knowledge learned in their work, heard from others, shared and constructed in common discussions. (Knowles 1993, 78.) The inner dialogue on teaching and educational matters appears and can be reached for being inquired as arguments concerning for example the theory and practice with which the teacher concludes things to be correct or wrong, good or bad, etc. in different situations at work. These arguments are linguistic statements and are thus easily identified and focused as materials to be inquired.

Experiential, autobiographical knowledge is stored in our memory also in a non-linguistic form: as feelings or physical sensations, as remembering of the body (partly symbolic linguistic and tacit level). Such experiences, too, can be the basis for accepting or rejecting a certain practice in teaching and learning situations. Dealing with the joys and happiness of teacher autobiography as a positive vehicle to learning and the fears and anxiety as obstacles or a negative vehicle to learning, for example, should be part of teacher education and development. Although people cannot totally verbalise their feelings or physical sensations, it does not mean that they cannot be dealt with. Observing teaching situations and different feelings and sensations coming to expression in them, recognising and re-experiencing both positive and frightening events can be raised as part of the inquiry in education and the research concerning it. (Jaatinen 2001a, 133.)

The introduction of the “metaphor” as part of teacher education research has been useful as it gives one way of also reading the non-linguistic knowledge in our consciousness. An example of a typical metaphor concerning the teacher could be “Teacher is a boss.” It is a figurative way of describing a teacher by referring to a boss who has the qualities (for example authority and decision-making) that we think the teacher should or should not have. This kind of a metaphor often contains very strong emotional charges (ridicule, hatred, admiration). Cole (1990, 5–6) specifies the metaphors

“...linguistic expressions of tacit levels of thought, fictional constructs of the actual. Deriving from the Greek “to carry across,” metaphors provide a way of carrying ideas and understandings from one context to another so that both the ideas and the new context become transformed in the process.” (Cole 1990, 5–6.)

By reflecting experience and representing elements of personal histories metaphors allow access to individuals’ thoughts. They are vehicles of thinking over our experiences, they organise our thoughts about subject matters, activities or theories coherently and in a compact way. By using a symbol system they also allow us to convey experiences that cannot be literally described. (Knowles 1994, 60–61.)

Metaphors create very colourful and persisting images, for example, of teacher’s roles, hardworking students, slow learners, the school as an institution, discipline, and so on. And as Pavio (1979) states

“perhaps through imagery, a metaphor provides a vivid and, therefore, memorable and emotion-arousing representation of a perceived experience.” (Pavio 1979, 152.)

Because school and learning experiences are often very strong in mind and thus when recalled out of the memory they arouse various feelings, negative and positive, have a long-lasting effect on us and our learning, teachers and students should be encouraged to identify and analyse their metaphors concerning growth, education and school life. As part of the teacher’s own, maybe unconscious, educational theory the metaphors may have very strong and long lasting effects on his or her educational activity and teaching. On the other hand, by creating new metaphors we can learn to see our own work or learning environment in a very novel way, differently.

2.6 / as the auto/biographical /

The concept “auto/biography,” i.e. the self (auto) is writing (graphia) about his or her life (bios) is from Liz Stanley. In her article *On auto/biography in sociology* (1993, 41–52) she questions such conventional divisions considered almost self-evident in life writing as “biography/autobiography,” “self/other”, “public/private” and “immediacy/memory,” and argues that the researcher-self constructs and creates rather than discovers sociological reality and social knowledge. Stanley bases her arguments on two lines of thought: the sociological autobiographical study of Merton and the feminist study and in it the conception of reflexivity of the intellectual autobiographical study.

According to Stanley (1993), Merton (1972) thinks that the reality is not a single one as there is not exactly the same event of which the people construct different competing descriptions either. And so, there are no sociological methods to make conclusions systematically or to decide on the “superiority” or “betterness” of the knowledge being placed and produced in different ways, even though there exist means which “the laymen” use for making this difference. In the autobiographical study he pays attention to the text dealing with it as the subject rather than material of the study. He does not try to say anything at all about the external matters of the text on the basis of the text.

This way he avoids the restrictions produced by the memory and observation errors in the study. He allows the use of external documents and sources, too, to the writers of autobiography. According to him the autobiographical text is the result of the interaction of the writing individual and the social environment. The autobiography, as Merton (1988) says, is always a sociological autobiography. (Stanley 1993, 42–43.) Such narrative view of the methodology on the auto/biographic study is represented also by Saarenheimo (1997) and by Vilkkio (1997) in their doctoral theses.

In the feminist research the concept of reflexivity is central. According to Stanley (1993, 44), Cook and Fonow (1986) present five methodological postulates that characterise the feminist research:

- 1) a reflexive concern with gender
- 2) consciousness-raising as a way of re/seeing the social world
- 3) rejection of the claimed objectivity/subjectivity dichotomy,
- 4) a concern with researching and theorising experience
- 5) an insistence on ethics as a facet of these others.

Stanley raises the concept of “reflexivity” crucial, when talking about the autobiography and pays special attention to adapting the principles of reflexivity in the research process in which the evaluations, interpretations and conclusions are drawn from material, and includes the researcher’s auto/biographic examination in it. Common to the lines of thought on autobiography described above is the fact that both confess that the knowledge is different systematically depending on the social position of the wholeness of the study (including the researcher). In both lines of thought this difference of the knowledge is considered epistemologically as valid. (Stanley 1993, 44–46.)

Stanley (1993) breaks traditional conceptions of the biographic study: First the division “self/other” is difficult. Writing about one’s own life is impossible apart from the others and correspondingly writing about the other person’s life contains the writer’s autobiography as an essential part. The biographic self and the autobiographical self are overlapping in the study. For this reason Stanley uses the concept of “auto/biography” instead of “autobiography” and “biography.” According to her, the researcher has to study the foundation of his or her own working process and understand that the knowledge is situation- and context-bound, and differs systematically in relation with the social position of the producer of the knowledge.

Another common and taken-for-granted distinction in the biographic study is the distinction “public/private.” According to Stanley all writing, also biographic and autobiographical presupposes the presence of some kind of an audience, even though an imagined “public”. The self who is writing an autobiography is face to face with the object being written. The pair of concepts “immediacy/memory” refers to the chronological dimension of writing. Writing about experiences and events is never exactly the same as the experiences and the events and thus there is no quite immediate immediacy within them.

Writing is always a description done after the events and experiences through memory and contains the writer’s choices and interpretation. The description is always some kind of contention or explanation of what had taken place, so it has already been written from one point of view. (Stanley 1993, 47–49.)

According to Stanley (1990), the auto/biographic self is an inquiring analytic sociological actor who tries to construct and create (rather than to find) social reality and sociological knowledge. The use of the self emphasises here the fact that the knowledge that has been created this way is contextual, situation-bound and specific and that it is different depending on the different social position of the researcher (gender, person, racial, etc.). Thus the knowledge of the researcher’s own autobiography rises epistemologically to a crucial place in any given study and it must be made public when reporting on the study. The reader must get information on the researcher’s thinking and reasoning process that leads to the research results and to which autobiographical knowledge of the researcher gives the context and the place. (Miller 1991, 1; Stanley 1990, 209; 1993, 49.) Accordingly, the written biographies or autobiographies are never recordings on only one human being and his or her life but documents on many lives. In them are intertwined the stories of both the researcher or researchers and the one(s) researched and other people important to them. They change every participant in the research process. (Cotterill & Letherby 1993, 77.)

Stanley’s thoughts have much to give to the research on teachership as well as to understanding what teachership is in general. The conception of the inseparability of the researcher’s (teacher’s) autobiography from the research results (learning results) also forces the examining (evaluating) of the researcher (teacher) as part of the whole research process (learning process). The understanding of research results (learning results) in their own contexts

tells about the relativity of the knowledge researched (studied), binding of it on time and place and its process-like nature.

In their research Stanley (1990; 1993; 1995) as well as Saarenheimo (1997) and Vilkkö (1997) are inquiring into narrated biographic materials. In them the biographic study is primarily inquiring into stories and language. Thinking of both teachership and education activity this kind of starting point is a little questionable. A different starting point to research is presented for example by Perttula (1995; 1998) who in his studies tries to find meanings that are included in the experience of the ones to be inquired and with the help of the interpretation of meanings to tell about their lives. Also Grumet (1990a) rejects the idea of the experience as a discursive formation:

“Claiming that identity is a fiction, postmodernists attribute our scribbles and fantasies to the determinations of genres and codes. I would be naive if I refused to admit influence in what we notice, what we choose to tell, and in how and why we tell what we do. Nevertheless, autobiographical method invites us to struggle with those determinations. It is that struggle and its resolve to develop ourselves in ways that transcend the identities that others have constructed for us that bonds the projects of autobiography and education.” (Grumet 1990a, 324.)

These two different points of view to the biographic study, i.e. subjective biography/life history and narrative biography/life history, are both present in this study: My aim is to inquire into meanings and understanding connections included in the experience; to explore and make visible subjective autobiographical knowledge. I also try here to show the limits of the language as the describer of experience.

2.7 Possibilities and limits of knowing about oneself

Research literature concerning the use of experiential autobiographical knowledge emphasises the fact that we must be aware of the mechanism through which our memory is constructed, because that knowledge helps us in considering the experiential material critically. In other words, to be able to develop as teachers we must become acquainted with the structure of our

own identity and consciousness, with its concept formation, in order to fully understand our experiential narratives. (See Graham 1991; Knowles 1993; Saarenheimo 1988; 1991; 1992; 1997; Vilkkio 1988; 1997). Furthermore, the concept of one's own identity and consciousness are very closely connected to what the experiential story is like. When a person is reminiscing about his or her past experiences, his or her memory selects and emphasises some events, and evaluates everything that has happened. Therefore, the verbalised or written autobiography is not a collection of the events that happened in a person's life, but, instead, it is a restructured picture of oneself. The core of the description is in who the narrator experiences that he or she is, and how he or she became this particular person. (Titon 1980, 290.)

According to d'Epinay (1995, 49) a person's narrative of his or her experiences, his or her life is always the narrator's view, where part of it may even be imagined. The imagined part, however, has borrowed elements of the narrator's "real" world and life. It is part of his or her life-world and therefore, the "story" told is not of less value. The teacher's description of his or her experience (a problem situation in the classroom and how it was solved, for example) may be tinged with a kind of wishful thinking, an illusion of how he or she would have wanted the things to be or happen or how he or she had feared them to be or happen. Experiencing people, things and events rise from the totality of the human being, his or her way of experiencing people, things and events in general, the way of experiencing being the result of an individual autobiographical development process. (Jaatinen 2001a, 136.)

When inquiring into experiences it is as important to pay attention to a narrator's way of interpreting his or her experiences as to the experiences themselves. If a teacher or student is not able to perceive "the total tone" of his or her experience, he or she may have difficulties in making a difference between the truth and the imagined in a certain classroom situation; he or she may begin reflecting and reaching a solution of something that has never really happened except in his or her mind. (Jaatinen 2001a, 136.)

Something that has taken place only in the narrator's mind is, of course, true to him or her and an important subject of the study as such, but it should not be separated from those connections in which it has been created. To be able to understand one's way of experiencing people, things and events as thoroughly as possible, and accordingly, one's action and behaviour, one must return to the roots of one's own experience by exploring one's autobiography, the birth mechanism of meaning relations, by peeling away meaning struc-

tures and trying to reach the essential. Such research, in addition to separate individual cases and experiences raised from the memory, helps us to understand our personal way of experiencing the world, creating and interpreting meanings, making choices, constructing and reconstructing our memory. (Jaatinen 2001a, 136.)

When studying his or her autobiography, i.e. experiences or life-world, a teacher is at the same time both a researcher and the subject that is being researched. The autobiographical method, the hermeneutic understanding of life, makes it possible for the researcher to study individual experience, and for the one that is being researched, it offers a means to reach an understanding of him/herself as a more integrated person. (Saarenheimo 1988, 265). Becoming acquainted with our own autobiographies helps us to know our meaning-making processes and therefore, through reflection based on that knowledge to analyse and organise learning and education activity. Proceeding in this manner, when one relates to him/herself his or her experiences, a person obtains two types of information. First, he or she remembers and collects documents on historically true events and episodes. Second, he or she reports his or her subjective truth, personal meanings. What has been narrated afterwards does not completely correspond to the experienced past but it resembles the person's other autobiographic memories and is in harmony with his or her conception of him/herself. (Saarenheimo 1991, 263).

The experience, when it is recalled and narrated, does not manifest itself as it was at that time, but it is influenced by the present moment, the narrator's self and situation in life: the past and the present (often the future also), the earlier and the present experience are mixed (Castelnuovo-Tedesco 1978, 19–25; Saarenheimo 1988, 268; 1992, 272). The choices of the past may look incomprehensible in the present context, but completely reasonable and self-evident when placed in their own time and place. Becoming conscious of the time and place helps us to understand the choices of our past, the creation of our meaning structures and thus, at best, integrates us. (Saarenheimo 1992, 269–273.)

To be able to understand what we have experienced and to be able to properly interpret it, we must study our own present meaning structures and changes in them. As far as the research of experience is concerned, the researcher must possess a very high level of self-awareness. It is hardly possible to do valid research on one's self without another person or a community. Other persons should be used, if possible, as methodological instruments. Re-

sorting to the collaborative assistance of other people is thought to be the best way of improving the process of inquiring into and expanding our self-consciousness in educational contexts (Reason & Rowan 1981, 245–247). In such a collaborative process, an inquiry into a person's meaning structures and the construction and changing of them is not enough. Such a process should also contain the inquiry into the inquiring process including all participating individuals with their autobiographies, since the knowledge of a human being is created in a cultural and social context (Aldridge 1993, 53–64; Stanley 1995, 101–102).

I would like to return to Luriâ's (1979, 174) thought of the romantics of the science who "*neither split living reality into its elementary components nor represent the wealth of life's concrete events in abstract models that lose the properties of the phenomenon themselves.*" Instead, they inquire into the events from as many points of view as possible, reach for finding the uniqueness, the human being's life in its connections and have a caring attitude to the ones being inquired, which includes listening to their voices during the entire research process. Luriâ's voice is worth listening to here, in a study concerning teaching and learning a foreign language, in which the research material consists of the teacher's and the students' autobiographical narration.

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