This is a book for everyone trying to improve teacher education. Based on experiences primarily in Sweden, three models for assessment of student achievements are analysed: the small thesis model, the portfolio model and the case based model. What are the characteristics of these types and how could they be understood in a broader perspective?

“Thorough descriptions and analyses of their effects in educational practice, as presented in Examining Praxis, are an indispensable starting point for real improvements. In fact, the authors of this book do that by connecting first order action research (research by teachers and students into their own practice) with second order action research (research by teacher educators into their own practice) and third order action research (meta-studies by researchers).”

Foreword by Jan Ax, University of Amsterdam and Petra Ponte, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences and Leiden University, the Netherlands.
Examining Praxis
PEDAGOGY, EDUCATION AND PRAXIS

Volume 4

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The Pedagogy, Education and Praxis Series will foster a conversation of traditions in which different European and Anglo-American perspectives on ‘pedagogy’, ‘education’ and ‘praxis’ are problematised and explored. By opening constructive dialogue between different theoretical and intellectual traditions, the Series aims, in part, at recovering and extending the resources of these distinctive traditions for education in contemporary times. The Series aims to contribute to (1) theoretical developments in the fields of pedagogy, education and praxis; (2) the development of praxis in the pedagogical professions; and (3) the development of strategies capable of resisting and counteracting contemporary tendencies towards the technologisation, standardisation, bureaucratisation, commodification and de-moralisation of education.
Examining Praxis

Assessment and Knowledge Construction in Teacher Education

Edited by

Matts Mattsson
Teacher Education
Regional Development Centre
Stockholm University, Sweden

with

Inge Johansson
Department of Didactic Sciences and Early Childhood Education
Stockholm University, Sweden

and

Birgitta Sandström
Department of Education
Stockholm University, Sweden
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The ‘Pedagogy, Education and Praxis’ series arose from shared concerns among educational researchers from Australia, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and the United Kingdom about the relationships between different traditions of education and educational research that inform our work. The meanings of terms like ‘pedagogy’ and ‘praxis’ are contested within European research traditions and Anglo-American traditions and even more confusingly contested across or between traditions. These words, shared across languages and intellectual traditions, inhabit different spaces in different languages, with different characteristic ways of behaving in each.

What ‘pedagogy’, ‘education’ and ‘praxis’ mean in Dutch or English or Swedish – where variants of these words occur – cannot be translated precisely and without remainder into another language. The series aims to encourage a ‘conversation of traditions’ in which the voices of different traditions can be heard, and different perspectives can come into view. In this way, readers may glimpse beyond the English in which the conversation is conducted to the rich intellectual traditions presented by contributors to the Series. We hope to use these key ideas – pedagogy, education and praxis – as windows through which we may see, even if darkly, into the rooms of other languages and traditions, and to learn what we can about those other traditions. The international collaborative project ‘Pedagogy, Education and Praxis’, of which this Series is an expression, has three kinds of aims:

- theoretical aims concerning the exploration and critical development of key concepts and associated understandings, from different educational and research traditions, of pedagogy, educational science and educational studies, and social and educational praxis and practice;
- practical aims concerning the quality and transformation of educational praxis in settings including education, teacher education and the continuing professional development of teachers, in relation to a variety of contemporary educational problems and issues, as they emerge in a variety of educational contexts at different levels of education and in different national contexts; and
- strategic aims of
  - encouraging the dialogue between different traditions of theory, research and practice in education;
  - enhancing awareness about the origins and formation of our own (and others’) presuppositions and understandings as participants in such dialogues; and
  - fostering collaboration and the development of networks between scholars interested in these problems and issues across traditions.
The volumes in the series are intended as contributions to this dialogue. Some aim to foster this dialogue by opening and exploring contemporary educational contexts, problems and issues within one country or tradition to readers from other countries and traditions. Other volumes aim to foster dialogue by bringing together, to address a common topic, authors and contributions from different countries and traditions. We believe that this endeavour will renew and revitalise some old conceptual resources, and make some, old or transformed, accessible as new resources for educational theory and practice in the international conversations, conferences and collaborations which constitute the globalised educational research communities of today.

Stephen Kemmis, Charles Sturt University, Australia
Matts Mattsson, Stockholm University, Sweden
Petra Ponte, Utrecht University of Applied Sciences and Leiden University, The Netherlands
Karin Rönnerman, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
FOREWORD

There is widespread consensus that the main purpose of educational studies as an academic discipline is to further improvement of practice. We cannot avoid the impression that the dominant view is still that “academic knowledge precedes practice”; that academic knowledge should be guided along carefully beaten paths so that it permeates practice; that academic knowledge can determine what is good and what is better. The so-called Research, Development & Diffusion model is based on these conventional premises. Education in the Netherlands, for instance, has for a long time had a legal and financial infrastructure that is strongly based on this RDD thinking. It is the role of researchers at the universities to produce objective knowledge that is amenable to generalisation. It is the role of the educational advisory centres to translate this knowledge into products and procedures that can be applied, so that these can then be transferred to teachers via teacher educators or in-service trainers. Teachers are then expected to apply these products and procedures in practice.

The Dutch government more or less privatised this system in the 1990s. This was not done because views on theory and practice had changed, but out of a desire to drastically reduce the role of the government for economic and ideological reasons. The system that was created in this way has, of course, certain typically Dutch characteristics and other countries will have followed their own paths. Nevertheless, in earlier publications from the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis series, we see similar developments described in the Nordic countries and Australia.

We characterised the view that academic knowledge precedes practice as “still” dominant. This statement needs to be qualified: from a historical perspective this view is in fact fairly recent, dating only from after the Second World War. Before then it was not academics who set the tone and were figureheads for practice (at least not academics as we understand them now), it was usually inspired practitioners. Well-known international examples of such figures are Montessori, Petersen, Freinet and Parkhurst, and every country will certainly have its own local educational practitioners of consequence. This period of educational reform and innovation is sometimes referred to as the romantic period. Educational reform and theory development usually developed out of practice and there was no technological chain as in the RDD model. In this sense academic knowledge did not lead the way for practitioners; practitioners who often had highly unconventional ideas about what it meant to be a child in school and in society went their own way.

Movements that did distance themselves from a positivistic theory-practice view include the “critical pedagogiek and didactiek” in Germany and other continental European countries in the 1970s; the teacher as researcher approach of Stenhouse
in England in the 1980s and the emancipative action research view of Carr and Kemmis in Australia in the 1980s. It was also in this period that researchers gave specific attention for the pedagogisch-didactisch practice of teachers. If you want to help teachers to improve their practice, it may well be necessary to base your efforts on the “target system” (that is the learning child at school and in society), but it is also necessary to have knowledge of the “acting system”, that is of teachers’ thinking and actions. In the 1980s and 1990s this realisation led to research into, for instance, teacher thinking and teacher planning (Taylor, 1970; Bromme, 1981; Ax, 1985). In chapter 10 of Examining Praxis, this type of research is placed under the umbrella of practitioner-oriented research: the study of practice. Because of the great emphasis on practitioner research, this is closely linked to research in and through practice. This offers a new perspective on the relation between those who gain understanding and those who try to use it.

The authors of Examining Praxis are still building on historical traditions that are opposed to a positivist view of the relationship between academic knowledge and education. They give us insights into the praxis of the teacher education course: the praxis of teacher educators and students. These insights have been gained by focusing on the degree project. The tensions that can arise in this context seem to come from the fact that government policy is based on instrumental-rationalist perceptions that do not fit with the perceptions of those involved with the courses or with the nature of educative praxis. The diverse contributions to the book also illustrate some of the problems with bridging the gap between theory and practice. They show us the risks involved when policy measures are put in place without reflection on the relationship between theory and practice. Such measures are not always a blessing. Thorough descriptions and analyses of their effects in educational practice, as presented in Examining Praxis, are an indispensable starting point for real improvements. In fact, the authors of this book do that by connecting first order action research (research by teachers and students into their own practice) with second order action research (research by teacher educators into their own practice) and third order action research (meta-studies by researchers) (see also Ponte, 2008).

NOTES

1 The Dutch terms pedagogiek or pedagogisch and didactiek or didactisch cannot be literally translated as “pedagogy” or “pedagogic” and “didactics” or “didactic”. Pedagogiek or pedagogisch refers to the science of the child’s upbringing. Didactisch refers to pedagogy as a theory of teaching.

REFERENCES


Jan Ax
University of Amsterdam
The Netherlands

Petra Ponte
Utrecht University of Applied Sciences and Leiden University
The Netherlands
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PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND
1. WHAT IS AT STAKE?

About This Book

Examination

We need to explain the title of this book, Examining praxis - assessment and knowledge construction in teacher education. The concepts ‘examining’ and ‘praxis’ can be interpreted in different ways.

One aspect of examination is that university lecturers, as part of their teaching duties, should encourage and help student teachers to examine issues of importance to their prospective profession. On this meaning, an examination is an investigation. Investigations made by students are supposed to generate knowledge that could be applicable to many situations other than those related to a particular study and a particular university context. Student teachers should learn how to search for and how to build new knowledge about their life and world, about teachers, pupils and circumstances related to a professional practice. They should learn how to conduct a research inquiry and how to conduct a systematic investigation that might generate knowledge of public interest. And they should learn how to involve other participants in learning processes. This is an important part of the professional work of a teacher. Some student teachers manage to initiate and develop collaborative and community based projects that involve experienced teachers (including pre-school teachers) in their degree projects. This aspect of examination emphasises the search for new knowledge of relevance to a profession: examination is a process of research in which a person tries to understand the world in order to construct new knowledge together with others.

Another aspect of examination is that university lecturers, as part of their professional duties, must assess students’ achievements. Students’ papers, essays, degree projects and learning outcomes ought to be assessed according to established academic standards. In the Swedish university system, the final examination is crucial. For someone to graduate as a teacher, it is obligatory for them to conduct a degree project. Student teachers’ degree projects usually take the form of a small thesis. As a result of a recently reformed programme for teacher education, thousands of student teachers every year try to complete degree projects according to established standards. The large number of people involved in this process is one reason why the degree project itself has become a controversial issue. Another reason is that the degree project is generally regarded as an indication of the quality of an educational programme as such, for example teacher education, and of the university conducting the teacher education programme.
Approaching the issue of examination from quite another perspective, it may come as a surprise that student teachers’ achievements are seldom assessed or evaluated according to traditions, norms and values developed in the field of professional practice. Academic standards have a strong impact through rather elaborate criteria established for judging the quality of a degree project. One reason for this imbalance is that it is quite difficult to identify requirements and criteria that originate from the field of professional practice. A review of teacher education in Sweden presented by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education did not report a single example of examination procedures focusing on professional practice knowledge (Högskoleverket, 2008). Professional practice knowledge is considered in this volume as actions, sayings, doings and relating (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). In the dominant academic tradition, there is an emphasis on cognitive aspects of knowledge production represented in the form of written reports. The implication is that research serves the primary purpose of enlightenment, while praxis development is generally regarded as secondary or something that should be left to others. There is a long academic tradition of separating theory from practice.

Requirements of an academic report

In assessing the quality of academic reports, most universities use a similar frame of reference (Mattsson & Kemmis, 2007). Researchers are generally expected to have an important question that motivates their inquiry. They should approach a study from an explicit perspective. They should contribute original findings, generally structured in the form of a theory. Research methods are expected to be tailored to the research question, and to yield findings that can be expressed consistently with the theoretical perspective that informs the study. Ethics should be respected in accordance with established guidelines for research on human beings. The empirical field should be relevant to the project. Researchers should be able to show how an analysis was carried out to yield interpretations of empirical data. The autonomy of the researcher should be secured. The research should not be shaped or biased by personal interests. Research related to a particular field of professional practice should be of relevance to that field. Researchers are expected to meet accepted academic standards regarding form in text, references, quotations, figures, tables and the like. Knowledge should be reported in a way that will allow others to examine its quality. Key terms generally used here are validity, reliability, replicability of results and sometimes rigour. Most important, however, in this perspective, is that research should generate new knowledge. I think that all the authors in this edited volume will agree that these are the key requirements for an academic report. There is also a general agreement that students’ small theses should be systematic. They should represent in-depth knowledge of the subject matter under study.

However, most often these studies are de-contextualised as if they were not really part of a professional practice. It is generally taken for granted that a degree project primarily serves the purpose of being an exercise in investigative work.
This exercise is supposed to promote a reflective attitude: an attitude that will enable graduates to participate in developing their professional work as teachers and pre-school teachers. The degree project is a taken for granted practice in the Swedish educational system. But all degree projects are not just exercises. Some of them may contribute to praxis development, an aspiration that will be dealt with in this volume. What then is praxis and what is praxis development?

Praxis and praxis development

Praxis and praxis development are key terms that may be interpreted in different ways (Bernstein, 1971; Bourdieu, 1999; Freire, 1973; Habermas, 1974; Marx 1888). Kemmis and Smith (2008), referring to Aristotle, understand praxis as morally informed actions for the good of humankind. In their view, praxis includes sayings, doings and relatings. To them, praxis development is a commitment “to live a certain kind of life”. They state that:

... our underlying assumption is that education and being an educator are inextricably linked to social and moral responsibility. Our hope is that we can re-ignite conversations about praxis for all professionals involved in the work and study of education (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 3).

Praxis, they say, is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances that confront them at a particular moment and, as a consequence, act for the good of humankind. In this view, education is a very important professional practice. Teachers and teacher educators have social and moral responsibilities for the wellbeing of humankind.

In Sweden praxis is generally interpreted differently. When people refer to praxis, they often think of general habits and customs, traditions, the way things are, practices that are taken for granted. People think of a settled practice that cannot easily be given up. Bourdieu’s concept of habitus (acquired patterns of dispositions to act in particular ways in particular situations) is related to ‘habits’ in a way which comes close to the ordinary language meaning of praxis in Sweden (Bourdieu, 1993). When people do, say and relate according to the tradition and culture of a specific professional practice, their manner may be understood as praxis. From this perspective, praxis is not a normative concept. It is a term for describing how people actually live their lives and how they do their jobs. People’s doings, sayings and relatings are part of a culture which, to a great extent, was formed before they were born into that culture. Praxis in this sense could be regarded as good or bad. Praxis is formed over a long period of time. People have internalised the norms and the habits that are now taken for granted practices. Bourdieu (1993, 1999) talks about this phenomenon in terms of sedimented intentions. He refers to habitus or sedimented intentions as a frame of reference that is concealed in social fields and in peoples’ cultures and actions (Broady, 1991). Such frameworks may be activated in particular circumstances. Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ includes actions informed by reflection as well as actions which merely express deeply ingrained habits. The term ‘habitus’, was introduced by Bourdieu,
as a tool for further investigation. For better and for worse praxis, habits and extra-
individual formations represent continuity. Praxis, interpreted this way, makes it
difficult to tell if a certain educational practice should be understood as good or as
something that should instead be given up. Praxis, regarded this way, is not a
matter just for rational choice. It is part of a structure, an institution and a tradition.
Praxis is embodied; it is integrated with culture and with people’s emotions. It is
part of a certain kind of life. As Bourdieu’s concept habitus suggests, our freedom
to act in the world is limited. It is restricted by history, context and social capital.
And it is restricted by other people’s way of living and the strategies applied by
other agents advocating other ideas (Mattsson, 2004, 2008). With this concept of
praxis any attempt to change existing praxis, for example, an academic tradition for
assessing student achievements, will probably meet resistance.

Issues and approaches

Each author in this volume is responsible for his or her own chapter. Several
seminars have been organised around this book-project by the network Knowledge
Construction and Professional Work. Authors and critical friends have discussed
drafts of the chapters in order to improve them. The reader will, however, find
quite different approaches to the issue of examination. Some authors discuss
assessment, evaluation and degree projects in teacher education as a taken for
granted practice. Some are quite sympathetic to the dominant small thesis model.
Some focus on how government steering documents and official guidelines are
implemented and evaluated, as if it is all a matter of implementation. Some
describe how the small thesis model is practised by universities and how student
teachers experience this practice. Other authors demonstrate a critical attitude in
relation to the taken for granted practice. They report from projects aiming at
praxis development. Some deal with praxis and praxis development in a way which
might be inspired by Bourdieu. Others are inspired by Aristotle (2004), especially
as interpreted by our Australian colleagues (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). For still
other authors, praxis does not seem to be a key concept.

All chapters, however, are occupied with the relationship between theory and
practice. Several authors discuss the interaction between university studies in
teacher education and students’ experiences in practicum. They discuss what
constitutes theory and what constitutes praxis in this context. When new
professional groups, like teachers and pre-school teachers, approach the university
system in order to achieve legitimacy and status, questions are always raised about
the nature of their professional knowledge. How is professional practice knowledge
constructed? To what extent is this kind of knowledge based on research and to
what extent is it based on reflected practice?

These questions take us to the theme of examination in terms of assessment,
evaluation and examination procedures. Different types of assessment and
evaluation are discussed in this book. Students’ achievements are analysed using as
empirical evidence: the course paper, the reflective essay, the content specific
narrative, students’ actual performance, film, the small thesis, the portfolio, the
WHAT IS AT STAKE?

Case based learning and examination model and the action research project. The major types are discussed in terms of (1) the small thesis, (2) the portfolio and (3) the case based model. Contributing authors reflect on how different types of assessment and knowledge production can be understood, what types of examination procedures are appropriate and who should have the authority to judge the quality of the knowledge presented. Questions like these are important from an academic perspective, from a professional practice perspective and, of course, from a student perspective. Questions like these are important for citizens whose children are educated by qualified teachers; they are important for public authorities supervising teacher education. Teacher education has many stakeholders. One of the most influential (in Sweden) is the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education. Most authors refer to critical reports from this agency.

The undergraduate degree project is a probe. It is a touchstone in the Swedish university system. When the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education reviews university institutions and their programmes for teacher education, its representatives focus on the academic quality of students' degree projects (Forsberg & Lundgren, 2006, Högskoleverket, 2008). The agency asks questions like: How are the degree projects related to research? What methods are used? What is the relationship between theory and the empirical field under study? What about language, references and form? Does the degree project report any new knowledge? These questions indicate that the doctoral thesis serves as a prototype for student teachers' degree projects. For several years now, expectations related to degree projects have been more and more demanding and, as stated, the degree project as such has become a controversial issue. One reason for this might be that we live in a time when, as Habermas (1987) suggests, the lifeworld is being colonised by system imperatives. Schools and universities are increasingly integrated into systems that require assessment and evaluation according to curricula and goals that are to a great extent determined by external bodies. Schools and universities are expected to give more and more detailed information about pupils’ and students’ achievements. They are required to report about the development of schools and universities as institutions for knowledge production. The Bologna process puts pressure on universities to reform structures of higher education in a convergent way. Greater compatibility and comparability of systems should be achieved. All universities should be more transparent and congruent when it comes to assessment, evaluation and examination procedures (Bologna Declaration, 1999). Consequently, university lecturers are expected to judge the quality of student teachers' individual learning outcomes. In this process, pedagogical traditions and epistemologies are challenged. The Bildung-tradition is challenged by the Curriculum-tradition. New approaches to pre-school service and teaching are formed by circumstances and actors beyond the control of teachers, teacher educators and universities. In our time, it is not easy to say what knowledge is and what knowledge is not to be regarded as valid and worthwhile. For this reason, it is difficult to assess the quality of teacher education.
A professional teacher today is required to demonstrate an increasing repertoire of personal as well as professional qualities, competences and experiences that cannot easily be developed just by university based teacher education. Other agents, structures and processes are involved in a development that may or may not result in improved educational praxis (Ax & Ponte, 2008; Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Mattsson & Waldenström, 2008). From this perspective, praxis development is an intriguing phenomenon.

Let us now introduce each chapter. The authors approach the issues of examination, praxis and praxis development in different ways, applying different theoretical perspectives, using different methodologies and focusing on different aspects.

In Part I, Christina Gustafsson, (Chapter Two) gives an interesting historical background to the degree project in teacher training and higher education. She has looked into the changes that have taken place in government steering documents and official guidelines during the past 30 years. Her question is: What are the requirements regarding students’ degree projects? She has also looked into evaluations of the teacher training programmes. Gustafsson reports that organisational changes in the university system have had an impact on the character and quality of students’ degree projects; tasks that are sometime referred to as “independent work”. One conclusion is that the government steering documents are not very precise about the requirements for students’ degree projects. There is much room for interpretation. Another finding is that a decentralisation has taken place, giving extended authority to each university to form its own guidelines and requirements for students’ degree projects. A third point of interest is that the degree projects produced at different universities resemble each other in form. Evaluations indicate that the form of the degree project is often more important than the subject matter under study. A fourth conclusion is that the small thesis model as a form and genre has become an educational practice that is now taken for granted. This hegemony should be contested.

In Part II, several chapters deal with perspectives and cases related to the 2001 reform programme for teacher education. Monica Hansen Orwehag (Chapter Three) reports from a student perspective. Her study is based on a questionnaire completed by 148 students in the region of University West, Sweden. Hansen Orwehag explores student teachers’ understanding of the significance of the degree project in terms of “usefulness”. Students are asked if the degree project seems to be useful in relation to their prospective work as teachers. One observation is that a change takes place in students’ attitudes towards the degree project during the process of their studies. Initially, they have a sceptical view. They doubt that the degree project will be useful. However, it seems that this scepticism is transformed into productive learning and insight. Hansen Orwehag concludes that through a
systematic and scientific approach demonstrated in a degree project students can learn something important about being a teacher in a very practical way.

Matt Mattsson (Chapter Four) takes as a point of departure a Research and Development project carried out in the local community of Upplands Väsby, just outside Stockholm. The aim was to improve the quality of student teachers’ degree projects by encouraging them to pay more attention to professional practice knowledge. A parallel aim was to explore alternative and complementary ways of assessing student teachers’ achievements. Mattsson analyses 33 degree projects that were used as tools for dialogue at public seminars. He emphasises the role of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) in teacher education and argues that assessment of students’ achievements should, to a greater extent, involve experienced teachers and school leaders. Attention should be paid, not only to students’ individual achievements, but also to the practice architectures that prefigure their projects. Important aspects are identified in terms of students’ contributions to building an ‘inquiry culture’. Other aspects and qualities are discussed in terms of ‘communicative validity’ and ‘academic literacy’. The findings are summarised in a frame of reference including aspects that might be of importance in evaluating praxis-related research. An intriguing aspect is the issue of praxis development.

Annika Lindskog and Elisabeth Hessleffors Arktoft (Chapter Five) analyse two projects in the Gothenburg region. They interviewed 15 newly graduated teachers about their views of the degree project. The teachers were generally dissatisfied with the way that their degree projects were received. One conclusion from the study is that an emphasis upon ‘academic’ knowledge is predominant in teacher education. Furthermore, the authors discuss another project aimed at changing the focus of students’ work in a particular course. The underlying ambition of this project was to promote professional practice knowledge; not just academic knowledge. From an action research approach, the authors outline alternative criteria for assessing students’ achievements. They analyse aspects that might be of relevance for the field of professional practice such as ‘empowerment’, ‘inquiry culture’ and ‘reflection’.

Birgitta Sandström (Chapter Six) examines 22 degree projects produced by students in nurse education programmes in Sweden. The case of nurse education is interesting because programmes for teacher education and degree projects produced by student teachers are often compared with programmes and degree projects in nurse education. As was the case for many other vocational programmes in Sweden, nurse education was integrated into the institutes of higher education in 1977. Education, which to a great extent had been based on professional practice knowledge, now became subject to other demands and other controlling authorities.

Sandström criticises an evaluation made by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education which reviewed nurse education programmes. She analyses students’ degree projects as an expression of a dominant academic discourse. Students’ choice of theory, terminology and perspective give a hint at what is generally regarded as appropriate for the academic genre at a certain point of time.
in a certain context. For example, 21 of the 22 degree projects examined used literature studies as a method. The literature reviews mainly consisted of refereed articles published in international journals. One conclusion is that the small thesis model seems to be part of a discourse that puts an emphasis on form, procedure and genre rather than on professional practice knowledge.

In Part III, other perspectives and points of departure are introduced. Compared to the case studies presented in earlier chapters, the authors represent new approaches to the issue of examination and praxis development. They pay more attention to the formation of knowledge.

Rolf Lander (Chapter Seven) makes an analysis of 85 papers and essays produced by students in eight courses of the teacher training programme at Gothenburg University. What are student teachers interested in when observing teachers' work? How do they describe and analyse their observations? A part from a case in which a student investigated an anti-harassment policy, students seldom wrote about the school organisation outside class-rooms. Most of the content of the degree projects could be divided into stories about teachers' ‘deeds’ and teachers’ ‘orchestration’. Content related to ‘deeds’ focuses on the moral character of what teachers do and content related to ‘orchestration’ focuses on how teachers try to achieve some flow and coordination in pupils' work. Lander maintains that students' stories about teachers' work often seem too episodic to be useful for reflection. He argues that if reflection is the purpose, then stories should give accounts of repertoires and designs. Lander notes that the students frequently use practical cases in order to demonstrate theoretical understanding in line with the course literature. Such theories seem to be directed towards “explaining” cases of pupils' behaviour or, by contrast, “judging” teachers' behaviour. Students seldom explore the observed teachers' own practical theories or the local context of cases under study.

Tor Vidar Eilertsen and Bjørnar Strøm, (Chapter Eight) at the University of Tromsø, Norway, describe a project aiming at developing portfolio assessment as a means to promote integration between theory and practice in teacher education. The project involved 60 postgraduate students undertaking part-time study, and was carried out over a two year period. The portfolio model in practice includes various forms of student performance such as oral presentations, film and reflective essays. In their studies, students were encouraged to focus on personal and down to earth topics; topics which could be used as bridge-builders for a more concept- and theory-based communication.

Eilertsen and Strøm discuss appropriate forms of examination in the professional education of teachers. An interesting observation is related to the compulsory reflection that was part of the course requirements. The authors state that:

A common denominator for the majority of the reflective texts is that work with them had functioned as a door opener to the theory of education as a tool on which to model their own practice theory...

It seems that the portfolio model requires an independent and active student/learner. Students who are not familiar with the academic culture and genre
need a lot of personal mentoring combined with peer-assessment; otherwise they seem not to be able to develop the competences needed for conceptualising their own professional practice knowledge and reporting their findings in text.

*Inge Johansson* and *Anette Sandberg* (Chapter Nine) present experiences and analysis from a project aiming at the professional development of preschool teachers. Fifteen working teams consisting of 33 preschool teachers and 11 day care attendants chose to participate in a project aiming at encouraging practitioner research. The age of the participants varied between 26 and 61 years. They met seven times during a period of eight months at the university. Johansson and Sandberg served as project leaders, educators, mentors, examiners and researchers. Their main question is: “What knowledge develops from participation in a project like this?”

The participants conducted small studies related to their own field of activity. Johansson and Sandberg discuss the general character of professional practice knowledge compared to knowledge based on research. In this project, participants developed both types of knowledge. In their concluding remarks, the authors reflect on the role of examination procedures. They state that formal examination played a vital role in recognition of and reflection on the knowledge developed during the project:

The examination is an opportunity to communicate and confront the new knowledge with the surrounding worlds’ criticism of the development work...

*Lars Lindström* (Chapter Ten) draws on an old tradition for teacher training, making comparisons between craftsmanship and rationalism in knowledge formation. Comenius, the 17th century founder of instructional science (didactics, pedagogy), was inspired by the practical wisdom of medicine. He turned traditional relationships between authority, scientific knowledge and experience upside-down. Instead of leaning upon authorities of antiquity, he explored the instructional implications of taking nature as his guide. According to Comenius the mission of the teacher is “to cultivate and not to transform” nature. Lindström claims that the role of medicine as midwife in the birth of pedagogy has not been properly understood. Moreover, in transforming the culture of education to meet the challenges of the 21st century, medical education may still serve as a source of inspiration. Lindström maintains that:

The illustrative example is the most important medium for teaching practical knowledge. It occupies an equally central position in the practical domain as does the verified proposition in the theoretical domain.

He offers strong arguments for a case-based learning and examination model. Student teachers should be confronted with authentic cases; they should be given enough time to reflect on and to discuss a large body of authentic cases using different theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches. They should be engaged in the exercise of determining “what this is a case of”.

11
In Part IV there are reflections, conclusions and challenges based on the previous chapters and issues.

In Chapter Eleven the reader will encounter reflections about points of interest, conceptual issues and empirical issues.

Stephen Kemmis discusses the problem of whether it is possible for students to reveal their ‘practical knowledge’ – the personal knowledge they act on – in the medium of written assignments. Or can such knowledge only be revealed in practical action?

This question leads to reflection on the relationship between words and the world. Teacher students are invited to a process of “noticing, naming and reframing” reality and in doing so, they are supposed to develop a ‘praxis stance’. Kemmis maintains that this process is part of a discourse and an institutional setting that gives power to the examiner to decide “… what counts as worth noticing, how it should be named, and how it should be framed or re-framed….”. In this perspective examination is central to the process of becoming a person or a professional, examination is central to becoming “qualified”.

Jan Ax and Petra Ponte discuss degree projects and examination from two different perspectives. One follows an instrumental-rational line of reasoning. In the other approach, education is “a moral endeavour to which ethical standards apply”. They maintain that degree projects generally are embedded in course curricula and that assessment and criteria for that reason should be analysed in a wider perspective including processes among teachers who are expected to adapt to “external reform proposals”. They refer to Habermas’ theory of system and life world and they identify a tension between what is required from teachers by the systems and what could be done by teachers aware of the dialectic between retrospective analyses and prospective actions. How teachers choose to act under these circumstances, they state, is an issue that could and should be researched by the means of educational action research.

Karin Rönnerman and Petri Salo maintain that the cases of examination and assessment presented in this volume could be reflected upon as variations of teacher education programmes. They introduce a framework that rests upon the different methods of justification used by student teachers or their supervisors in order to act and learn within different educational settings. The following aspects are relevant: (1) pedagogical thinking can be intuitive; (2) it can be rational, (3) teacher education can be inductively organised; (4) it can be organised in a deductive way, using theoretical frameworks for approaching educational phenomena and activities. Rönnerman and Salo identify a tension between the inductive and intuitive aspects of teacher professionalism and the deductive-rational ways of organising teacher education.

Matt Måttsson (Chapter Twelve) presents conclusions, problems and challenges. Again, three major models will be analysed: the small thesis model, the portfolio model and the case based model; this time in relation to epistêmê, technê and phronêsí. Then the relationship between theory and praxis will be explored. Finally the question of what should and what could be done will be highlighted.
What is at stake?

What should children learn in school and what makes a person a good teacher? What kind of teacher education could foster good teachers and how could teachers' knowledge, competence and talents be identified and assessed? The issue of examination is related to a public debate about the quality of schools, teachers and teacher education. Teacher education in Sweden has been the object of severe criticism for the last ten years or so. Several ideas and proposals have been introduced lately, regarding all levels of the educational system. The general trend in the public debate is that teacher education should be more ‘academic’. More attention should be given to subject matter and to didactics related to a subject matter. Critical experts propose, that to be authorised, universities in charge of teacher education should have a larger proportion of doctorate teachers and senior lecturers. More resources should be allocated to research related to schools and teaching. Teacher educators should have more time for research. More attention should be paid to student teachers’ degree projects. They should to a greater extent reflect theoretical insights as well as professional practice knowledge (Forsberg & Lundgren, 2006; Högskoleverket, 2008). For many years there has been a tension between a university tradition for teacher education and a tradition based more on professional practice knowledge. Generally speaking, the university tradition emphasises research-based knowledge and the subject matter and the professional practice tradition emphasises qualities built on communication, relations and didactic skills.

Many of the ideas introduced are related to pre-school, primary and secondary school and gymnasium and have had a focus on assessing and grading pupils’ individual learning processes and learning outcomes. Pupils, students, schools as well as universities should be more competitive. A trend is that more attention should be given to “core subjects” like Swedish language and Mathematics.

During the last decades, local schools have become more ‘market-oriented’. Many schools have been transformed to “private” institutions competing for pupils. Politicians, governments and the public sector have a different role in relation to schools today. Twenty years ago the educational system in Sweden was quite centralised and homogeneous. Today a different organisational pattern makes it more difficult for local and central authorities to govern schools.

A governmental committee recently emphasised the requirement that a person applying for a permanent position as a pre-school teacher or teacher should be graduated from teacher education. Un-graduated teachers should be obliged to upgrade their knowledge within a limited number of years. A new system of authorisation should be introduced. The idea is that school teachers should be “licensed”, which typically would require a bachelor’s degree, completion of an approved teacher education programme, including a degree project, and an additional year of qualified experience of the profession (SOU 2008:52).

On the whole, the idea is that teachers should become more professional; their status and salary should increase. They should to a larger extent master research-based knowledge. One idea is that this could be achieved if they themselves develop the capacity to research their own professional practice. A more
productive interaction between research and professional practice should be established. Generally, teacher education has been an object for criticism because of a distant relationship between educational research and the field of professional practice.

Furthermore, the Swedish Government has initiated a process for ranking Swedish universities according to criteria used internationally (Ministry of Education, 2008). As a consequence, all universities should be more competitive. To a great extent the quality of teacher education is judged by the quality of the student teachers’ degree projects. As a part of all these structural changes, ideas, proposals and requirements, there has been a call for praxis-related research. Referring to Mattsson and Kemmis (2007) praxis-related research may be regarded as an umbrella-term including action research, dialogic research, co-operative inquiry, research circles, collaborative research, action learning, learning studies, practitioner research and R&D projects of a variety of kinds.

In the end, several crucial questions are raised: What kind of knowledge, competences and talents are of importance for the teaching professions? How could teacher education be organised and how could student teachers’ qualities be identified and assessed? What issues are of importance for student teachers to research?

For all these reasons it is essential to examine praxis in the field of teacher education. There are reasons for analysing the ways student teachers’ achievements are assessed and evaluated. Let us come back to some of these issues in the concluding chapter.

NOTES

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2 Teachers and the field of professional practice generally include pre-school teachers and their practice.

3 Praxis-related research is used here as an umbrella-term to include action research, dialogic research, co-operative inquiry, research circles, collaborative research, action learning, learning studies, practitioner research and R&D projects of a variety of kinds.

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What Is at Stake?


Mats Mattsson
Teacher Education
Regional Development Centre
Stockholm University, Sweden
2. DEGREE PROJECT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION

During the first years of the twenty-first century many European higher education programmes have been reformed as a consequence of the so called Bologna process. One of the goals with the Bologna process was to create a common European educational structure, characterised by three educational levels—first, second, and third level—and a uniform grading scale with seven steps. In Scandinavia all five nations (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden) have new or rather new reforms in the teacher training programmes as an adaptation to the Bologna system (Skagen, 2006). In Sweden there was a reform of teacher education in 2001 and since then there have been smaller adjustments to the European educational structure.

There are differences between the teacher training programmes in the Scandinavian nations. However, it is now common that student teachers are expected to carry out an independent work—a degree project—irrespective of whether they are Bachelor students or Master students. Especially in Sweden, but also in Denmark, problems and difficulties with the degree project among student teachers have been observed. Gustafsson and Hallström (2005a) found a gap between the overall objectives of Swedish higher education and the student teachers' achievements. The National Agency for Higher Education (2005, 2006) in Sweden also paid negative attention to the degree project.

One reason for the interest of the student teachers' degree project is that it gives general eligibility for postgraduate studies in Sweden. However, studies show that the students don't develop a research attitude through the degree project and Gustafsson and Hallström (2005b) showed that the students did not use the degree project to develop a professional attitude either. In the year 2002 it was the first time all student teachers in Denmark were required to carry out a degree project (Bacheloroppgave in Danish). Experiences from this have been published (Møller, 2004; Storgaard Brok, 2003; Unge Pædagoger, 2004). Problems and difficulties have been identified, for instance the student teachers' ability to do academic writing and communicate as scholars. It was found that the students could not argue in an academic way. Of course, this type of experience resulted in questions about the necessity of a degree project and whether or not there was evidence that the degree project is necessary for a prospective teacher. Questions around the degree project include; is it an academic degree project or is it a degree project more devoted to the author’s and other persons' professional development?

The above raises more questions about the degree project. From where did the idea about a degree project come and why? Which outlines about the degree project have been guides for higher education teachers and students? Is it possible to elucidate the experiences we do today by traditions or higher education history? This chapter is an attempt to address these questions with a focus on Sweden and teacher education. The context of Swedish teacher education is also important, so a holistic view of the intentions and organisation of the degree project in higher education will underpin this chapter. The interest is directed to what is written about the independent work/exam work/degree project in the Higher Education Act (Högskolelagen), the Higher Education Ordinance (Högskoleförordningen) and other relevant documents (e.g. Swedish Code of Statutes (SFS)). There is an assumption that these documents serve as guidelines for what is going on in Swedish higher education. By studying documents from different periods this chapter aims to identify the ideas and the development of the ideas around the independent project over a period of thirty years. It is possible that an historical review can support some interpretations of the present situation and reject others.

DEMANDS OF EXAMINATION DURING THE DECADES 1970 AND 1980

We are currently experiencing a change of generations among higher education teachers. However, many higher education teachers born in the forties do still have their positions. Their own higher education has consequences for their way of supervising teaching students and also for which attitudes they have to academic features of the teacher education programme. Many teachers born in the forties started their own academic career in the sixties and early seventies. For students it was a quite free undergraduate education without demands on special or advanced studies to get a Bachelor or Master degree. Nevertheless, many students still studied the same subject during three semesters and did a degree project. Higher education teachers with this experience differ from other teacher educators of the same age, because some of them often started their career as a lecturer in teaching methods. Therefore, there are two categories of teacher educators, those who conducted some sort of degree project during their studies, and those who have not carried out an independent work in their own studies. The two categories of teachers work side by side and all of them are today expected to support and supervise the student teachers’ degree projects.

Gerrevall (1992) suggests that assignments that were included in most of the higher educational programmes and named in different ways – degree projects (examensarbeten), small thesis (uppsatsarbeten), projects (projektarbeten), in-depth studies (fördjupningsstudier) each had a relationship to the Higher Education Act introduced in 1977. In that document the emphasis was on scientific methods, on critical thinking, and on the relationship between education and research. To meet such objectives it was necessary to include some form of independent work.

During the middle of the nineteen seventies teacher education for preschool teachers and teachers in comprehensive schools was still run in separate institutions (teacher training colleges) outside the organisation of other higher education. This is the reason why the starting point for the analysis in this chapter is just before
teacher education programmes and other post secondary education were integrated in the university organisation. The first statute used here is from 1965 and was valid for the academic year 1974/75.

Within the Philosophy faculty, the four fundamental diplomas at this time were Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Economics, Bachelor of Social Sciences, and Secretary Diploma. No independent work or degree project was required according to the university regulations. Neither was it explicitly required for further studies at postgraduate level. There existed, however, other educational programmes at this time where the students were expected to perform an independent work. To become a librarian we can read that “students will single-handedly or in collaboration with other student or students carry out a special project.” Also students in technical faculties of the college of forestry and the agricultural college had to perform a degree project. The scope was not specified in the university regulations but the objective was expressed in the same way in the three sectors:

The degree project intends to show whether the student has the ability partly to apply the knowledge she/he acquired during the study time, partly to work independently on an assignment.

Despite the talk about an independent work, it was regulated in detail. The student could not influence the subject area of the assignment even if “reasonable consideration” of the students’ desires were considered. The degree projects were graded with Fail and Pass, despite the fact that grading scales with more steps were used in the educations in other respects. In the technical faculty and the agricultural college the degree project had to be presented during the last academic year, but not the last semester, while within the college of forestry it was to be presented before the last academic year. It seems, according to the regulation, that the degree projects were not classified as tests. The writing about tests shows that one takes into considerations the depth of the student’s knowledge, the degree of maturity and ability to make an independent judgement and a critical analysis. It is surprising that these aspects were not valid for the degree project.

While the university regulations governed the universities, teacher education programmes were governed by another statute. Class teachers (Grades 1-6) were educated at teacher training colleges and teachers in secondary and upper secondary school were educated at the universities. However, nothing was regulated about an independent work though the prospective teachers should, according to the overall objectives of the education programme, learn to continuously pay attention to research and development work with the purpose to renew, to develop, and to improve their teaching (Morberg, 1999).

THE 1977 REFORM AND A NEW TEACHER EDUCATION

With the 1977 reform of higher education all post secondary education was brought together, in principle, as one organisation. Programmes with many students, for example teacher education and different paramedical training programmes, were incorporated into university programmes. Until now the teacher training programme had been carried out at teacher training colleges with the statute for teacher training
colleges as a governing document and the National Board of Education as the responsible authority (Morberg, 1999). At the same time all Swedish higher education was under the *Higher Education Act*, a uniform organisation, and a quite regulated system through the *Higher Education Ordinance*. The studies were organised as general educational programmes, where each programme belonged to one of five vocational training sectors. The teacher educational programmes belonged to the sector for educational trades and nurse education belonged to the care sector. It was possible to study a separate single subject course that might not last longer than three semesters and a special project could be included. There is no more information about this special project. Neither is there any information about other forms of independent work or special projects for other educational programmes. The level of the study programme syllabi, the local plan, and the syllabi were regulated by the *Higher Education Ordinance*. Still, it was possible to take a Bachelor without in-depth studies. To be qualified for postgraduate studies the student should have studied for three years, of which three semesters should have immediate importance for the postgraduate work. The general objectives for university education were expressed in the *Higher Education Ordinance* as follows:

- University education should be built on a scientific basis.
- The education should be organised so that the students acquire knowledge and skills and develop their ability to be critical in assessing phenomena of divided kinds. The education should promote the student to prepare herself/himself for different trades or develops herself/himself in trades she/he already conducts. In the educational process, knowledge and skills that have been won through work and society life will be made use of.
- All education should promote the student’s personal development.
- A general objective for the education is that it should promote the understanding for other nations and international relations. (SFS 1977:218 2§).

The above quotation from the *Higher Education Ordinance* does not give an indication that an independent work/degree project is necessary to reach the objectives.

Between the higher education reform in 1977 and the next reform in 1993 the government suggested a new teacher education in 1986. The proposal was the result of a committee that was convened in 1974 to investigate teacher education. In 1988 new teacher education for the whole nine-year compulsory school, the ‘compulsory teacher programme’, and an ‘upper secondary teacher education programme’ were established. The prospective schoolteacher for the compulsory years could choose from two options, Grades 1-7 or Grades 4-9.

In the first central study programme for school teacher education for the compulsory years scientific direction was stressed. More studies were required, however, in order to be accepted for postgraduate studies. Through incorporating vocationally oriented education programmes in the university organisation the academic requirements (research connection, a scientific basis, and critical education) were also valid. Morberg (1999) suggests that the academic requirements of teacher education had already been expressed at the end of the nineteen forties. However,
there was no requirement that corresponds to the demand of an independent work or a degree project.

One idea behind the 1977 higher education reform (Högskolereform) was an increased local influence to structure and drive educational programmes. The study programme should point out the guidelines and the intention was that these guidelines should be interpreted and established by an undergraduate studies programme committee and transformed to local plans and syllabi. Askling (1981) showed that the central documents illustrate the direction and objectives and how the educational programmes could be carried out. She found, however, a gap between the directions and the concrete teaching plans.

Some evaluation studies were done during the first years of the nineties. The evaluators found that the scientific basis and the research connection in teacher education might be strengthened (i.e. National Higher Education Board, 1992). It was found that the prospective upper secondary teachers often had in-depth studies in subjects and then they had done a Bachelor degree project.

THE 1993 HIGHER EDUCATION REFORM
The differences between the statutes from 1977 and the years before the 1993 higher education reform are minimal when it comes to degree projects, special projects and the like. The statutes are very similar. The overall objectives (see above) have not been changed. Substantially the sentence about the special project in the single subject courses is the same as 1977. There is, however, a small grammatical difference compared to the original text. If the demands of the educational programme correspond to the demands of the degree of Bachelor, the student gets a degree of Bachelor of ...; otherwise the degree is named University Diploma in ... completed with the programme’s title. At the same time there were also temporary prescriptions about the Masters degree (three semesters beyond the three years graduate education) which could be taken at six Swedish universities. It was prescribed that those completing three semesters should have “an independent work (small thesis or the like) corresponding to ten weeks work” (UHÄ-FS 1978: 33). To be accepted for postgraduate studies there is a distinction between general eligibility and specific eligibility. This is a difference from 1977/78, but still in 1993 there is no demand in the ordinance text that the student should have an independent work.

Early in the nineties the preparation of the 1993 higher education reform started. With the 1993 higher education reform Sweden introduced three General Degrees (corresponding to broad areas) and 41 different Professional Degrees directed to specialised areas. The General Degrees were University Diploma (at least two years studies), Bachelor (at least three years studies), and Masters (at least four years studies). To get a Bachelor and Masters the demands were in-depth studies in a main subject – three and four semesters respectively. The in-depth studies should include an independent work (degree project) corresponding to ten weeks work to get a Bachelor and an independent work (degree project) corresponding to at least twenty weeks work or two projects corresponding to at least ten weeks each, to get a Masters. The Masters Degree was introduced to emphasise the importance of
in-depth studies and quality in graduate higher education. The different organisation of educational programmes and the diploma ordinance led to a new Government Bill about teacher education (Prop. 1991/92:75).

In the system of qualifications that took effect the first of July 1993 (SFS 1993:100, Appendix 3) there are objectives described for eight teacher diplomas. For seven of them the student should have “presented a degree project in which the student should relate scientific theories that she/he has learnt to her/his future work”. For the eighth educational programme - the craft teacher education - the words “scientific theories” are replaced with “theories”. The wordings in the system of qualifications can be compared with those of the Government Bill (Prop. 1991/92:75), where in-depth studies are introduced and it is proposed that the prospective teacher should have a degree project corresponding to at least ten weeks work. The student should use scientific theories taught in the subject studies, the methodological studies and pedagogical studies should be related to real school situations. Thus, the academic intents of the Government Bill were higher than the objectives that later were formulated in the Higher Education Ordinance. It is also worth noting that the scope of the degree project is not specified in the System of Qualifications. Neither is the phrase ‘independent work’ used, despite the expression being used when the general degrees are described.

It is impossible to confirm that all prospective teachers really got the chance to carry out a degree project when the System of Qualifications from 1993 was valid. We cannot be sure that the compulsory school student teachers who would teach pupils in Grades 7-9 and the upper secondary school student teachers carried out an independent work. Indeed, there were demands for in-depth subject studies of three or four semesters but according to the System of Qualifications this is the only indication of the scope.

Beyond the objectives associated with the degree project in the System of qualifications, the overall objectives according to the Higher Education Act were legally binding for all graduate educational programmes (SFS 1992:1434).

The basic higher education shall give the students

- ability to make independent and critical assessments,
- ability to independently perceive, formulate and solve problems, and
- preparedness to deal with change in working life.

In the educational field concerned, in addition to knowledge and skills, students shall develop ability to

- seek and evaluate knowledge at a scholarly level,
- follow the development of knowledge, and
- exchange knowledge with other people, including people without specialist knowledge of the field. (1 Chap. 9 §)

At this time admission to postgraduate education is still general eligibility corresponding to three years studies or specific eligibility. Nothing is mentioned about independent work. Curiously nurse education, which was incorporated in the higher education system at the same time as the teacher education in 1977 after the reform, does not have any text about degree project in the System of Qualifications.
In the year 1998 some changes were made to the five years old Higher Education Ordinance but in respect to the aspects that have been discussed here – degrees, text about independent work and both overall and specific objectives – there are no differences.

A REFORMED TEACHER EDUCATION 2001

A committee was appointed in Spring 1997 to analyse teacher education. A changed teacher role made new demands on teacher education. Both preparatory works (SOU 1999:63) and the Government Bill (Prop. 1999/2000:135) stressed the importance of a scientific basis in teacher education. In a proposed degree project the prospective teacher was expected to demonstrate that she/he could use scientific methods and theories as an important part of a scientific approach. A degree project should, according to the Government Bill, supply the students with knowledge about research methods and ethical issues; the degree project should be a preparation for a postgraduate education. The Government Bill also stressed the opportunity for the students to deepen their knowledge and prepare for active participation in future development work through the degree project.

A reformed teacher education in 2001 replaced the eight existing teacher education statutes (see above). The new System of Qualifications was introduced early in 2001 (SFS 2001:23, Appendix 2). The system deals with another 42 Professional Degrees, one of them being the Graduate Diploma in Special Education. Depending on which pedagogical activity the student teacher plans, the demands for a teacher degree varies between studies of three years and five and a half years. Of the 43 professional degrees there is text about a degree project/independent work connected to four degrees. For a teacher diploma the regulation states: “To get a teacher diploma the student should have carried out an independent work (a degree project) corresponding to ten week’s work” (SFS 2001:23, Appendix 2). The Graduate Degree in Special Education has a scope of three semesters and an independent work corresponding to ten weeks is demanded. It is interesting to note that the basic nurse education still does not mention independent work to get a diploma. The discussion about teacher education and nurse education has similarities because both programmes should, according to governing documents, be a combination of a professional and academic education. This is a current discussion. Some people assert that these qualifications could be either professional or academic as it is difficult to combine these demands.

The overall objectives as they are formulated in the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434, 1 Chap. 9 §) can be seen as the objectives for the degree project in the teacher education (see above). For teacher education as a whole, the System of Qualifications has eight specified objectives. All of them are linked to the professional activity of a teacher, but the objectives “make use of and systemise their own and other’s experiences and relevant research results as a basis for development in the professional activity” and can be related to the accomplishment of a degree project, especially if it is run as a development work.

Irrespective of what is established above about lack of information about independent work, degree projects or special projects in the System of Qualifications,
it is important to point out that many, perhaps most of, the professional programmes have had degree projects. This has been necessary when the students wanted to take a general degree, a Bachelor or a Master. This has been valid for nurse education as well as other longer educational programmes.

ADJUSTMENT TO THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

During 2006 some changes in the present Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434) and the present Higher Education Ordinance were made as a consequence of Sweden's intentions to adapt to international higher education decisions. The adjustment to the Bologna system meant that Sweden from the 1 of July 2007 introduced an organisation of higher education in three levels, first, second, and third level (SFS 2006:1053). Full time studies correspond to work during 40 weeks and can be translated to 60 higher education credits (HEC). At the first level it is possible to take two general degrees, University Diploma (2 years), and a Bachelor (3 years). At the second level it is also possible to take two general degrees, a one year Master and a two year Master. The two year Master degree should be linked to postgraduate education. For all degrees at the first level and second level a degree project should be included. The scope of the degree project for a University Diploma is not stated. To take a Bachelor the student should have an independent work (a degree project) of at least 15 HEC (ten weeks). To take a one year Master, a degree project of at least 15 HEC is demanded, and for the two year Master the demand is either a degree project of 30 HEC (20 weeks) or two degree projects of at least 15 HEC each at advanced (second) level.

Teacher degrees can be taken both at first (graduate) level and second (advanced) level. The level the diplomas can be taken depends on the HEC, the demands of in-depth studies in a subject or a wider subject area, and the proportions required of studies related to advanced level (SFS 2007:129). Teacher degrees of 180 or 210 HEC are graduate level, and study programmes of 240 to 330 HEC are at advanced level. This provides for 60 HEC courses to be classified at advanced level. For vocational education and also teacher education, the System of Qualifications has specified objectives in the areas of: knowledge and understanding, skills and ability, and judgements and approach. From the total of 19 specified objectives for the teacher education it could be possible to associate only one with the demands of a degree project:

show ability to use, systematise, and reflect about one's own and others experiences and relevant research results with the aim to contribute to the development of the profession and knowledge in a critical and independent way, and knowledge development of subjects and subjects areas in a critical and independent way (SFS 2007:129).

Student teachers who plan to take a teacher degree at the first level should have an independent work of at least 15 HEC and the independent work at the second level should be of at least 30 HEC or two of at least 15 HEC each. These would be added to the specified objectives that are listed and connected to degrees in the System of Qualifications and the overall objectives for all Swedish higher
education. At the first level the objectives (SFS 2007:129) are the same as those presented above but the process should not be transmission of knowledge but construction of knowledge and skills by the students (p. 6).

At the second level the objectives are stated thus:

Second level education shall essentially build on the knowledge that students acquire in first level education or corresponding knowledge. Second level education shall involve a deepening of knowledge, skills, and abilities relative to first level education and, in addition to what applies to first level education, shall

- further develop the students’ ability to independently integrate and use knowledge,
- develop the students’ ability to deal with complex phenomena, issues and situations, and
- develop the students’ potential for professional activities that demand considerable independence or for research and development work.

In June 2007 the Swedish Government decided to appoint an investigator to suggest a new teacher education (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2007). The investigator’s brief was extensive and the recommendations were expected to comprise objectives, contents, structure, scope, dimension, and questions of governance for a reformed teacher education. In the instructions (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2007) there is a talk about research links and individual scientific developments, but the parameters focus is on the skills, knowledge and understandings required by teachers in current day classrooms. The degree project is mentioned in the instructions but only in a peripheral way. The general eligibility to postgraduate studies disappeared for all students when the Bologna process started in Sweden and the new System of Qualifications was presented (SFS 2007:129).

In Table 1 a summary of 30 years development in Swedish higher education with focus on degrees and independent work is presented.

*Table 1: Summary of degrees, degree projects, and objectives of the degree project for 30 years.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document</th>
<th>Degrees</th>
<th>Degree project, special project, independent work</th>
<th>Objectives of the degree project</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1974/75 University statues SFS 1964:1464</td>
<td>Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Economics, Bachelor of Social Sciences, and Secretary Diploma</td>
<td>Special project in library higher education; degree project at technical faculty, the college of forestry, and the agricultural college</td>
<td>Scientific base; special objectives for the degree project at technical faculty, the college of forestry, and the agricultural college; no scope is mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The statute of the teaching training colleges SFS 1968:318</td>
<td>Degrees outside higher education organisation: Class teacher, Subject teacher</td>
<td>Independent work is not mentioned</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

25
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Act/Ordinance</th>
<th>Programmes/Fields</th>
<th>Objectives/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1976/77</td>
<td>University Ordinance SFS 1964:461</td>
<td>General programmes; the same degrees as 74/75</td>
<td>Identical to University statutes 1974/75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977/78</td>
<td>Higher Education Act + Higher Education Ordinance SFS 1977:.218</td>
<td>Teacher education included in higher education organisation. Five professional sector (programme, single subject courses)</td>
<td>In a single subject course a special project can be an element. General objectives; no scope is mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1977/78</td>
<td>New teacher education 1986</td>
<td>Compulsory school teacher; two fields of study – Grades 1-7 or 4-9</td>
<td>Independent work is not mentioned. The scientific base is stressed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>Higher Education Act + Higher Education Ordinance SFS 1992:815</td>
<td>Bachelor degree. Masters degree at the universities</td>
<td>Single subject course identical as 1977; Masters degree shall include an independent work corresponding to at least 10 weeks. Identical general objectives as 1977/78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992/93</td>
<td>Higher Education Act + Higher Education Ordinance SFS 1992:1434, SFS 1993:100</td>
<td>General degrees (Masters, Bachelor, University diploma) + 41 professional degrees (of which eight are teacher diplomas)</td>
<td>Independent work in Masters degree (20 weeks or 2x10 weeks) and Bachelor degree (10 weeks) and in the teacher education programmes. General objectives + the objectives the institute decides for general degrees + one specified objective for teacher education; no scope is mentioned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Reformed teacher education Higher Education Ordinance SFS 2001:23</td>
<td>General degrees as 1993 + 43 professional degrees. Teacher degree (120-220p); Graduate Diploma in Special Education</td>
<td>Degree project (10 weeks). General objectives + the objectives the institute decides for general degrees + a number of objectives in the System of Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>Adaptation to the Bologna system SFS 2007:129</td>
<td>General degrees at first and second level; Bachelor of Education and Master of Education</td>
<td>Bachelor of education an independent work of 15 HEC; Master of Education an independent work of 30 HEC or two works of 15 HEC each. Higher Education Act’s objectives for first and second level + the objectives the institute decides + the objectives for three areas from the System of Qualification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007+08</td>
<td>Directives for a new teacher education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comments on the description

The table above describes the development from a centrally governed educational system to a system that is proportionately decentralised. The teacher education system has been both inside and outside the university organisation. Although this analysis is not based on a thorough examination of the field and would benefit from a deeper critique, it appears that the independent work has been presented rather inconsequentially and vaguely in ordinance texts. The terminology is unclear. Probably, there is a difference between on one hand a special project and on the other hand an independent work/degree project. However, it is not clear that the independent work and the degree project are synonymous terms. It is worth noting that the expression, small thesis (uppsats), which is the most common term for this type of work among higher education teachers, has been found only once in the studied texts (in relation to the temporary Master education at six universities the year before the reform 1993). If we handle the meaning of independent work and degree project as rather similar, another aspect—the scope of the work—is very uncertain. With the 1993 higher education reform the scope of the independent work in a Bachelor and in a Master was decided. A third aspect is the fact that students who study a professional programme today often are eager to take a general degree too. This means that most of the professional education probably has some form of independent work, even if you can’t see it in the System of Qualifications. For most professional degrees, however, a degree project has not been required and if it has the scope has seldom been specified.

In the light of the vague ordinance texts and the fact that the scope has been unclear, it is reasonable to evaluate the research and investigations about degree projects in another way when it comes to the meaning of special project/independent work/degree project. Below some Swedish investigations are introduced.

Swedish studies about degree projects

Fifteen years ago Gerrevall (1992) established that there existed very little research about degree projects. He implemented an extensive survey concerning independent work, which was based on an analysis of about sixty general education programmes at a Swedish university. Gerrevall planned that his description would give a rough view of how different educators handled the degree projects, but not more, since the descriptions of the educations varied in clarity. A result of the analysis was that the concept ‘small thesis’ focuses on the form of presentation while other terms like ‘special project’ and ‘in-depth studies’ indicated a focus on contents. Some uniformity was found in the technical sector while in the care sector, most courses had in-depth and application works but they were not of the same scope. Within the educational sector the standard was equally unclear with small theses conducted in some subject studies. The study showed that the prospective teachers for Grades 4-6 carried out a group project characterised as an in-depth assignment directed to investigation or development corresponding to four weeks work. The author’s conclusion was:
Independent works characterised as in-depth studies or application studies are thus common occurrences and are considered as an important element in all forms of higher education (Gerrevall, 1992, p. 25).

Gerrevall (1992) put the provocative questions (on the basis of his own results) that asked, if the independent work, that seems to be taken for granted, actually can be justified, what are the expectations? He also recommends that the independent work must have a scope corresponding to at least ten weeks as he is uncertain that important education objectives can to be met during the few weeks when the independent work is implemented. He sees the students' view of the aim as a critical aspect. If a “scientific approach” should characterise the work, he claims, it is not enough to talk about how one will go about the work without talking about why it should be scientific. He also found that the independent work cannot be isolated to only the period it is implemented; it should be prepared earlier in the education. (cf. Gustavsson, 2007; see below).

Lendahl's Rosendahl's (1998) thesis is about the meanings of degree projects. She considered the degree project as a mandatory element in Swedish teacher educations after 1993. Interestingly Lendahl's Rosendahl interprets the term degree project as a term meaning the end. The aim of her work was to investigate the importance the degree project had for the prospective teacher. Lendahl's Rosendahl discusses the function of the degree project and relates it to research connection, critical thinking, and scientific approach. The author draws the conclusion that the student teachers experienced the degree project as both frustrating and inspiring. It appears that the work contributed to knowledge and also increased the ability to reflect.

In the middle of the nineties the National Agency for Higher Education organised a research project named "The Examination project". A part of this project concerned the independent work/the degree project of at least ten weeks. One part of the study focused on organisation and implementation of the degree project. Teacher education was not represented in the survey. A reason for that could be that student teachers’ degree projects at that time were not considered equal with the Bachelor thesis. The main results are described as follows in one report from the project (Eriksson, Högberg, Bäcklund & Gustafsson, 1997, pp. 7–8).

The investigation from the departments shows big variations between different subjects/programmes when objectives, organisation, implementation and assessment of the independent work are studied. ... Further it was clear that the criteria for the assessment often were unclear and that the product, the thesis/the report, is an important part of the assessment.... We also supposed that differences could be an effect of general or professional degrees and if the educations were run at universities or new university colleges. However, such differences could not be established. On the contrary, there were considerable differences between various subjects/programmes.

In another report from the project the students’ views of independent work are presented (Eriksson, Högberg, Bäcklund & Gustafsson, 1999). The basis for the results was a questionnaire with just over 2000 replies (67%) of which approximately a
fifth of the answers came from students who had not finished the degree project. Pleased and displeased students were found in all subjects and programmes. Among others it was clear that the students saw that their tutors in the same departments had various values about what was good and less good and also that there could be big variations between the tutors’ and the examiners’ assessments. Many students wanted a clearer structure and organisation for the degree project, for instance seminars during the process and above all a seminar at the end of the process. The students also wanted engaged and available tutors with whom they could have frequent discussions. The most interesting aspect of the studies of this project was that they showed approximately the same problems and views independent of subjects and programmes. Therefore we can suppose that the results also could be valid for the teacher educations at the same time.

Two years ago a dissertation that focuses the sense of writing a small thesis was published (Hagström, 2005). The theoretical starting point was taken in pragmatism and the dissertation builds on text analysis. The author emphasises the writing process and its dependence on context and the students’ understanding of the matter they have chosen to write about. She also claims that the overall objectives for higher education are seldom linked to the writing process.

When the reformed teacher education was implemented in 2001 the evaluators from the National Agency for Higher Education (2005) listed a number of planning activities that could not be implemented because of the meagre time to plan. One aspect discussed was the degree project and its place in the educational process. The evaluators’ general assessment was that the high aspirations of the bill (Prop. 1999/2000:135) had not been realised when the evaluation occurred; the degree project and its important role in the development of a scientific attitude is one example. The group remarked that the research connection had an instrumental form that consisted of training research methods, exercises in implementing surveys and the replication of previously implemented degree projects. Instead, they called for creative, scientific, and interesting research questions, identification of fundamental epistemological questions or discussions of the reasons that one does qualified analyses of a certain material. The evaluators also noted that there existed a contradiction between research alignment and practice alignment (Prop. 1999/2000:135).

Another study that focused only on degree projects (National Agency for Higher Education, 2006) also presents quite a negative assessment of the degree projects in the teacher education programme. However, questions about validity as well as reliability can be aroused in this study depending on selections of works, the evaluators’ different frames of reference, and the aims of independent works in the general and professional oriented degrees respectively.

In a collaboration between three Swedish university colleges (Dalarna, Gävle, Mälardalen) and two Swedish universities (Karlstad and Örebro) an evaluation of degree projects in the teacher education programmes was implemented in 2005 (Examensarbetet i lärarutbildningen vid lärosätena inom Penta Plusområdet, 2005). For the review, three degree projects were chosen from each institution – one weak but graded pass, one graded pass, and one graded pass with distinction. Each work was read by more than one person. It was found that the reviewed degree projects
were especially research directed in the sense that they followed the framework for a scientific work, although there were deficiencies in scientific attitudes and it was difficult to identify that new knowledge had been reached. The latter was valid both for the scientific aspect and the professional aspect (cf. Gustafsson & Hallström, 2005a,b).

**DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The purpose of this chapter is to show how the degree project became introduced in higher education, and especially in teacher education, and to describe objectives associated with the process. A restriction of the analysis is that its bases are laws and ordinance texts. However, according to Lindensjö and Lundgren (2000) this is the so-called ‘arena for formulations’ aimed at governing the formulation of those documents that govern the concrete educational process. When starting the analysis, there was an assumption about a systematic growth of the degree project idea with clear intentions behind the development. The analysis certainly presents a growth but it is a growth characteristic of deviations and lack of continuity. The idea that it was possible to present accurately the intentions of the governance was probably optimistic because it would require a review of all those discussions that lead to words and formulations in laws and regulations. It is a restriction that such a work not has been done. At the same time it is clear that the higher education teacher regulations at best control the **Higher Education Act** and **Higher Education Ordinance** but rarely control the preparatory work. This means that it is the objectives in the **Higher Education Act**, the guidelines and regulations in the current ordinance and adequate objectives decided at institution level that are the starting points for syllabi, assessment criteria and study guides. From this perspective, it is remarkable that the terminology for the independent work/the degree project/the special project is so unclear and so inaccessible and difficult to link to the individual objectives of the **Higher Education Act**, and more particularly, to the System of Qualifications. It is also impossible to use the current texts to demonstrate that there has been a degree project in some educations.

There is no doubt that the scientific approach and the scientific importance of the degree project have been stressed with every new reform. Both research and the National Agency for Higher Education have shown strong academic demands as a natural demand. The possibility to demonstrate a connection with the degree project and the higher education objectives overall has, however, not occurred. One result of this has been an academic training far from classic education and real scientific training.

As a consequence of the analysis, results from studies about the degree project require new interpretations. Gerrevall’s (1992) survey that has been reviewed above is the most thorough study of them. He tackled the governing documents in more detail than the present analysis, but he also restricts himself in aspects of the critique of the guidelines by using Lindensjö and Lundgren’s (2000) terminology. Not unexpectedly Gerrevall highlights the problems with the terminology in the type of work that has been studied. He also emphasises the question of whether important educational objectives actually can be reached during those weeks when
the independent work is implemented. The odd thing is that Gerrevall’s study had no effects. The uncertainties of the governing documents are still, fifteen years later, the same.

Lendahl’s Rosendal (1998) claims that the scientific requirements and the importance of the degree project that occurred through 1993 year’s reform must be considered as something new, although various forms of independent works existed in teacher education earlier. Possibly, one can say that the requirements have become explicit in another way. This in turn has led to a discussion about the academic process and the professional process respectively. Lendahl’s Rosendahl poses the rhetorical question, “has the strong emphasis on teachers’ progression to postgraduate studies through the degree project taken place at the expense of research connection in a more general sense and what are the research connection’s consequences for the teachers’ vocational activity?”

When it comes to the investigations/the evaluations (Examensarbetet i lärarutbildningen vid lärosätena inom Penta Plusområdet, 2005; National Agency for Higher Education, 2005, 2006) we have to consider that the studies have focused on the products, that is the presented text, but suffer in terms of validity and reliability. Some tutors and some examiners want the products to be “clinical” cleaned, which means that problems, arguments of pathways and similar are not written down at all or written very little about. When this happens, one drops away big parts of ten weeks’ work, parts that maybe have been decisive for the student’s learning process.

Gustavsson (2007) has quite strong arguments on the theme scientific and professional in relation to teacher education degree projects and thereby adds to a lot of ideas that came forward in earlier studies. Central in his messages is that the student teachers never become proficient in scientific attitudes, for instance examining attitudes, theories and methods related to their degree project. This means that “The students are lulled in the attitude that there exists one scientific attitude that in itself holds handful of methods” (Gustavsson, 2007, p. 58). That training leads to a standardisation, a “reducing model or template thinking” that has nothing to do with independence and critical attitudes. Both Gerrevall (1992) and the National Agency for Higher Education’s evaluation (2005) could establish that the procedure was more important than the contents.

Thus, we can establish that there exist many views on the quality of the degree projects that in extension means criticism against both research connection and scientific attitudes. The problem is also that the studies presented here seem to indicate that neither the scientific nor the professional objectives get the weight they could. Possibly, current evaluations have underestimated the complex character of the degree project in an educational programme. It is also noticeable that so few have discussed the governing process and the governing documents. Gerrevall’s (1992) and Askling’s (1981) studies stand quite alone and unchallenged.

The review of documents and earlier research has lead to some conclusions. The analysis made clear that it seems difficult to harmonise a professional education as teacher education with other higher education. The reforms of teacher education have often been quite separate moves, sometimes before and sometimes after other reforms of higher education. Today it is important that professional degrees are
parts of the Bologna system. This means vague and unspecific steering documents, as it is necessary that governing documents can be used for all. Therefore the Act, the Ordinance, and the System of Qualifications, have given, and give, much room for interpretation. The force of the documents is weak. The present analysis shows that higher education institutes’ implementation of documents has an open field. Combined with a general attitude that decentralised operations are better than centralised, the teacher educators, and all other professional educators, are responsible for most of the decisions themselves. When it comes to the degree project this is interesting because the teacher educators, as individual persons, have different abilities to handle the degree project depending on their own education and academic career (see above).

Thus, one conclusion is that the degree project can be almost anything, because there are no written central restrictions or specific rules about the project except a quantitative measure of how many weeks the independent work should be. The second conclusion is that the loss of central clear instructions and objectives opens the field for other levels in a decentralised organisation to take over. The third conclusion is that investigations and research tell us that the possibility for institutions and individual teacher educators to make decisions about the degree project is used very little. It is relevant to ask why and then you have a fourth conclusion. The conclusion drawn here is that some teacher educators win the play. It seems to be the teachers who have an academic tradition and who want to protect the degree project as an academic product. Instead of seeing the degree project as a means to develop the profession and prepare a concrete work as a teacher, nearly all student teachers have carried out “small theses”. The National Board of Higher Education (2005, 2006) has criticised the quality of the degree project and so also have researchers (see above). Concurrent pictures of big differences between educational programmes/subjects/institutions irritate and surprise. One can, however, only expect differences regarding the extraneous frameworks that have been given, and are given, for the independent work. Yet, very few question the degree project. It is a necessary part of the education but nobody asks herself/himself why the outcomes are as they are. This chapter should be seen as a first step in that direction. Analysis, such as presented here can make the meaning clear and improve the degree project in a direction that gives the possibilities for degree projects of both developing the profession and contributing with new knowledge.

NOTES

1 Acknowledgements. I would like to thank my colleagues at the Department of Education and Psychology, University of Gävle, for valuable and interesting talks and comments on the text at seminars. For important help to make a comprehensible and readable text in English, I would like to thank Doreen Rorrison at Charles Sturt University, Australia.

2 The Swedish documents used in the analysis are Higher Education Acts, Higher Education Ordinances, and common as well as teacher education documents. The Swedish titles of the documents are presented in a Swedish version of this chapter.

3 The System of Qualifications is an appendix to the Higher Education Ordinance containing objectives for professional higher educations.

4 The Swedish regulatory documents in the table are excluded in the reference list.
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Högskoleförordningen (SFS 1997:218 2§).


C. GUSTAFSSON


Christina Gustafsson
Department of Education
Uppsala University, Sweden