

Teacher's stories about teaching newly arrived refugee youths at a vocational upper secondary school in Sweden

Hamid Asghari

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7252-9657>

hamid.asghari@kau.se

This article presents the stories of four teachers teaching newly arrived refugee youths at a vocational upper secondary school. The youths came to Sweden in 2015 and later, and they live in a so-called vulnerable area. This is a period when many unaccompanied children and adolescent refugees arrived in Sweden. The study aims to contribute to knowledge about teaching newly arrived refugee youths and the way these youths can influence teaching in a vocational school. The methodological and theoretical starting point for the study is based on a narrative perspective. The stories are analysed thematically and show that these students have great solidarity with each other, are ambitious, and create a good mood in the classroom. In addition, there is always “someone” who does not believe in democratic values, although most of the students value the Swedish democracy and equality between men and women. The expulsion decision that some students receive affects the teachers’ teaching as well, since it means that they also have to deal with teaching situations where their students’ lives and deaths are involved in the sense that they are refugees threatened by expulsion.

Keywords: teachers’ work, teaching newly arrived refugee youths, narrative research, teachers’ stories, vocational upper secondary school

1. Introduction and literature review

In 2015, Sweden was one of the European countries that received a large number of refugees from Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq (cf. Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018). A total of 40,000 newly arrived refugee youths aged 13–18 came to Sweden in 2015 (The National Agency for Education, 2016). In the Swedish social and political context, these youths are sometimes described as potential threats, existing outside the normality of Swedish society and challenging it (Wernesjö, 2020). In addition, these youths have to learn Swedish together with multiple mandatory school subjects such as English, Mathematics, History, Social studies, and Religion, which creates new challenging teaching situations for the teachers (e.g. Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016; Jepson Wigg, 2016). A Swedish Government Official Report (SOU 2017:54) shows that the teachers' competence has shortcomings in accommodating newly arrived refugees in a regular class. Further, the report indicates that the government has concerns and even experiences resistance from the teachers to accept the newly arrived students in the regular classroom. More competence is required so that teachers can support these students' development better.

Teachers' work has annually become more and more broadened with other tasks than teaching (Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999). Nonetheless, teachers show great commitment, and the willingness to leave the teaching profession is quite low among teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). The teachers' sense of belonging, positive and supportive relationships between teacher colleagues, and adequate teaching hours are considered important reasons for teachers to thrive in the teaching profession (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015) present a number of factors that create difficult working conditions for teachers. These factors include having a high workload and time pressure; having to adapt teaching to students' needs; dealing with students' disruptive behaviour and conflicts of values; experiencing a lack of autonomy, poor behaviour in teamwork, and lack of status – which lead to deteriorated social life, increased sick leave, reduced working hours in recent years, and physical and mental exhaustion. Further, teachers are increasingly required to handle administrative tasks (Griffith et al., 1999). The teachers in Ahlgren and Gillander-Gådin's (2011) study talk about how they make an effort to handle the demands placed on them, but they also explain that they struggle to find the time to complete their teaching-related tasks. The study shows that teachers are trapped between *their ambitions* and *what they do in*

reality. While their ambitions are to teach their respective subject areas, much of their teaching time is spent improving students' behaviour and teaching them about cultural aspects.

Half of the asylum seekers who came to Sweden in 2015 were unaccompanied children and youth, and many of them lacked or had a poor educational background when they arrived (Brunnberg & Darvishpour, 2016). Unaccompanied refugee youth enter into a migration process that is adapted for young refugees, and this process is important for where they will live and go to school (Herz & Lalander, 2017). When those of school age (between 6 and 18 years) receive a residence permit, they undergo various introductory measures, and then they proceed to education (Çelikaksoy & Wadensjö, 2015a, 2015b). During the introductory period, students focus primarily on learning Swedish (Jepson Wigg, 2016). Students with immigrant backgrounds face various challenges in their new country that influence their study results, and one of those challenges is learning the new language (cf. Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018; Emery et al., 2020; Jepson Wigg, 2016; Malitzki & Fredriksson, 2011). Language is the key that these students need to progress in the school system (Jepson Wigg, 2016), and it is important for their integration into Swedish society (Malitzki & Fredriksson, 2011). Their age and when they have arrived in Sweden also prove to be important factors in managing the education system (Jepson Wigg, 2016). The older the students are upon their arrival in Sweden, the harder it is for them to pass the Swedish education (Jepson Wigg, 2016).

According to Sharif (2016), newly arrived students in Sweden have high educational aspirations. The students in his study emphasise, among other things, the importance of education as a factor for integration into Swedish society (Sharif, 2016), but their school situation can be affected by the hierarchies and structures they encounter in school, which can lead to them being excluded (Bunar, 2015). Pérez-Aronsson (2019) shows how racialised youth in Sweden create online safe spaces where they share their stories of oppression. Wernesjö (2014) has conducted a study based on interviews with youth who came to Sweden as unaccompanied asylum-seeking minors and have received a permanent residence permit. She relates belonging among unaccompanied young refugees to the concepts of home, place, racism, and notions of Swedishness. According to Wernesjö (2014), unaccompanied young refugees may experience difficulties in gaining access to communities of Swedish-born friends of the same age, even when they go to the same school. In

her analysis of the interviews, Wernesjö (2020) has concluded that gratitude, diligence, and responsibility are prominent in the young respondents' stories. They also describe themselves as hard working in relation to education and future working life.

Further, Hagström (2018) has studied the experiences of newly arrived students' experiences of their everyday life, inside and outside school. The study shows, among other things, that school is an extremely important context in newly arrived students' everyday lives, and education is a prerequisite for them to have a liveable life. Their social life outside of school also influences their successes and setbacks in their studies and their outlook for the future. Thommessen et al. (2015) have investigated how a group of unaccompanied refugee youths experienced coming to Sweden and how they perceived the support that was available to them. The study shows that the youth are grateful for the security they have received in Sweden, but they are worried about waiting for a residence permit. They have sacrificed a great deal on the way to Sweden, and now they once again face a number of challenges in the host country. They wish for guidance and support and feel a longing for people who can listen to them and understand what they have been through. They also have a desire to look ahead and a strong will not to waste the opportunities provided in the country of asylum.

Lalander and Raoof (2016) have studied how unaccompanied refugee minors view the staff at the residential care units where they live. The results show that unaccompanied young refugees perceive that they are defined as children by the staff, not recognised as competent actors, which can be provocative for them. Moreover, these youths perceive that they are described as a homogeneous group that needs to be trained in order to live up to a desired Swedishness. The staff working in the residential care units can implement sanctions against social activities to create discipline in the accommodation. This creates not only hidden resistance but also a social environment where the youths do not feel like complete people.

International studies as well as Swedish studies often show the willingness of newly arrived children and youth to be educated, mainly with the aim of learning the language and being integrated into society (cf. Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018; Reddick & Sadler, 2019; Shergold, 2018). In Canada, studies show that education prepares refugees for meeting new challenges. In particular, younger

children who have spent more time in the Canadian education system have an easier time completing upper secondary education (Reddick & Sadler, 2019). Further, a study focusing on young refugees' experiences of education in Austria shows that young newly arrived refugees in Austria have a strong belief in education, have high educational goals, and appreciate the generous Austrian education system that is free (Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018).

In recent years, a number of European studies on the education of refugee students have been carried out (e.g. Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018; Berggren et al., 2020; Emery et al., 2020). Berggren et al. (2020) explore the schooling experiences of 19 immigrant youth in Sweden. Their study focuses on the institutional obstacles that immigrant youth encounter in the national education system. Atanasoska and Proyer (2018) write about young refugees' experiences of the new country they have come to, including the importance of education for them and their aspirations in the new system. Emery et al. (2020) studied how a sense of entitlement and strategic knowledge is relevant when studying the educational trajectories of newly arrived migrant students. Emery et al. (2020) state that it would be interesting for future research to study teachers' perceptions of newly arrived migrant students. This article follows their proposal in its focus on teachers' experiences of teaching newly arrived refugee youths. It contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges teachers have in teaching newly arrived refugee youth from a so-called vulnerable area in vocational education at an ordinary Swedish upper secondary school. Their stories provide knowledge that increases the understanding of the development of the school's and the teachers' social missions (cf. Goodson & Anstead, 2012).

I want to conclude this section by clarifying that previous research has contributed to knowledge about teachers' teaching situations and immigrant students' education, but when I started to look at the research field in these areas, I found that at least one puzzle piece was missing. This puzzle piece is teachers' stories in relation to their work with newly arrived refugee youths at a vocational upper secondary school located in a so-called vulnerable area in Sweden.

Consequently, my study of teachers' stories about teaching newly arrived refugee youths can help to make teachers more visible in the contemporary world, and it is an important contribution to research on newly arrived refugee youths.

2. Aim and research question

This study aims to contribute to knowledge about teachers experiences in teaching newly arrived refugee youths and the way these youths can influence teaching in a vocational education at an ordinary Swedish upper secondary school located in a so-called vulnerable area. The study poses the following research question in this context: What are the prominent themes in four teachers' stories about teaching newly arrived refugee youths?

3. Stories as a methodological and theoretical approach

The study's methodological approach is based on a narrative perspective (cf. Andrews et al., 2013; Chen, 1997; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995) that centres on what four teachers say about teaching newly arrived refugee youths at a vocational upper secondary school in Sweden (cf. Mishler, 1999). In this study, the teachers have been given the fictitious names Eva, Hanna, Karin, and Mats. Eva is a 29-year-old teacher of Swedish and English who has four years' work experience in the teaching profession. Hanna is 32 years old and has six years' work experience in the teaching profession; she works partly as a Special Education Teacher and is also a teacher in Swedish, Swedish as a second language, and religion. Karin is 46 years old, has 16 years' teaching experience, and teaches Swedish and English. Mats is a 58-year-old teacher of Swedish, history, social studies, and religion; he has been working as a teacher since 2001.

The vocational upper secondary school has been given the fictitious name Automechanics School. It is located in a so-called vulnerable area in a major city in Sweden. A "vulnerable area" is defined by the Swedish police as an area with high crime rates and social exclusion. The majority of the newly arrived refugee students at the school live in this area. The school was started in an old but recently renovated building after the wave of refugees of 2015. The Automechanics School offers vocational education in the Sanitary, Heating, and Property Maintenance Programme; Vehicle and Transport Programme; Industry Engineering Programme; Construction and Installation Programme; and Electrical and Energy Programme and aims to educate students for the labour market. The majority of the students are newly arrived refugee youths, although there is a small number of Swedish-born students or students with an immigrant background.

Most of the students are boys, which may be due to the male-dominated vocational programmes the school offers.

This study is part of a research project on teachers' stories about democracy and teaching. Prior to the project, in December 2017, an application for ethical review of research concerning people was sent to the Regional Ethics Review Board. The decision of the Board was that there is no ethical objection to the implementation of the study. Based on the project, I interviewed 12 teachers in general subjects such as Swedish, English, mathematics, history, social studies, and religion from four vocational upper secondary schools. All these 12 teachers contacted me by email or phone and wanted to participate in my research, including Mats, Carin, Hanna, and Eva, who worked at the Automechanics School with about 70 students. The Automechanics School had the largest number of newly arrived refugee youths compared the other three schools where the other eight teachers worked, and the conversation between me and Mats, Carin, Hanna, and Eva was mostly about these youths. This is the reason for the selection of school and teacher respondents for this study.

According to the teachers, the majority of the newly arrived refugee youths at the Automechanic School had been allowed to stay in Sweden through Gymnasielagen (the Upper Secondary School Act), some had their application for a residence permit rejected, and some had already been deported from Sweden. Gymnasielagen, entered into force on 1 July 2018, enabled refugee youths who were not allowed to stay in Sweden to apply for a residence permit for upper secondary education. The new law on upper secondary level studies gave newly arrived refugee youths the right to spend up to six months after completing upper secondary education to find a job to support themselves in order to continue living in Sweden (Swedish Code of Statutes, 2017).

I interviewed the teachers twice, in October 2018 and May 2019, each interview lasting 1–1.5 hours, and the interviews took place at their workplace. All interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and transcribed immediately after the interview. During the first interview, the conversations between me and the teachers were based on open questions (Riessman, 2008), for instance, can you please tell me about your teaching of your vocational students in the subject of English? Or how is it to teach the subject of history to vocational students? By asking such open

questions, I gave the teachers the opportunity to decide for themselves what parts of their experiences of teaching vocational students they wanted to talk about (cf. Goodson et al., 2010; Riessman, 2008). They mostly talked about their newly arrived students. The second interview was a supplement to the first interview, filling in the missing knowledge gaps. For example, in the second interview, I asked Karin, Last time you said that your newly arrived students tend to say that it is wonderful that women in Sweden have power, but what happens if one of them says, “No, I do not think women should have power”? Karin answered that there is always someone who does not agree, but then their classmates would object.

Focusing on *the content of the teachers’ narrated experiences* of teaching newly arrived refugee youth (cf. Pérez Prieto, 2000), I brought together each teacher’s interview data from the first and the second interviews and structured the descriptions chronologically (cf. Lieblich et al., 1998). In other words, I as a researcher created stories from the teachers’ stories (cf. Lieblich, 1993). The teachers’ stories can be seen as socially situated acts (cf. Mishler, 1999; Pérez Prieto, 2000) that represent the experiences of a larger group of teachers who teach newly arrived refugee youths (cf. Mishler, 1999).

The theoretical approach in the study concerns understanding the content of the teachers’ stories. The teachers – when talking about experiences in their lives or parts of their lives (for example, their experiences of teaching newly arrived students) – are experts on their own lives (cf. Atkinson, 2007; Lalander, 2016) and give meaning to their lived experiences through their stories (cf. Mishler, 1999). The ontological assumptions of the study are based on the idea that teachers express their experiences and that parts of a *reconstructed reality* become visible in their stories. With “reconstructed reality”, I mean that the teachers’ recounted experiences are not exactly the same as what happened in the past, or exactly what was experienced (cf. Goodson & Anstead, 2012). In the interview situation, the teachers highlight what they consider relevant to the interviewer or what they think the interviewer wants to hear (cf. Goodson, 1996; Mishler, 1999; Pérez Prieto, 2000).

When teachers talk about their teaching experiences in interview situations, they look back on their lives and the times they met and taught their students (cf. Bruner, 1986), reflect on them (cf. Freeman, 2010), and construct their stories in interaction with me as a researcher and interviewer (through how I ask questions and what questions I ask) based on the interview situation in which they find themselves (cf. Mishler, 1999; Pérez Prieto, 2000).

The analysis of the teachers' stories is inspired by Riessman's (2008) description of thematic narrative analysis. In my thematic analysis, I attempted to identify the characteristics of the teachers' stories. By studying what they have said, I was able to identify different themes in their stories. Based on Riessman's (2008) theory, a theme can be discovered by comparing different stories or different parts of the same story, where certain descriptions are repeated. I used a thematic narrative analysis by reading the teachers' stories multiple times and by coding the recurring descriptions both in individual stories and in several teachers' stories. One example of recurring descriptions that construct the theme *teaching ambitious students* is the descriptions of ambitious students who have language barriers. The word *ambitious* occurs several times in the teachers' stories. Another recurring aspect is that the students are motivated to learn, and many of them want to be doctors or engineers; hence, they keep making an effort in school despite the language difficulties.

Following the Swedish Research Council's (2017) guidelines, I wrote an information letter (the Information Requirement) and informed the teachers about the purpose of my study. In the letter, I explained that their participation in my study is voluntary and that they have the right to cancel their participation in the study at any time during the process. I also wrote that I would treat the interview material confidentially (the Confidentiality Requirement); that is, the names of places and people would be anonymised and the recorded interviews would be kept in a safe place. Further, I informed the teachers that those who participate in my research would be aware of each other's participation and that they themselves would likely tell each other about the interview discussions with me; however, I as a researcher would not tell one teacher what the other teachers discuss. I also wrote a letter of consent containing the information just mentioned (the Consent Requirement), and the teachers signed it, confirming that they consent to participate in my research. In addition, the teachers received a copy of their own interview transcript. The purpose

of submitting a copy of the transcripts to the teachers, based on the confidentiality requirement, was to make the teachers aware that some of the stories contained in the transcripts would be published in articles. These stories could be recognised by their colleagues even after being decoded. None of the teachers expressed any views on these aspects (the Consent Requirement). I have informed the teachers both orally and in writing that the interview materials will be used in scientific publications, research conferences, and teaching (the Usefulness Requirement).

4. Results and analysis – The prominent themes of newly arrived refugee youths as students

In this section, I present the teachers' descriptions of teaching newly arrived refugee youth in five themes and analyse the descriptions. When selecting the descriptions, I have focused on the teachers' stories regarding their teaching of newly arrived refugee youths at the Automechanics School. An analysis of the teachers' stories resulted in five themes: (1) teaching ambitious students, (2) teaching students how the democratic society in Sweden works, (3) teaching students who have a high solidarity with each other, (4) teaching students who are threatened by the possibility of deportation, and (5) teaching students who create a good mood in the classroom.

4.1 Teaching ambitious students

The Automechanics School has a diverse student base. The teachers' stories reveal that many newly arrived refugee youths are ambitious, good at school, well prepared, and willing to ask questions. They want to develop, do all right for themselves, and work or study. For example, Eva says that many of her refugee students are unaccompanied and have lived here for about two years. Furthermore, she says,

My [refugee] students are very ambitious. They want to work. They want to study. They want to do all right for themselves. But I also have some who have been refused their residence permit. They hope to get it, invest in work or study, and build their life in Sweden. They are withdrawn, worried about their uncertain future.

This is in line with what international studies show about refugees' willingness to educate themselves and to get a job after completing vocational education (Reddick & Sadler, 2019; Shergold, 2018). Mats also talks about his ambitious students. Mats says that he has students who have lived only a couple of years in Sweden. They have language difficulties and received news of deportation, but they are still at school and do their school work. Mats continues,

Among my newly arrived students, there are some very good students who come prepared, with questions. They have obvious difficulties with the language, but they are ambitious, they are trying, and I must of course deliver. I can say like this that many of them are ambitious. Even those who are going to be expelled, they still attend school. I have some students who are going to be expelled. They come to school and attend anyway. I know that we have a student who has been denied. He lives in a church here in town, but he comes every day, does what he has to do, and keeps working. It's more that I'm surprised they can handle it.

Mats says that he is surprised that students who are waiting for deportation can handle the education. Like Mats, Karin talks about ambitious students. She says that some of her students, despite their lack of language skills, study hard and want to become engineers and doctors:

My refugee students are ambitious. They are very forward-looking; they know exactly what they want. They ask, lack knowledge when it's about language, but very good at school, very ambitious, want to become engineers, doctors, and it also put demands on me to reach their expectations.

Hanna also says that her students are ambitious. Discussing her students who have only lived in Sweden for two years, Hanna says,

Many of my students have only lived in Sweden for two years, but they are super talented and ambitious. They have language difficulties, but things happen all the time, purely linguistically. And that's what's great. It is super wonderful that they really dare and want to develop, and that puts demands on me too. [...] It is difficult to hold

lectures when some are very, very far ahead in their linguistic development and some are not, even though everyone is ambitious and does their best.

According to Mats and Karin, these ambitious students put demands on the teachers to deliver. Newly arrived refugee youths are at different levels of knowledge (Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018). According to Hanna, some of them are very advanced in their linguistic development and some are not. It can be strenuous for teachers to teach a diverse student base and allow students to work on the same tasks. In addition to the effort to cope with the demands placed on teaching, teachers must also try to find the time to carry out administrative work related to teaching (cf. Ahlgren & Gillander-Gådin, 2011). Accordingly, it is possible to reason that these teachers are in a difficult working situation.

4.2 Teaching students how the democratic society in Sweden works

Through education, refugee students can gain insight into what is considered important to the citizens of the new country, thereby making it easier for them to become integrated into society (Reddick & Sadler, 2019). The teachers' stories show that the way to gain knowledge about what is important for a democratic society is complex. The complexity appears to be rooted in the diverse student base, where there are both students who know about the foundation of Swedish values (a common collective ethical foundation) and accept it and students who must be taught how democracy in Sweden works. Eva says,

Refugee students are also different, of course. Some have such values that do not conflict with Swedish values, while some others have difficulty accepting the values we have in Sweden. One challenge for me is to teach those [who do not accept Swedish values] about the new Swedish society, how Swedish society works, that in Sweden we accept homosexuals, and that is how it is, and what you think yourself you keep to yourself. You don't just have to speak up for someone to feel offended.

Karin also talks about the conversations about democracy and equality between men and women with her students:

When I talk to my [refugee] students, they say that they also want a similar Swedish democracy in their own home countries. They say it is wonderful that women have power here, and Swedish government consists mostly of women. [...] When we talk about equality between men and women, there is always someone who doesn't agree. There is always someone who thinks that men are smarter than women, and they must have higher wages than their wives to support them, but most of the time, their classmates [other refugees] even get angry at them and protest against them.

Teaching the topic of democracy in Sweden reappears in Mats stories. Mats, who teaches social studies, says that he teaches about human rights – that homosexuality is accepted in Sweden and no one is allowed to be offended due to their sexual orientation. He teaches about the Swedish society and how it is constituted, and he meets the students concerns.

There are also students who find it difficult to accept the values we have in Sweden. There are sometimes strong reactions when we, for example, discuss gender equality, that in some religions, a man can wear swimming trunks and swim while his daughter cannot even attend swimming lessons at school. I tend to be a little provocative, and I usually take my example, my daughter. She should have the same conditions as anyone, regardless of gender. And then it gets a little difficult for them, and some say “yes, it's clear, it's clear”, but some are not convinced at all.

According to Mats, in the quote above, some students he teaches are not convinced that gender equality is possible or even appropriate, especially when it comes to swimming lessons for girls.

4.3 Teaching students who have a high solidarity with each other

The second theme that emerged in the teachers' stories concerns the high solidarity newly arrived refugee students have with each other. According to LeBrón (2015), solidarity between young people may be due to the coherence that is created among them. Furthermore, race, class, culture, income, religion, language, and political values are also important for cohesion creation (LeBrón, 2015). Common culture and a common language are important for immigrant youths when

choosing friends, and they mainly choose friends from the country they come from (Moskal, 2014). As shown in Karin's stories, the feeling of cohesion exists among newly arrived students:

I notice that the students who are very close friends with each other are also very supportive with each other. For example, someone's headphones had disappeared, they know who has taken them, but no one says anything. They do not gossip, but it is a form of solidarity. Where are his headphones? Nobody says anything. Yes, that's what I say, you say it's wrong to steal [but] isn't there anyone here who can tell who has taken the headphones? No, you won't tell. Nobody wants to be a rat.

The quote above implies there are different groupings among the students, and solidarity exists among the group members. The feeling of cohesion among the students is evident in Mats' story about car fires in the residential area and the fact that none of the students revealed who set the cars on fire.

I heard that there were car fires in the area. They [refugee youths] talk about the car fires. They think it's damn bad. And I also get the feeling that they know exactly who set fire to the cars last night. They speak in their own language, but I understand from their facial expressions that they know about it, but they tell each other to be quiet. And it is possible that the person who set the cars on fire is not even from the school, but they say nothing, and they say nothing to the police either. So it will be an unsolved case.

The feeling of cohesion can lead to solidarity among the students (LeBrón, 2015). The fact that there are students who cannot conform to the school and classroom laws and regulations and that there are students who keep quiet and do not talk is nothing new. Here, it seems that the situation is different. Here, the solidarity between the students can be described based on the context in which they are located. Although the majority of the students care, they also do not reveal who is the thief. Here, it can be about law-abiding, caring, and ambitious expulsion-threatened students feeling a distrust of authorities (including the school) and teachers as authority figures.

4.4 Teaching students who are threatened by the possibility of deportation

The possible notices of deportation these refugee students face create problems for teachers. One problem appears to be about strong feelings of powerlessness, namely, not being able to help students waiting for deportation. These students are withdrawn and worried about their uncertain future. The students who are waiting for a residence permit have a similar situation, which also, in turn, creates a sense of solidarity among them (cf. LeBrón, 2015). The expulsion of a student creates concern among the other students who are waiting for a residence permit. For example, Hanna says,

What is terrible and affects my teaching is when they get deported. It's, of course, terrible. Last week me and a colleague visited a guy awaiting deportation who has been diagnosed with abandonment syndrome. So, of course, it affects you. It is a very strong feeling of powerlessness, and of course, it affects my teaching. It affects my students who are waiting for the Swedish Migration Agency's decision; they may also get deported. There will be some conversations about it and their situation, what happens now that they have been deported. As a teacher, I want to do more, of course, when I see these amazing youths, and I want to change the world for them, but it's not always possible.

As Hanna says, she cannot change the situation for students who have been given a deportation order. She cannot “change the world for them”, which shows how powerless teachers are in this situation. The risk of expulsion creates tension in class – tensions that can be of importance to teachers' teaching work and that can affect students' concentration in class. Karin also talks about students' expulsion decisions and their impact on her teaching:

There were suggestions that the grades teachers give expulsion-threatened refugee students could be a consideration in the decision on whether the refugee student were to stay or be expelled. The proposal didn't go through. But I say I can't be the one to decide who to expel, no, if I write that he is good in school, then he may stay. Thus, I don't want to play God in any way and decide the fate of people. I couldn't do it. So,

at regular intervals, I think I'll change job. I love my profession, but what happens to these individuals, it comes too close.

As I showed in a quote from Eva in the previous section, refugee youths who have not yet received a residence permit but hope to live in Sweden invest in work or study. They focus on building their life in Sweden. In this section, Hanna talks about students who have received an expulsion order. Their expulsion order affects her teaching and students' learning negatively because those who are waiting for a decision on whether or not they will receive a residence permit live in uncertainty and there will be some conversations about those students and their situation in the classroom. Eva's and Hannah's stories reveal that newly arrived refugee youths have enormous potential and they can make a significant positive contribution to the future of Sweden (cf. Rossiter & Rossiter, 2009). The problem that Eva and Hannah highlight is that the uncertainty that these students experience makes them less focused on their studies; instead, they are worried about their uncertain future. From Karin's expression "I don't want to play God" emerges the problem of grading. If grading becomes linked to the students' possibility to stay in Sweden, the state would be imposing a requirement on teachers that sets their professionalism against their compassion.

4.5 Teaching students who create a good mood in the classroom

The teachers' stories about their teaching indicate that all these four teachers are happy to meet and teach these newly arrived refugee students. For example, Eva says that her students are very funny; it is great fun to teach them, and they laugh a lot together. She says,

All my students are boys. They are very funny guys. Although they have an uncertain future, and they don't know if they are going to stay or if they are going to be deported from Sweden, even if they are lonely and have no mom or dad here, they are still happy boys. They joke, and we laugh a lot together. It's great fun to teach these boys.

The quote above shows that the refugee youths in Eva's classroom are happy students who create a good mood in the classroom. This is despite the fact that they have an uncertain future and that they are alone without parents. The other teachers' statements show a similar attitude to teaching these students. For instance, Mats states,

I think, for the most part, it is exciting and interesting to meet these youths and teach them.

Hanna also says that she loves her newly arrived refugee students, and she wants to help them individually in their school assignments because they are not all at the same linguistic level:

I love them. They are linguistically at different levels, but because they are classmates with each other, they work with the same tasks. I would like to be with them and help them perhaps more individually in a task.

On the other hand, Karin expresses that she loves her profession but “thinks” that she “will change job” in the future (as I showed in the previous section). It is important to take into account that she does not want to change her job because she dislikes teaching newly arrived refugee youths; rather, she wants to avoid grading newly arrived refugee youths if it means she will be responsible for them being expelled from Sweden.

5. Discussion

Sweden has a long history of immigration, refugees included. This study focuses on a specific refugee group: newly arrived refugee youths. The knowledge that the teachers in this study contribute with their stories is useful as new refugees continue to come to Sweden and go to Swedish schools. These refugees face a complex situation that combines relief over coming to a safe country with anxiety and uncertainty about the future (e.g. Chase et al., 2020; Herz & Lalander, 2017; Wernesjö, 2020).

The teachers' descriptions indicate that the majority of these refugee youths are ambitious, but the students' life situation places demands on the teachers, not only to help the students to develop their knowledge but also to make them succeed; the students have to meet the knowledge requirements since their possibility to stay in Sweden is dependent on the success of their studies. However, the teachers do not state who is placing these demands on them. As it appears from their stories, it is the teachers themselves who put high demands on their own teaching. The fact

that teachers place increasingly higher demands on themselves to do their utmost is highlighted by Ahlgren and Gillander-Gådin (2011) and Sann (2003). In this context, the expectations that the teachers place on themselves to successfully teach ambitious refugee students create a stressful working situation that influences their teaching work.

The teachers' descriptions show that many of their students are ambitious and want to build their future in Sweden. They plan to study or work and hope to be able to stay and not be deported. Teaching students whose classmates may be expelled, or who themselves may be expelled, can be tiring for teachers. According to Westman and Etzion (1999), the strain can also be spread from one teacher to other teachers, which can influence other teachers' work and their working environment. Lack of teaching experience can be a decisive factor for teacher dropout (Dicke et al., 2014), and having deported youths in their classrooms may create a new teaching situation that many teachers have no experience with. Teaching ambitious students who have language difficulties is another challenge the teachers in this study talk about. Consequently, support from management and colleagues is needed for the teachers to be able to handle these challenges and provide these students with good conditions for success in their vocational education. Following Dicke et al. (2014), I argue that in the absence of support from school management and colleagues, tasks such as teaching students who have language difficulties or teaching students unfamiliar with how the democratic society in Sweden works can be extra work in addition to the planned subject teaching. In addition, the interviewed teachers mention teaching students who are fun and beloved, who create a good mood in the classroom despite the threat of expulsion; this appears to create another challenge for the teachers.

According to the teachers, many refugee youths hope for a democracy similar to the Swedish one in their home countries in the future. Furthermore, most of them appreciate equality between women and men, even if it conflicts with their prejudices and past experiences. However, some of the students find it difficult to accept democratic values, especially gender equality, which poses a challenge for the teachers to meet and respond to these views in a professional way. The teachers' stories reveal that the refugee youths have a great sense of solidarity (cf. Wernesjö, 2014, on group affiliation among unaccompanied youth), and when one of them receives an expulsion order, it can affect the classroom environment and the teaching situation. The teacher descriptions also

indicate that there is a sense of solidarity between these law-abiding, caring, and ambitious students and those who cannot follow the laws and rules of society. This is perhaps some form of resistance that these students show due to their uncertain state of residence in Sweden and the uncertain future that politicians and authorities have created for them; it is also perhaps a way for them to say that they also exist (cf. Lalander & Sernhede, 2011).

Based on Rossiter and Rossiter (2009), I argue that an immigrant youth who comes to Sweden has the potential to make a positive contribution to the future of the country. This potential takes shape through particular processes and can be used when the student is integrated into the community – for example, when the student learns the language, when the student learns how society works, when the student learns how to behave in the community, and so on. Parts of this potential can be formed in school and in the interaction between teachers and students, but it also requires that teachers are provided time to prepare students for integration into society. In addition to teaching their subjects, teachers must teach some of their students how the democratic society in Sweden works. They must also manage the tensions among troubled students when one of them receives an expulsion order. Consequently, teachers find themselves with an increased workload as well as increased work hours. The teachers' increased work hours based on extra tasks can lead to an excessively high level of stress that can affect their teaching work (cf. Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2015).

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2018), the sense of belonging, positive and supportive relationships between teacher colleagues, and adequate teaching hours are among the important factors that make teachers feel satisfied in their teaching profession. Gymnasielagen also seems to have affected teachers' work. In addition to teaching and administrative work, teachers also have to deal with situations where expulsion-threatened students are involved. Since Gymnasielagen offered expulsion-threatened refugee youths the opportunity to stay in Sweden depending on the school grades they receive, the consequence is that teachers deal with the responsibility of "playing God" and deciding the fate of people. While willingness to leave the teaching profession is quite low among teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018), we cannot ignore how the expulsion of students, the fact that some students will no longer be sitting in the classroom the following morning, may affect a teacher's strength to continue being a teacher. Having to "play God" and decide people's

destinies can be disruptive to the peace of mind teachers need in their profession, and this peace of mind seems to be missing from one of the interviewed teachers, who is considering leaving the teaching profession.

The results also show that teaching newly arrived refugee youths, in itself, is not a problem for teachers. The problem is the expulsion threat that hangs over these youths. This threat can become an obstacle for them to learn the language, be integrated into society, and achieve their dreams of becoming doctors and engineers. These consequences of this threat subsequently create an unpleasant work situation for teachers in their teaching. The new Gymnasielagen (Swedish Code of Statutes, 2017) seems to be a factor for the newly arrived refugee youths' future educational visions. Many of them want to be doctors or engineers, but due to the Gymnasielagen, they must find work and support themselves after completing upper secondary education if they want to stay in Sweden. This means that they cannot opt for university education, unlike Swedish citizens or persons with a permanent permit of residence. In other words, not all vocational students have the same conditions for further education, which ultimately creates class differences in society.

6. Conclusions

Goodson and Anstead (2012) recommend that researchers present stories in a context where document analysis, archival research, and other methods enable the triangulation of research data. In this article, I presented four teachers' stories of the teaching situations they find themselves in when teaching newly arrived refugee youths. The study was conducted in a vocational school in a so-called vulnerable area in Sweden in 2018 and 2019, after the wave of refugees of 2015. In the Swedish social and political context, these refugees are sometimes described as having difficulty adapting to Swedish society (cf. Lalander & Raoof, 2016; Wernesjö, 2020). However, many of these youths are willing to educate themselves and have high educational aspirations (Atanasoska & Proyer, 2018; Bunar, 2015; Reddick & Sadler, 2019; Sharif, 2016), but marking them as unaccompanied, separated, and in the long run alone affects their self-esteem, everyday life, and identity (Herz & Lalander, 2017). They are aware of their label as unaccompanied refugees and need to constantly reflect on it and its effect on their lives (Herz & Lalander, 2017). This means that political measures are also needed for these youths to be able to trust authorities more, to feel part of society, and to acquire a sense of ability.

Working with the Swedish language is good, but it is not enough when refugee youths are threatened with expulsion. These youths must first have a secure existence in society, which comes from obtaining a residence permit. The newly arrived refugees who have been granted a residence permit must partake not only in Swedish language courses but also in education on how Swedish society is constituted and on what is expected of them in Swedish society. Through education, we must also work with preventing the conditions that lead to an increased risk of criminal behaviour. For the refugee youths who have been given notice of deportation, their already existing affiliation and loyalty can lead them to becoming members of criminal gangs. These youths may try to overcome the power of the system by resisting (Lalander & Sernhede, 2011), and one way to resist may be to ignore the expulsion decision and hide from the authorities. Although international studies show that crime rates for young immigrants are actually much lower than the public perception of it (Easteal, 1989), we cannot ignore the fact that refugee youths who hide from the deportation decision must in some way support themselves and thus become an easy target for criminal gangs. They also seem to have great solidarity with each other, which may be due to the perception of these youths as potential threats that cannot adapt to Swedish society (cf. Wernesjö, 2020); therefore, they feel they can only trust and receive protection from other immigrants when they have to hide from the deportation decision. The study also shows that the youths want a democracy that is similar to the Swedish democracy in their home countries. However, there are also those who do not believe in democratic values, but those students are most often opposed by their classmates.

Teaching refugee students who live with the frustration of being repeatedly labelled as unaccompanied (Herz & Lalander, 2017), have received a deportation order, or have classmates that may be expelled has changed the teachers' work. A classroom environment with newly arrived refugee students who have an uncertain residence situation is sensitive, and the teaching is strongly affected when someone receives an expulsion decision. Since this study focuses on the stories of four teachers, I cannot generalise on how the newly arrived refugee youths can influence teachers' work. However, the study contributes with knowledge on some teachers' work with newly arrived refugee youths at a vocational high school located in a so-called vulnerable area in Sweden, and it suggests that being a teacher is no longer only about teaching the subjects or working with

administration and documentation. In the stories analysed here, the teachers have to deal with teaching situations where their students' lives and deaths are involved because they are refugees threatened by expulsion.

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