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IN THE TENSION FIELD BETWEEN POLITICS, PRACTICE AND SCIENCE

Supervision of Degree Papers in the School of Teacher Education
at Halmstad University, Sweden

Anders Persson

HÖGSKOLAN I HALMSTAD
För utveckling av verksamhet, produkter och livskvalitet.

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Halmstad februari 2009

Anders Persson
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Forskning om utbildning och lärande inom lärarutbildningen i Halmstad

In the tension field between politics, practice and science

– supervision of degree papers in the School of Teacher Education at Halmstad University, Sweden

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Introduction

In the teacher education programme at Halmstad University, Sweden, the supervision and examination of the students' degree papers recently changed. Groups of students are now supervised by supervisor pairs, who in turn are part of a team that is coached by a colleague. The examination of the degree papers has also changed, in that the examination is conducted by someone outside the supervising team. Moreover, new evaluation criteria have been developed. These new criteria have sharpened the scientific requirements and clarified the requirements regarding its relevance to teaching practice. Finally, teachers, principals and other actors in preschools, primary schools and secondary schools have been engaged as co-reflectors whose role is to provide collegial comments on the education students' theses.

The present text[1] is primarily intended to describe this new approach to supervising and examining degree theses. A secondary intention is to critically reflect on supervision and examination in the light of the unusually tension-filled character of the teacher education program, and of its unique academic culture.[2]

The complex, politicized and tension-filled teacher education program

Under the new teacher education program that was introduced in Sweden in 2001, some ten previous teacher education programs were supplanted by a single teaching degree program. The teacher education program is therefore a complex program consisting of a "general" area of study that is mandatory for all teaching students, and a number of subject-focused areas, subject specializations, field-based instruction and courses on pedagogy relating to particular subjects.[3] The latter two involve moving beyond the traditional distinctions between theory and practice and between subject area and practical pedagogy.

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[1] This text has been published in Swedish in Kroksmark & Åberg 2007a and in Norwegian in Kroksmark & Åberg 2007b.

[2] In other words, it is not a matter of research-based, but rather experience-based text, with analytical elements. It is important to note here that the transition to group supervision was monitored by an evaluator, Lars-Olof Hilding, who regularly reported his evaluation results to me and submitted a written report after the first term using the new approach, which I have drawn on here.

[3] There are variations in how different academic institutions actually organize the teacher education program; however, these are not taken into consideration.

The scope of the teacher education program varies from seven to eleven terms, depending on whether it qualifies students for preschool teacher employment and employment in the lower primary school grades, or employment in higher primary grades and secondary school. The variation in the length of the program is essentially related to the varying degrees to which the program focuses on a particular school subject. The general area of study is basically the same for all students, whereas the subject-focused parts vary according to the students' individual selections. Essentially, the students can combine the subjects in which they are interested, regardless of demand on the labor market. This is a problem, which presumably can be alleviated through active academic counseling.

The complexity of the program also stems from the fact that it brings together several fields of study. Not only is instruction given in several fields in the various subject-focused streams and specializations, but also the general area of study, common for all students, consists of instruction that integrates various scientific disciplines. Moreover, the emphasis the new teacher training program places on the pedagogy of particular subjects also contributes to the complexity, since subject-area pedagogy presupposes a sort of integration of subject, pedagogy and praxis.

Lastly, concerning the complexity of the teacher education program, the changes in the directorship of the school instituted in the beginning of the 1990s meant replacing a more unified government control with a system involving several controlling actors. In official contexts, the steering system is nowadays described such that the government formulates objectives and follows up its objectives, while the municipalities are the responsible school authorities.[4] The teacher education program is a state-government responsibility, and schools are a municipal-government responsibility, therefore the program must be more flexible, since the way in which schools are organized and run varies from municipality to municipality. The considerable number of private schools established in the past 15 years adds further

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[4] The simplified and frequently encountered description of the change in the steering system that reads "from rule-based steering to goal-based steering" can be criticized, although I shall not do so here. I do believe, however, that the changing of the steering system is better described as a progression from bureaucratic steering based on rules to steering based on financial norms. Theoretically, the scope for action has increased at lower levels of the school system as a result of steering by goals – however, it is an empirical question whether this will actually be the case, particularly as resource reductions and financial norms relating to balancing the budget have restricted the scope for action.

complexity. At the same time, the state has not ignored the opportunity to try to control the municipally run schools using the few means of control remaining at its disposal after school responsibility was downloaded to the municipalities in 1991. One of these means of control is, in fact, teacher education: "State government control of teacher education is important given the requirement in the Schools Act of formal education for teachers of preschool classes, regular compulsory school and adult education," as it is expressed in the government's bill on the new teacher education (Regeringens proposition 1999/2000:135: 11). Moreover, the state exerts financial control over schools – for example, through special subsidies, which, combined with various municipal subsidies, produce a degree of inconsistency in school development, which also affects teacher education via field-based instruction.

Teacher education is not only a complex program of study, it is also unusually politicized. No other degree program receives as much attention in political contexts and the media as teacher education currently does. An article about shortcomings in schools and/or teacher education on the commentary page of the opinion-leading Swedish daily Dagens Nyheter not only sends signals to all teacher education programs in the country but is also a call to action. This is related to the fact that in our society school is considered both a means by which to solve all manner of societal problems and the medium by which to further people's careers, social development and learning. Considering, also, that since the beginning of the 1990s, several political battles have been fought about schools – concerning, for example, the proper degree of freedom for the so-called free schools (private schools), and grading and discipline in schools – such articles are not unusual. The structure of the school system has also changed radically as a result of the downloading of school responsibility to the municipalities, and the increased municipal influence has increased the number of political actors who can make decisions; such decisions are often contradictory and have a direct bearing on school operations. For teacher education, this implies that a rather rough road, not found in most other tertiary education programs, is to be expected. For example, the content of the teacher education program is subject to sudden political demands, as recently arose in connection with the teaching of reading and writing and with grade assignment. Moreover, teacher education, like schools themselves, tends always to become caught up in a crisis of legitimacy, because education has become a sort of universal response to various individual, organizational and societal problems, while many actors have extremely high expectations for education. The difference between the actual capacity of schools and the educational system to solve problems, and the level of expectation of the community at large, becomes critical for

the duration of the legitimacy crisis. Another possible expression of a legitimacy crisis is that teacher education is considered to be out of step with societal trends, or not in line with the expectations of actors that enjoy strong public support. Over the past 10–15 years, in the dynamic tension between the concept of the school as problem solver and high expectations, schools have mainly come into the spotlight for their shortcomings. This has ramifications for teacher education. No doubt it has had an adverse impact on the status of the program.

Not only is teacher education complex and exceptionally politicized, it also embodies (perhaps for these very reasons) a number of tensions. One such area of tension involves, on the one hand, the idea that teacher education is supposed to prepare its students to teach in nationally accredited schools and on the other, a stress on individualization and the actual impact of different variables (class, gender, ethnicity and regional circumstances, to name but a few). Another involves the relative freedom of education students to design their own course of study versus labor market demand for teachers with certain subject combinations. Probably, however, the area of tension that most affects teacher education on a daily basis is that between a scientific approach, teaching praxis and more or less visionary political objectives concerning the development of schools and the role of the teacher. The government bill on teacher education states as follows:

> The role of teacher education is to be both a university-level degree program and a professional training program, and to be a vehicle through which the government may achieve its objectives as regards preschool, compulsory school and adult education. As a result, teacher education is subject to the requirements of having a scientific basis, preparing the students for their future professional role, and research. To satisfy the requirement of being a vehicle for government control, teacher education must provide future teachers with such knowledge and skills that enable them to carry out their societal function (Regeringens proposition 1999/2000:135: 16).

Against this background, teacher education is governed, on the one hand, by the general aims of the Higher Education Act, and, more specifically, by the regulations concerning degree programs in the Higher Education Ordinance. The eighth and ninth paragraphs of the Higher Education Act promotes what can be called a scientific approach, which implies that university-level education is to be based on a scientific form of knowledge described in terms such as "independent" and "critical assessment," "independent problem formulation" and "problem resolution." The regulations concerning degree programs in the Higher Education

Ordinance set forth, on the other hand, the specific aims of the education degree (to which I shall return).

Initially, we can safely say that the regulation concerning degree programs has had a strongly politicizing effect on teacher education. It is first stipulated that the knowledge that qualifies a candidate for an education degree is what is required to realize the aims of compulsory education. There could be no problem with this aim attached to teacher education if the aims had been non-ambiguous – however, the situation is almost the reverse: the aims of school/compulsory education are many, and are at times contradictory – some are expressed in written form, while others derive from the position of school as a special institution in society and are therefore often unwritten. Moreover, in a recent evaluation by the National Agency for Education (Skolverket 2004:114f), the Agency speaks of a "goal overload," while education researchers since at least the 1970s have shown that compulsory education is assigned several aims that are difficult to combine – from Halsey (1980), who likened compulsory education to a trash can into which politicians dump society's most intractable problems; to Isling (1984), who spoke about the tension between equal socialization and unequal qualifications; to Gesser (1985), who distinguishes between the reality level of the education system ("where whatever happens happens" 1985:41)) and a reform level on which changes are implemented and sometimes fail to impact the reality level much; to Lindensjö & Lundgren's (2000) distinction between the arena of formulation and the arena of realization. The degree program regulation ignores, however, the tensions between the various aims imposed on schools.[5] This becomes even clearer in the more specific objectives for teacher education that are contained in the degree program regulations, which stipulate that the newly graduated teacher shall contribute to the dissemination and establishment of society's basic values, counter discrimination and promote equality.

Degree work in the teacher education program

In the daily reality of the teacher education program, the fields of tension referred to above appear as concrete problems that must be resolved in order for the program to appear legitimate from various points of view and in relation to various actors. Against this background, the program can be neither narrowly visionary (and thus only represent school in

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[5] Remarkably, the aim of governing the entire education system by goals, which is currently affecting higher education through the Bologne process, has resulted in a belief that these tensions have suddenly disappeared.

the way that at least some political decision-makers say they want school to be in the future), simply practical (and thus only prepare students for the way things are), nor exclusively scientific and problem-oriented (and thus restricted to a critical and detached attitude towards visions and practice). Regardless of whether it is possible or not, teacher education has to try to be all of these things simultaneously. This applies also to the degree paper.

In the teacher education program at Halmstad, we decided to reorganize our method of supervising and examining students' degree theses in accordance with the model I developed previously at the Department of Sociology at Lund University (Persson & Andersson, 2002). The starting point there was that throughput, in terms of undergraduate and graduate thesis papers in sociology, was extremely low, and fewer than 10% of the papers were approved within the period stipulated in the curriculum. On the other hand, the scientific quality of the papers was high. As was often pointed out, although not in writing, the whole system of essay writing focused on gearing essays so as to ensure students' admittance to postgraduate studies, even though many students did not have that as their goal. Nevertheless, supervisors and examiners were still known to say that "a good essay takes a long time to write," thereby implying that the ten weeks allotted in the curriculum was too little time. Non-scientific aspects of quality were subordinated. A special culture had developed around essay writing – a freedom-promoting, individualistic culture that prioritized the individual's own choices, minimizing the effect of various factors that might restrict such choices.

The Lund model

The goal of the development project carried out in Lund was to increase throughput without lowering scientific quality. This was to be accomplished through reorganization of the system of student supervision into one of group supervision, redefining of the supervisors as a team led by a coach, and finally, restructuring the supervision process to be considerably more goal-focused and anchored in the curriculum rather than in students' and supervisors' own choices. It was presumed that this would also gradually lead to cultural transformation.

The result, after one term of the new style of supervision, was that throughput increased sharply (to over 50% of papers completed within the time prescribed by the curriculum), while the level of scientific quality was essentially maintained. This result remained unchanged in the following term. On the surface, a new culture seemed to be taking shape. In

the following table, this new culture is referred to as "Z" and it is compared with two other supervision cultures.

	X	Y	Z
Students freely choose essay topic?	No	Yes	Yes
Students freely choose supervisor?	No	Yes	No
Supervisors freely choose students?	No	Yes	No
Essay plan required?	Yes	No	Yes
Deadlines set?	Yes	No	Yes
Examiner and supervisor are the same person?	Yes	No	No

Figure 1: Supervision cultures.

The Y culture, previously referred to as the freedom–individualistic culture, is based on the individual's choices carried out both by the student and the supervisor. It is results-oriented and involves no overarching pedagogical control of the students' work process. It encompasses a scientific evaluation system, which means that the examination is conducted by someone outside the supervising team, a more equitable system than its opposite. The X culture, on the other hand, was reflected in a survey I conducted in 1996 on the methods of organizing essay writing used in 17 basic course programs offered by the Faculty of Social Sciences of Lund University (Persson 1996). It is based on a restriction of choices, requirements on students' work process, and a streamlining of the evaluation process whereby the supervisor and the examiner are the same person. The X culture is more of a factory-type model. Consequently, Y and X are opposites. The Z culture is a sort of synthesis, or at least a blend, of the other two.

The active means by which to accomplish the changes mentioned were group supervision of students and coaching of supervisors. The students were supervised in groups representing approximately seven essays each. The supervision was thus given the format of a course – however, there were resources available to permit some individual supervision. The group supervision was partly a matter of guiding the students' writing of their essays and partly of fostering a group process whereby each student could obtain and provide support, as well as a group dynamic focused on producing an essay of good quality within the time constraints

imposed by the curriculum. In a parallel process, supervisors were coached by a specially appointed team leader. Since most of the supervisors had no prior experience of group supervision, the idea was that the coach would guide them in such a way that they could then proceed in approximately the same manner with their own student groups – that is, learning by doing. The central aspect of group supervision and coaching was to achieve a constructive and trusting group atmosphere, whereby individual participants would be able to ask for and obtain support from the group (the details of the approach are described in Andersson & Persson 2002).

When a system of individual supervision is replaced by one of group supervision, both the student role and the supervisor role change. The relationships become more complex. In the individual supervision situation, the relationship is typically one between an older, more knowledgeable expert and a younger student with less knowledge of the subject. The relationship should be mutual and clearly defined in the sense that the student should take responsibility for his or her own learning and the supervisor should view his or her role as pedagogical. The relationship can deteriorate in various ways, however, along a scale where one end represents a starkly power-based relationship, with the supervisor in charge and the student subordinated, and the other end a "service-based relationship," with the supervisor delivering knowledge and the student consuming it. The relationship can also change in other ways with adverse effects. With group supervision, on the other hand, relationships are formed between the supervisor and the group, between the supervisor and the individual students, between individual students, and between individual students and the supervision group. In this network of relationships, the supervisor is expected to create the conditions for a constructive group atmosphere, a responsibility that is shared by the students, to ensure that they derive the maximum benefit from the group supervision. Moreover, the supervisor should de-emphasize his or her role somewhat, to allow students to also play an active role in the group. The idea behind group supervision is not just to create a series of lessons, but rather for the group to become a resource, which it can be if the individual students contribute to the supervision and share the responsibility for the group atmosphere. Of course, this entails creating the conditions whereby this can be achieved.

The relationships of the coach group are essentially analogous to those of the supervision group – however, they can be complicated by the fact that the members of the coach group are part of a hierarchic and competitive system in which colleagues who share the same office

space can in fact be involved in decades-long quarrels. (For more on this, see Ehn & Löfgren 2004.) This can place limits on the likelihood of cooperation. On the other hand, cooperation that succeeds against all odds yields a special satisfaction that can be attractive in itself. The university or college environment makes special demands on the person who assumes the role of coach. The coach's position in the hierarchy and relationships with the supervisors who are to be coached can affect the likelihood of success. There is good reason to ask who the academic staff allows to be the coach and why they do so. Moreover, it is perhaps not always the most suitable person who dares to accept the challenge. So, the team leader should always be chosen with care. In my experience, it makes things easier if the person who is to be the coach is both well-informed and an outsider.

Group supervision, with the goal of increasing throughput while maintaining scientific quality, requires the group supervisors to reflect on what should be considered good quality. The evaluation system falters in that there is essentially no limit to how good essays may be, but there is a limit to how poor they may be. When we upgrade the time factor and simultaneously take the students' varying reasons for their studies seriously, particularly when we realize that not all students dream of taking a PhD in the future and sometimes have good ideas about the applicability of the subject in non-academic contexts, we are forced to reflect on what the right quality is and ask ourselves questions such as the following: Quality in relation to what? To the scientific community? To society at large? To both? Working life? Life? Everything?

Translation to the teacher education program at Halmstad

The idea of coaching and group supervision traveled with me to the teacher education program at Halmstad University, in conjunction with my appointment as guest professor there in 2005. It was then necessary to translate the idea to the specific conditions that characterize teacher education, which I have discussed at length above, and to allow it to be colored to some degree by the debate on teacher education that was then taking place against the background of the evaluation of the teacher education programs, conducted by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education in 2004.

The differences between studies in sociology at Lund University and the teacher program at Halmstad University are significant. The sociology courses are not nearly as complex as the

teacher education courses, as the latter demand considerably more in terms of coordination from both the students and the course administrators. In terms of the work involved, sociology courses can be likened to an organization that can be delimited from its environment and governed in a relatively one-dimensional manner. Teacher education is more like a network that reaches across many boundaries, such as those between subjects, between theory and practice, and between universities and colleges, on the one hand, and schools, on the other. The various actors in the sociology courses generally approach the courses from a scientific perspective, whereas teacher education, as mentioned previously, is expected to be scientific, prepare students for a career, and provide a vehicle by which to realize more or less visionary political aims. The sociology teachers are scientifically qualified – that is, all those who were group supervisors in the first term of the development project described above are either associate or full professors. In this respect, too, in the teacher education program, the situation is more complex: traditionally, the subject-focused instruction has had more scientifically qualified personnel, whereas it has been more difficult for the practical pedagogical instruction to maintain the formal scientific level. Current teacher education programs exhibit a tendency toward a similar division between subjects, on the one hand, and general education, on the other. Another palpable difference is the controlling of content, which in the case of sociology has been relegated entirely to the scientific community within the framework of the Higher Education Ordinance. Teacher education, on the other hand, is subject to obvious political control through the degree regulation of the Higher Education Ordinance and more recently, increasingly, by the agency of the media.

However, as explained previously, political control over teacher education is exerted primarily through the degree regulation. The degree regulation specified the goals of 42 professional degrees. Of these, 28 can be defined as relating to the treatment of human beings, or rather, to relationship-focused professions, as they are practiced in relation to what is sometimes referred to as "clients." (Regarding such professions, see Hasenfeld 1983, Persson 2006.) The character of the goals varies: some involve the actual carrying out of the profession, others convey the goals of the future responsible authority, while still others are associated with ethics, and in one case – teacher education – it is prescribed that the student must be able to "…convey and inspire support for the basic values of society and democracy." Half of the relationship-focused professions have educational goals associated with

professional ethics – although not teacher education[6] and not law or social worker education programs, either. Occupations that are more about dealing with things than working with clients – such as engineering – have neither ethical goals nor goals related to basic values, which, regarding ethical goals at least, would seem remarkable.

In other words, it is only teacher education that is expected to "convey the basic values of society and democracy" to the students. This is no accident, but rather deliberate control of schools and, ultimately, of schoolchildren. This is in turn related to the fact that everyone goes to school, which, in this particular respect, is an interface between the government and the child, in which the government has and takes advantage of the opportunity to politically foster all children and to exert power in a number of other respects (Persson 2003). The bill on the new teacher education program makes this quite clear:

Concerning basic values, integration and diversity issues should be incorporated in all of the areas of instruction of the teacher education program. Teachers must prepare schoolchildren for life in a democratic, equal-opportunity and multicultural society. (Government Bill 1999/2000:135: 17)

Depending on how key concepts such as "democracy" are defined, and on how already achieved goals – as regards equality, for example – are evaluated, teacher education is apparently expected to prepare its students for a society that either does not exist, or exists only in part. In certain respects, then, teacher education is an education for nothingness – to invoke Sartre's (1984) distinction between being and nothingness: teacher education educates in part for something that does not yet exist. Such political, rhetorical education can be difficult to combine with a scientific approach.

To summarize the foregoing discussion, teacher education involves considerably more tensions than individual courses in various subjects, and probably also more tensions than other degree programs. This is also confirmed by current public debate on teacher education, of which the 2004 evaluation of the country's teacher education programs by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education may serve as an illustration: the evaluation revealed shortcomings in scientific quality as well as in praxis basis. The degree of freedom students

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[6] This refers to the degree regulation 2006.

were allowed was considered too great, and the academic requirements too low (Högskoleverket 2005). This became significant for the development of our approach to supervising teaching students' degree papers.

Coaching, group supervision, examination and co-reflection

The development work in the teacher education program came to apply to supervision and examination. The supervision was organized in the same way as in Lund, with the difference that the supervisors worked in pairs, each pair being responsible for a student group representing around seven degree papers. The reason for this was that not all supervisors had a PhD, so we formed pairs in which at least one person did. The result of this approach was that all students who were writing a degree paper received supervision from a supervisor who had a doctorate. It turned out, however, that pair supervision was also preferable because complementary subject expertise and supervisory competence are usually required. The supervision groups are also significantly larger than in Lund, since many of the students in the teacher education program write their degree paper in pairs. A supervision group can consist of about 15 students, making the groups socially more complex – which is another argument for pair supervision. Otherwise, we proceeded basically according to the Lund model, with scheduled meetings with the student groups and parallel coaching of the supervisors, with me acting as coach.

As mentioned, in Lund, the goal was to increase throughput without sacrificing the scientific quality of the papers. In Halmstad, throughput was close to 100%, whereas the scientific quality of the degree papers varied greatly. The goal here, then, was to achieve a more consistent and generally higher scientific quality, and new evaluation criteria, entailing more stringent requirements, were formulated. The result, not unexpectedly, was that throughput declined, with approximately 70% of degree papers achieving pass or pass with distinction within the stipulated time frame. Apart from scientific criteria, an evaluation criterion was formulated regarding the pedagogical implications of the paper and a criterion concerning occupational relevance. The examination was organized in the form of seminars in which the supervisor pair acted as external examiners for a supervision group other than their own. The papers dealt with in the seminars were "evaluatable degree papers." Consequently, the preliminary triage was done by the supervisors prior to the seminar, and manuscripts found ineligible for evaluation were returned to the authors to be reworked. Following the seminar,

evaluatable manuscripts could be given a pass with distinction, pass or fail. The reasons for the grade assigned were given by the examiners in writing, and if the work received a "fail," the authors were instructed to work more on their paper and the papers were evaluated once more. In cases of disagreement on grades between supervisors and examiners, the coach intervened as a third party in his capacity as lead examiner.

Parallel to this new method of supervision, we developed collaboration with the municipalities in which the students underwent their field-based instruction. On a trial basis, some 20 teachers, principals and others from the municipal school and education administration were engaged to serve as "co-reflectors." The assignment of these co-reflectors was to read the teaching students' degree papers (they were paid by the municipalities for doing so) and provide opinions as to the relevance of the papers to the teaching occupation and school operation. The trial turned out very well and was made permanent as of the 2006 winter–spring term. It should be stressed that the co-reflectors did not set grades – rather, they shared their views in a spirit of collegial cooperation, views that may prove valuable in the students' future careers. In teacher education, the co-reflectors' views are also used as a type of quality instrument to obtain indications of the quality of the instruction as regards relevance to the teaching profession and school operation.

Nestlings, theory resisters and quacks in the culture of teacher education

As the foregoing discussion makes clear, there was opposition in Lund between the new approach involving group supervision and coaching, and the culture that prevailed in the department and in the lecture halls. Unquestionably, the freedom–individualistic culture was an obstacle to the kind of cooperation required for group supervision and coaching. The new approach entailed restricting students' freedom of choice in certain respects, such as their choice of supervisor – and preserving freedom of choice in other respects. The somewhat elitist orientation – that is, allowing the smaller number of students who were planning to proceed to research education to set the standard for the grading of papers – was also difficult to combine with the notion that a majority would be able to produce a paper and do so within the prescribed time frame. What was the situation, then, in the teacher education program?

In the evaluation of group supervision in teacher education (Hilding 2006) carried out at the same time as the new approach was implemented, there was a fair amount of information

about the students that can be used as a type of cultural indicator. More than 70% of the students are female, and the average age is 32. Only 6% of the students have a country of origin other than Sweden. A full 32% of the group come from homes in which the parents' highest level of education is primary school, while, for 30% of the group, the educational background is university or college. In other words, the student group is dominated by women and ethnic Swedes, has a relatively high average age and a large proportion of people from a non-academic background. The evaluation also shows that 45% of the students have no experience of university or college studies prior to the teacher education program and that over 30% have no prior experience of writing essays, etc., at the university level.

If we consider the academic culture of teacher education, it is less clearly defined than culture Y at Lund. This is partly due to the fact that there is significantly greater variation among the students as regards the reasons for their enrolment and their background. We can assume there is a social differentiation of students that partly reflects the variations in the length of the various streams of the teacher education program – however, I am not able to substantiate this with figures for the student group in question. In any event, the various parts of the teacher education program have different academic cultures. For example, there are differences between the area of individual subjects and the area of general education. There are also differences between subjects (such as natural sciences and social sciences). The following discussion applies particularly to the area of general education, since the degree paper falls within that part of the teacher education program, and students are brought together there. This is likely a strong contributing factor behind the absence, in this area of the program, of common study habits, reasons for enrolling in the program, structures of meaning, and other parameters that characterize what we call "culture." When we try to establish a more scientific culture in teacher education studies, however, we encounter a certain degree of friction, revealing certain cultural indicators that should probably be considered central.

The evaluation of the teacher education program carried out by the Agency for Higher Education in 2004 refers to interviews with students who talk about a lax study culture in the teacher education program. This depends of course on who is queried – however, in my experience, there is some truth to this as regards the area of general education, with the proviso that of course this must not be extended into a generalization about all courses. The talk of a "lax study culture" usually derives from the fact that the de facto examination format has a free character – something that, all things considered, is surely preferable from a

pedagogical point of view. The success of such an exam format requires, however, that the student take a great deal of personal responsibility for his or her learning. A student who for various reasons is unable to take such responsibility may be able to slink through the program without much effort, which can lower the morale of the entire student cohort. This was confirmed, for example, by the complaints I heard from certain members of the student cohorts when the requirements were raised in conjunction with the new form of supervision and evaluation of degree papers. The complaints were often expressed in group situations, where students who do take responsibility for their own learning and apply themselves remained silent. In one-on-one situations, however, these students often praised the efforts to raise the requirements.

There are of course many reasons for the development of a lax study culture. It is partly due to various factors that dilute students' personal responsibility for their own learning. One general factor, which relates not only to teacher education, is the trend towards mass instruction (regarding the "mass university," see Persson 1998) – particularly if there is a simultaneous lack of real alternatives to education for the students and studies tend to be a negative choice, a way to kill time while waiting for something better (an indication of this is the relatively high unemployment among university graduates, as shown by the labor market statistics published by the academics' union, SACO). Presumably, a weak or unfocused desire to study reduces students' sense of responsibility for their own learning. Another factor that may be significant is the instrumental and consumerist attitude towards knowledge that is proliferating among students (and others) in late or postmodern societies. For this reason, Ritzer (1998) refers to current institutions of higher education as "McUniversities," since education and knowledge are consumed there in a way that is not essentially different from the consumption of hamburgers. According to Ritzer, students view themselves as customers, and knowledge has become a product. In Sweden, the idea of the student as customer is expressed in the quality assurance literature of many universities and colleges, which refer to their desire to place the student, rather than his or her learning, in the centre. However, this is not unique to teacher education, but rather an expression of general trends that can discourage any students from taking personal responsibility for their own learning. Part of the problem is that teacher education represents a more reliable route to employment than many other programs, as shown by a report on students' establishment in the labor market (Högskoleverket 2006). So the weak or unfocused desire to pursue study that we observe in

some students is presumably not related to unemployment. It is more likely the anticipated future employment that weakens their interest in certain parts of the study program.

Teacher education studies also involve certain circumstances that dilute the individual's responsibility for his or her own learning. One such circumstance involves the structure of the new teacher education program, which, as has been mentioned, is complex and simultaneously based on the opportunity for students to design their own course of study by selecting various subject combinations. In order for the student to make enlightened choices – choices that will not lead to a teaching degree that, in terms of its special subjects, does not match existing teaching positions in the schools – a steady stream of information is needed. Given this background, it is perhaps not surprising that we see the development of something that can perhaps be called the "nestling syndrome": the student, like a nestling, demands to be fed – information in this case. The expressions "I have not received any information" and "I have not been taught that" are often heard in teacher education. These expressions indicate that some students cannot, or do not care to, take the responsibility demanded by the new complex and partially self-designed teacher education program. Naturally, the reasons for this nestling syndrome may also be related to other characteristics of teacher education studies, such as the tendency to infantilize the students that Emsheimer (2000) claims is typical of the organization of such studies. The complexity of teacher education studies and difficulty in surveying the entire program probably also explain in part why some teachers are often heard to say that they have not received information, either, even though they are presumably quite capable of obtaining it.

Personal responsibility for one's own learning tends also to be denied by political injunctions regarding the content of teacher education studies, which may be imposed on short notice. Course curricula – particularly in the area of general education – contain many goals that are the result of such injunctions. They may involve diversity, equality, bullying, and other issues that have at some time been the focus of public opinion. Objectively speaking, there is of course nothing wrong with that in that it involves extremely important issues – however, there is a risk that teacher education courses could become a series of politically correct snippets based on whatever happens to be the issue of the day, and therefore difficult to meld into an integrated whole. In addition, if the people who are learning – or those doing the teaching – cannot see the larger picture, there is a risk of the instruction deteriorating into a "sausage factory" focused on meeting external expectations rather than maintaining educational quality.

In this respect, it must be stressed that no degree program is ever perfect or complete; the program is always a process in transformation, and the glue that holds the process together is the students' personal responsibility for their learning, and the teachers' pedagogical ability.

As previously mentioned, there is a tendency to dilute students' personal responsibility for their own learning, which becomes even more apparent when we examine the scientific versus the employment-preparation aspects of the teacher education program. Moreover, I believe I see tendencies toward improper use of teachers' expertise in teacher education studies. More about that will follow.

I am of the opinion that theory and practice are based on two distinct types of knowledge that cannot be fully integrated. The relationship between them, however, can be described by the diagram in figure 2:
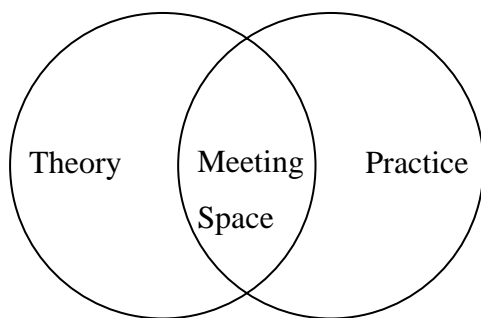
Figure 2: Theory and practice

Analytically, we can imagine two types of knowledge, called "theory" and "practice." Each of them has a particular dynamic and they cannot be completely merged – however, they can be more or less integrated. This usually involves creating applications and reflecting on one side or the other. In the figure, such integration is called "Meeting space." In many courses of study that involve preparation for employment, theory and practice are almost completely segregated. In teacher education studies, this segregation has at times become cemented in that the studies involve an academic component, for which instruction is provided by scientifically qualified personnel, and a practical, pedagogical component, for which instruction is provided by more professional experienced personnel. The new teacher education program involves two distinct encounters between theory and practice: subject-specific instruction that raises and attempts to answer questions on how, when and why a subject should be taught in schools, and field-based instruction, which replaces the earlier

practice teaching. Field-based instruction is meant to be a more reflective activity than immediate practice in the profession. The area of general education has a more defined objective than subject-specific studies to consistently integrate scientific reflection and practical professional activity.

In my experience, students in teacher education studies are highly motivated regarding learning that is immediately connected with the teaching profession, whereas many are less interested in scientific theory and reflection. To return to the above figure, these students shift the practice circle to the right and thus reduce the size of the space in which theory and practice meet – possibly, they allow theory and practice to meet entirely on the terms of practice. In other words, a sort of practical imbalance arises. The present teacher education program has an unclear orientation vis-à-vis teaching practice – given its goal of modernizing schools, it is, again, in some sense, an education for nothingness. Consequently, it is primarily the students, and sometimes the instructors of their field-based instruction, who become the exponents of a teacher education that is more firmly based on school operations. Questions about how things are done – about method, teaching tips and the like – are in my opinion particularly relevant, but seem not to be really permitted in our current teacher education programs, which is why students who ask for such information can encounter various diversionary tactics from their own teachers. This is partly because teacher education studies have an explicitly modernizing attitude towards school operations. It would seem, therefore, that the employment preparation is not allowed to include the induction of future teachers into school cultures that are considered by political decision-makers and government agencies to be sluggish, not promoting change, conservative, etc. In tone-setting school administration circles and certain scientific circles, the concept of school culture has come to be defined, in a manner that is hardly scientific, as a type of general slowness (regarding school culture, see Andersson et al 2003; Persson et al 2005) and not merely a sluggishness (in the form of resistance, for example) that creates problems for those who exert political control over schools.

The lack of a reflection of educational praxis that characterizes teacher education studies, and the requirement that they must also be scientific, can in the day-to-day reality of teacher education studies cause students to develop a resistance to theory. These students often judge the usefulness of teacher education studies from an employment perspective. Moreover, the scientific aspects often lack relevance and an apparent role in the practice of the profession,

which is sometimes the way it should be. When resistance to theory becomes obtrusive in a day-to-day perspective, the teachers risk being transformed into "quacks" in that the students, due to their resistance to theory, often ask their teachers to act in ways for which they are unqualified and that require a solid foundation in the teaching praxis. There are, however, some more scientifically minded teachers in teacher education studies who actually overstress theory at the expense of practice. To return to the figure above, the theory circle moves to the far left and reduces the meeting space, but from the opposite direction compared with the theory resisters. This results in theoretical imbalance. These teachers become quacks in the instant they cannot resist the constant demands of the theory-resisting students for applied theory, and cast themselves into the practice field in a manner that is hardly professional. Moreover, this is not unique to teacher education studies. The same risk exists in several employment-oriented academic programs, such as the human resources and working life program; I myself once experienced this, as a teacher, and have also written about it (Persson 1996). However, teachers in teacher education studies can become quacks in a different way – for example, when they are forced to teach courses concerning scientific methodology when they lack sufficient scientific expertise. This occurs in teacher education programs when there is a shortage of scientifically qualified personnel.

I readily concede that the cultural fragments I have discussed here – the nestling syndrome, theory resistance and quackery – are partly a result of my academic perspective. In another perspective, as Gunnar Handal has pointed out to me, the nestlings' hunger could be construed as a hunger for knowledge, the resistance to theory as a praxis bias that is appropriate for teacher education, and the "quackery" as a form of helplessness. While the perspective employed is critical for how these phenomena are perceived, and there are, moreover, palpable cultural variations in teacher education programs, the focus of many students on employment preparation is nevertheless a prominent cultural element. The scientific culture within the general education area of the program would also appear to be weak, at least in my experience. This is also indicated by the relatively weak instruction in scientific method and at times low scientific ambition. Allow me to mention here only three examples of this, after recently having read a number of degree papers in teacher education studies and participated in examination seminars in which they were discussed.

In scientific activity, it is essential to familiarize oneself with current research in the area one has chosen to study. Consequently, we have an evaluation criterion specifically for that and

we apply it when evaluating degree papers within the teacher education program in Halmstad. A defense for an inadequate research survey, which is unfortunately all too common and one that I have encountered too many times, is that the person "didn't find any research," which usually means the person did not find any literature on the subject in the nearest library. This type of argument shows that the person has not understood the point of conducting a research survey. The interesting thing is not whether there is any available literature on the subject, but whether other research has been done in the particular area. It seems the lack of desire for discovery, and of adequate scientific education, is unusually widespread.

Another similar error, which can perhaps be designated a category error, is that research literature is consistently viewed as "theory" – that is, theory is something one reads (whereas "empirical data" is correspondingly considered to be something one does). It is, however, well known that there is research literature that is predominantly empirical.

My third example reveals a lack of insight into the whole point of scientific activity, and has to do with "perspective." I have read several degree papers in which the authors have been content to read one text in an area of research, although there may be several such texts in existence. This means they completely miss out on the enormous resource presented by scientific disagreement, whereby different perspectives enrich one's understanding of the phenomenon one has chosen to study.

The immediate conclusion we can draw from this is that we must become much better at developing a scientific attitude and approach in many students in our teacher education program. At the same time, improvement is also needed in the employment preparation component. At Halmstad, we have taken the first step in sharpening our scientific evaluation criteria and benefiting from the help of co-reflectors from the schools. Further steps will be needed, however, to improve student supervision and instruction in this area.

Interaction, cooperation and clearly defined roles

Taking the new approach to organizing students' degree papers that is described in this article, we have dealt with the complex, highly politicized and tension-filled teacher education program through interaction and cooperation and by having clearly defined roles.

As mentioned, I imagine the teacher education program as a network rather than an organization. As a mental image, the organization creates boundaries – between those inside the organization and those outside. In a corresponding manner, the network tends to dissolve boundaries. The advantage of conceptualizing teaching education as a network is that everyone involved in efforts to enhance the teacher education program can be made visible as actors in the program. Teachers, researchers and other university personnel, students, municipal administrators and school employees, and employees of private schools contribute to the teacher education program to the extent they participate in the program, in field-based instruction and research of relevance for teacher education. A key aspect of our new approach to organizing student supervision and the evaluation of degree papers is that it has involved more intensive interaction, particularly within this teacher education network. A key aspect of this interaction is that we have succeeded in cooperating across scientific discipline boundaries in a way that enhances student supervision and the evaluation of degree papers. Within the teacher education program, such cooperation is also crucial to our maintenance of a reasonable level of quality in several areas of performance.

However, the most important argument for conceptualizing teacher education as a network and behaving as if it actually is a network is that it increases the potential for teacher education to be perceived as legitimate within a much larger context than the organization within the university that is called the teacher education program.

The network metaphor has many advantages, but it also has disadvantages. One disadvantage is that when the boundaries are erased, just who is in charge of the teacher education program can seem unclear. One way to deal with this is to create clearly defined roles, as in the case of our co-reflectors, whose assignment is not to assign grades, but rather to share their opinions about the degree papers. A distinction between the role of supervisor and the role of examiner is another example. Cooperation with professionally active teachers within the framework of the teacher education program also reduces the incidence of "quacks," who try to recreate a teaching praxis with which they are not particularly familiar, enabling them to devote themselves to areas in which they are competent, instead.

Given that teacher education is intended to prepare the students for teaching praxis and for more or less visionary political goals, as well as to increase their capacity for scientific

criticism and reflection, there is a risk that vision, teaching praxis and science can become too intertwined. Interaction and cooperation on the basis of clearly defined roles can be a way to deal with this problem.

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