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CONTENT

Editorial

INVITED SECTION: FESTSCHRIFT FOR LISBETH LUNDAHL

Karl-Georg Ahlström *The Origin of Special Education in Sweden*

Anne-Lise Arnesen *International politics and national reforms*

Dennis Beach *Education Science in Sweden*

Per-Olof Erixon *Academic Literacies; Discourse and Epistemology in a Swedish University*

Ingrid Gogolin *The Challenge of Super Diversity for Education in Europe*

David Hamilton & Gaby Weiner *Dancing at the Edge: Writing for the Academic Marketplace*

Eлина Lahelma *Gender Awareness in Finnish Teacher Education: an Impossible Mission?*

Martin Lawn *Governing through Data in English Education*

Johan Lithner *University Mathematics Students' Learning Difficulties*

Jenny Ozga *Governing Narratives: "local" meanings and globalising education policy*

Inge-Bert Täljedal *Reform and Reaction in Teacher Education at Umeå University*

Pavel Zgaga *Education for "a better world": is it still possible?*

Elisabet Öhrn *Class and ethnicity at work. Segregation and conflict in a Swedish secondary school*



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EDUCATION INQUIRY

Education Inquiry is an international on-line, peer-reviewed journal with free access in the field of Educational Sciences and Teacher Education. It publishes original empirical and theoretical studies from a wide variety of academic disciplines. As the name of the journal suggests, one of its aims is to challenge established conventions and taken-for-granted perceptions within these fields.

Education Inquiry is looking for lucid and significant contributions to the understanding of contextual, social, organizational and individual factors affecting teaching and learning, the links between these aspects, the nature and processes of education and training as well as research in and on Teacher Education and Teacher Education policy. This includes research ranging from pre-school education to higher education, and research on formal and informal settings. Education Inquiry welcomes cross-disciplinary contributions and innovative perspectives. Of particular interest are studies that take as their starting point, education practice and subject teaching or didactics.

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FESTSCHRIFT FOR LISBETH LUNDAHL

INVITED SECTION

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Reform and Reaction in Teacher Education at Umeå University

Inge-Bert Täljedal*

Abstract

From 2000 to 2009 Umeå University had a genuine faculty board for teacher education that was responsible for both first-cycle teaching and research training. The board itself was an innovation in the Swedish high school system and introduced a new practice-oriented subject for the doctoral degree, *pedagogiskt arbete* (“Educational Work”). The origin, development and abolition of this faculty board, as perceived by a former Vice-Chancellor, is sketched against the background of political trends and academic rivalries. It is proposed that the local course of events at Umeå reflects the fortuitous interaction of two different kinds of polarised fields of interest. In the more general and long-standing tension between conservatism and progression in school politics, the conservative camp lost in 2000 but presently has the upper hand. This fact is to the advantage of the traditional academic subject *pedagogik* (Education) by lessening the threat to funding and positions represented by more practice-oriented school educators.

Keywords: educational work, faculty board, pedagogy, research training, teacher education

Introduction

In matters of school development and teacher education Sweden is presently going through a phase of reaction. This fact is generally acknowledged, and well appreciated by some. Others regret this and may even go so far as to consider these times reactionary.

The things subject to such diverse valuations include the design and didactic effects of the marking system, the wording of goals in curricula, the function of the school system as an instrument for social stratification, the desirable proportion of the population with a university training, the good for society and individuals of there being generous options for continuing education, the dependence of the school debate on vague analytical concepts like *flum*, and so forth (*flum* is Swedish pejorative slang; vague in intension it is a favourite expression of Jan Björklund, Minister of Schools 2006–2008 and Minister of Education 2008–; as in *flumpedagogik* and *flumskola*, presumably meaning something like “woolly pseudo didactics” and “a degenerated school system fostering woolly thinking and imprecise knowledge lacking in substance”).

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Naturally enough, the spirit of the times also influences the administration of teacher education. In a local micro perspective this fact is illustrated at Umeå University where, within a few years, the vice-chancellors and the university board have swayed hither and thither in how they organise the governing of teacher education programmes.

At first sight, the shaping of a board or steering committee may appear a purely practical task, having little to do with ideas or philosophy. However, academic ideology and theory of science are highly relevant to the matter. Aspects of principal importance include the relation between first-cycle teaching and research, the essence of research as a thrust for true originality and its implications for administration, the intension of the concept of “academic subject”, and the demarcation of wider “areas” or “fields” of science and scholarship suitable for the establishment of “faculties” and “schools”. That education at the university level should somehow be linked to research goes more or less without saying. That research can only be well administered in the hands of scientists and scholars is perhaps not equally obvious. However, it is essential that researchers themselves have a very strong say in the matter as true research is a quest for the as yet unknown and therefore not readily amenable to routine administrative standards and valuations. The definition and demarcation of academic subjects is an important example of what should be left to the discretion of the scientific and scholarly professions. Notwithstanding this desideratum, subjects can be understood as adaptations of the academic organisation to both practical needs and the prevailing theoretical understanding of the world. As history tells, subjects are not rigid metaphysical entities but undergo processes of emergence, division and fusion.

Considerations like the above were decisive when in 1999, as the newly appointed Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University, I proposed that there ought to be a proper faculty board for teacher education, *i.e.* a board of collegiately elected academics and students governing both the first-cycle training and the research training of school teachers, a proposition assented to by the then university board.

A decade later my successor, Professor Göran Sandberg, abolished the faculty board for teacher education, replacing it with an administratively more elaborate organisation, the “Umeå School of Education”. Although not immediately evident from the formal rhetoric, the responsibility for research training was in reality once again separated from that for first-cycle education. Whereas the faculty board for teacher education had helped enhance the profile of the profession of school teacher within the university environment, its replacement by a less potent system of steering committees acted in the reverse, albeit under a grandiloquent designation. Being party to the case I do not wish to polemise unduly, although I believe that Vice-Chancellor Sandberg was no more judicious than I in those very matters. His being surrounded by a somewhat different environment, notably the spirit of the times and a newly recruited university board, may have contributed to the regress that, admittedly, is questionable in my eyes.

Whatever one may think about these issues, it can hardly be denied that the decade of the faculty board was an interesting phase in the history of Umeå University, remembered by many teacher educators as a period of much hope and expectation for the future. As time goes by, a diminishing number of people will remember the reform and its underlying ideas and motives. The following is a brief sketch of my own personal recollections.

Formal Aspects of the Faculty Board for Teacher Education

From April 2000 to January 2009 Umeå University had a full-blown faculty board for teacher education. This is to say, a board authorised to be responsible for both first-cycle teaching and research training and with a majority of members duly elected by doctors and students active in the teacher education programmes (mostly professors and lecturers), all in conformance with the stipulations for faculty boards in the then Ordinance for Higher Education. According to the ordinance, only faculty boards, elected and composed in a certain way were empowered to point out the academic subjects in which a doctoral diploma could be obtained, and to handle examinations for the degree. A faculty board was something distinctly different from a mere board for education; different in authority and hence also in prestige, one might add.

The new Faculty Board for Teacher Education at Umeå University was in a sense an innovation in the Swedish high school system. As in other Swedish universities or university colleges, the earlier governing board for teacher programmes had merely been in charge of first-cycle education. Research training of relevance to school teachers could then only be obtained under the auspices of more traditional faculty boards, in other words boards whose areas of responsibility corresponded to traditional faculties, in Umeå above all the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, and the Faculty of Science and Technology. (Since 2009 this is again the case, as the most salient effect of the abolition of the faculty board for teacher education.)

The very concept of “faculty”, long established in academic practice and until recently explicitly important in the Swedish High School Law and High School Ordinance, was no longer legally defined when I took office as Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University. Half a year earlier, *i.e.* on 1 January 1999, it had vanished from the law and ordinance in accordance with the government bill, *Högskolans ledning, lärare och organisation* (“The Management, Teachers and Organisation of High School Institutions”; Freivalds & Tham, 1997). In its place were four “areas of science” (*vetenskapsområden*), a judicial and administrative concept and term signifying wide scientific or scholarly fields within which universities were entitled to arrange research training and to which the parliament appropriated funding. The four areas were: the Humanities and Social Sciences, Medicine, Natural Sciences, and Technology. Thus, faculties in the previous legal meaning of the word no longer existed, whereas faculty boards certainly did.

The university was now free to establish faculty boards to govern first-cycle and research training within any area of responsibility that the university board might find fit to demarcate. The areas of responsibility needed not coincide with an “area of science” in the sense of the parliamentary state budget. This amendment of the High School Law and High School Ordinance afforded increased flexibility to the local organisation of universities. At the same time, it preserved a most important aspect of traditional academic freedom in that the direction, content and qualitative norms of research training should be in the hands of qualified academic staff (in part through their elected representatives), not in those of a university board or vice-chancellor.

In spite of this relatively thorough legal reform, the word “faculty” has remained viable in the daily talk of Swedish academics, a linguistic convenience that is mostly practical and harmless as the word naturally refers to the area of responsibility of a faculty board. However, there are situations when this convenience may hamper the free flow of thought, resulting in unnecessarily conservative consequences. Academic teachers as well as management officials are long accustomed to think of faculties as consisting not only of intellectual fields of action but also of physical structures (buildings and equipment) and people in subordinated units of organisation, such as departments. No doubt, the proposal to establish a faculty board for teacher education was at first met with some bewilderment as to what the corresponding faculty would look like and where in the material world it could be seen. To be sure, departments existed that were entirely devoted to teacher education (remnants from a once completely independent training college without much research), but they did not quite suffice to form a faculty in the old sense. That a modern faculty board could in principle avail itself of teaching and research at all the departments in all the old faculties was regarded by many as an unfamiliar and somewhat daring idea. Initially, the vision of a well-functioning faculty board without a corresponding old-time faculty of its own could even have seemed worryingly enigmatic. If, for no other reason, this suspect modernity might have created problems of etiquette at the doctoral award ceremony, the tradition-laden great festivity during which faculties are central to the ritual. And yet, in fact, the idea was so simple, straightforward, conducive to transdisciplinary collaboration and in line with the then recent parliamentary decision!

There was only one formal aspect that really threatened to stifle the administrative flexibility otherwise afforded by the legislation of 1999. According to the High School Ordinance, to be qualified to participate in the election of a specific faculty board, as an elector or as a candidate for membership a teacher had to carry out at least 50 percent of his or her professional duty within that board’s area of responsibility. Of course, that stipulation was meant as a simple means of picking out teachers with a sufficient expertise of the relevant kind. However, the requirement effectively prevented anyone from participating in elections for more than one faculty board, a consequence that seemed unwarranted from a practical point of view and was probably not deliberately intended. Why should 50 percent of one’s workload attest to a

radically greater expertise than, say, 49 percent, a figure compatible with being allowed to vote for two different faculty boards? It soon became obvious that this question was not merely theoretical.

Many professors and lecturers with a great interest and heavy involvement in teacher education also participated in teaching or research governed by the old faculty boards. Although greeting the new faculty board for teacher education with positive expectations, quite naturally these professors and lecturers were reluctant to give up their accustomed academic identities as, for example, humanists or natural scientists. For this reason, well before the second election of the Faculty Board for Teacher Education, I wrote to the Ministry of Education and proposed that the High School Ordinance be revised on this point. On 30 May 2002 the Government issued an amended version of the ordinance, now specifying the qualification for faculty board membership and right to vote as 40 percent of a professor's or lecturer's workload (provided, of course, that they held a doctor's degree). For the first time it was then possible to view the faculty and departmental organisation of a whole university as a matrix rather than as a more rigid divisional structure.

The Process Leading Towards the Goal

The establishment of the Faculty Board for Teacher Education was an attempt to finalise the incorporation of a previously independent teacher training college into Umeå University. The teacher training college was founded at Umeå in 1879, almost a century before Umeå University. Two other high schools at Umeå, for odontology and medicine, received their first students in the 1950s, united in the 1960s, and with some royal pomp became officially inaugurated as a university in 1965.

By parliamentary decision Umeå University also formally merged with the teacher training college already in 1977. However, the functional integration was noticeably slow for two decades. The former training college long succeeded, or was forced, to stand somewhat aside from the surrounding intellectual environment of the university. This state of affairs seemed to reflect that the two formerly independent institutions represented academic cultures of a distinctly different flavour, largely because the training college had little or no involvement in research and was entirely devoted to vocational education. Certainly, the university's Department of Education (*pedagogik*) housed professors with a special assignment to teacher education, but even within that department interests seemed to diverge as to the importance of amalgamating the two cultures.

Although many highly devoted professors and lecturers appreciated steps in the direction of a closer rapport between teacher education and the rest of the university, I could also sense a certain resistance from either side. If I am not mistaken, some teacher educators feared a loss of their professional identity as educators for the benefit of the general school system, while some more generally oriented professors or lecturers of the university subject *pedagogik* (education) feared the levelling or

degrading of their research-based academic standard. (For a broader perspective of the discussion of pedagogy in Swedish teacher education, see Erixon Arreman 2005, 2008, and Vinterek 2002). Coming from a vocational faculty myself, I could easily sympathise with any delicate professional pride on the part of teacher educators. At the same time, it appeared necessary to encourage their involvement in qualified research and not yield to any lingering opinion that scientific or scholarly work would not be part of their trade. I judged that a proper faculty board for teacher education, recognising teacher education as an area of scientific or scholarly investigation in its own right, would serve to recognise both the profession of school teacher and the fact that good research is a hallmark of true universities. Not to mention the benefits for the young that could hopefully result from a marked increase in school-oriented research carried out by experienced school teachers.

Although without significance for the development in 2000, a minor episode from that time is perhaps relevant to understanding the more recent turns of the organisation of teacher education. When during the autumn of 1999 I was deliberating whether to establish the new faculty board, at one stage I encountered the Swedish University Chancellor, Sigbrit Franke, on the roof terrace of a ministry building in Stockholm, where both of us happened to be attending a social gathering. The event had nothing to do with teacher education but, as Sigbrit had been a professor of pedagogy for many years and was also my predecessor as vice-chancellor as well as a close personal acquaintance, I took the opportunity to ask for her opinion. The situation did not allow much discussion but the Chancellor clearly advised me against forming the new faculty board. Rightly or wrongly, I chose to interpret that response as not reflecting any special chancellery or vice-chancellery insights but more Sigbrit's belonging to a community of traditional university educators protecting the perceived interests of their academic subject *pedagogik*.

A New Practice-Oriented Subject for the Doctoral Degree

The new faculty board started operating on 1 April 2000. During its first session a new subject of research training for the doctoral degree was decided upon, *pedagogiskt arbete* (Educational Work). To be qualified for studies in this new subject, students were expected to have two years of practical experience as a school teacher. This development was strongly opposed by certain senior staff at the Department of Education as well as by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Science, to which the Department of Education traditionally belonged. It could be argued that the new subject was in fact not new but an aspect of good old *pedagogik* (education), for which there was already a responsible department and faculty board. In all probability, some critics also sincerely worried that the hijacking of their spiritual legacy by an ignorant vice-chancellor, plotting with scholarly upstarts from the teacher college subculture, could seriously damage the standard and reputation of the social sciences at Umeå. They found it natural to demand much more by way of basic studies in education

(*pedagogik*) as a prerequisite for research training. That said, there can be little doubt that more mundane aspects, such as funding worries and fairly trivial interpersonal tensions, also contributed significantly to fuelling the opposition.

Once in enthusiastic operation, the new faculty board quite naturally started to claim a fair share of the university's total research budget. I was not able to meet that request to the extent anywhere near the board's expectations. Nonetheless, the board managed to start moving at an encouraging and rewarding rate owing to it having been successful in an application for external support. For example, by virtue of this faculty board in 2001 Umeå University obtained the Government's assignment to co-ordinate the new National School in Educational Work (*Nationella forskarskolan för pedagogiskt arbete, NaPa*), a co-operative project together with seven other universities and university colleges in Sweden. International collaboration was achieved in the form of an impressive network for which the Dean of the faculty board served as co-ordinator, namely the "Thematic Network on Teacher Education and Research in Europe (TNTERE)". TNTERE was funded by a decision in 2000 as part of the European Commission's Socrates/Erasmus programme and comprised around a hundred institutions for teacher education, not only in Europe. Realising the practical importance and relevance of the commission of the new faculty board, the Municipality of Umeå decided to finance three doctoral studentships and participated constructively in exposing locally experienced needs, without interfering in the integrity of the academic responsibility for the formulation of research problems and the investigative process. Support was also obtained early on from the life insurance company Folksam, not to mention the ordinary flow of grants to individual projects supported by the traditional sources of research funding.

The introduction of the new doctoral subject *pedagogiskt arbete* (Educational Work) was intended to meet the need for more school-oriented research that was not only felt by school professionals but had also been identified and succinctly articulated at the political level by the parliamentary commission *Lärarytbildningskommittén* (*LUK 97*, "Teacher Education Committee"; Björkman et al. 1999). As the commission largely consisted of members of parliament, led by the social democratic chairman of the parliament's standing committee for education, it was natural for the government to largely accept its proposals. Indeed, in 2000 the commission's main ideas regarding the first-cycle education of teachers were enacted into law by the Swedish parliament. However, in marked contrast in its bill the government had chosen not to follow the commission's advice to establish *utbildningsvetenskap* ("Educational Science") as a new official area for parliamentary funding, like that already existing for Medicine or Technology, other applied research areas of fundamental importance for society. Instead, the government and parliament rested content by adding and financing a new committee for educational research at the Swedish Research Council, a much less powerful and more conservative decision than that proposed by the parliamentary commission. Although the government bill talked about strengthening

research and research training linked to teacher education, the politicians no doubt shrank from the responsibility of securing such a development and instead referred that obligation to the university leaders. However, in reality it was of course impossible for vice-chancellors to carry through more than marginal redistributions of the research grants already at work in their institutions. Hence, the strengthening of teacher education that may have been politically intended in 2000 was effectively limited to a half measure, probably with implications for the reaction to come.

Origin and Practical Implementation of the Idea

Although I was instrumental for the creation of the Faculty Board for Teacher Education, the general idea that the university needed a new kind of research training programme for school teachers was by no means mine. As a professor at the Faculty of Medicine, before 1999 I had had little reason to pay any attention to the education of school teachers. However, as Vice-Chancellor I soon discovered that I had to deal with a pending commission from my university board regarding this matter. As I remember it, the commission was formulated in a way suggesting that the university board considered it within its mandate to have a new research training programme developed and decided upon. I went ahead with the task without really questioning that impression until after a while.

The already existing board for first-cycle teacher education and the Department of Education (*pedagogik*) were natural starting points for deliberating on how to meet the request of the university board. Both of these instances were sincerely interested but had different expectations for the outcome and tended to emphasise irreconcilable demands. I sensed the first inklings of those conflicting interests that were later to bedevil the birth and life of the faculty board for teacher education (and ultimately to kill it, I believe).

One late evening I sat at my desk glancing through the High School Ordinance, a text which in the preceding years I had not read very often, as is likely the case with most professors. I was suddenly struck by an unexpected insight: Vice-chancellors and university boards had no licence to decide on matters of research training, not even to decide the subjects in which the university should offer a doctoral degree. It was all an exclusive privilege for faculty boards! I found my “discovery” so exciting that I dashed down the corridor of the almost empty office building to discuss it with the head of the Vice-Chancellor’s Planning Department who, like me, worked late hours.

Among the already existing faculty boards the only reasonable candidate for the job was the one in charge of the Faculty of Social Sciences, to which the Department of Education belonged. It soon became obvious that those stakeholders were not very keen on introducing a new doctoral programme tailored to the needs of the board of teacher education. In essence, as I experienced it, the traditional university educators (professors and lecturers of *pedagogik*) wanted to keep a firm grip on the development, whereas the school teacher educators wished something more novel and practice-

oriented. I found myself stuck between two brands of educators (*pedagoger*) who were evidently in for some kind of power struggle. As I lacked personal expertise and professional status in *pedagogik* and teacher education, superficially it would have been prudent academic behaviour for me to yield to the faculty board of the social sciences. A major reason why I did not was my ample experience from a vocational faculty of some academic prestige. Against that background, I simply found some of the arguments of the established university educators (*pedagoger*) academic and theoretical to an exaggerated degree, apparently reflecting a somewhat disdainful, or at least condescending, attitude to succinctly practice-oriented researchers. In brief, I felt that the arguments of the school teacher educators were more valid and convincing and deserved a positive response. As I had realised that only faculty boards could introduce new doctoral programmes, I could see only one option for action and so proposed the establishment of the new Faculty Board for Teacher Education. Other arguments can certainly be added to defend that decision. However, as a matter of historical fact, it was the need for the new doctoral programme that did it.

Perhaps I should add that I had no stakes myself in this matter. Before becoming Vice-Chancellor I was, for example, only superficially acquainted with the chairman of the board for teacher education, Professor Daniel Kallós. However, my discussions with him and his allies, as well as with his academic adversaries, convinced me about the necessity of reforming the research training of school teachers and of forming a comprehensive board for both first-cycle and research education. Although new to me, these ideas were not highly original but essentially the same as those put forward by the parliamentary commission *Lärarytbildningskommittén* (LUK 97).

Some Final Remarks

Once the new faculty board was established, I felt very strongly that it caused much inspiration, diligence and joy of work among the teachers and administrators involved in teacher education. It was also encouraging that a few months later the Swedish government and parliament followed suit by legislating that universities involved in teacher education must have a comprehensive board for first-cycle and research training. Sadly enough, the positive feelings of a springtime for teacher education were somewhat counterbalanced by a fixation of conservative resentments among some staff members at the more traditional Department of Education (*pedagogik*).

A more entertaining expression of a certain worry over the pioneering step taken by Umeå University was recorded in 2002 in the form of a bureaucratic admonition from the Office of the University Chancellor. The faculty board for teacher education at Umeå had been found not to correspond in exact detail to the copycat substitute for a faculty board, *särskilt organ* (“Special Body”), that had been legislated upon a few months after the decision at Umeå University. While causing local expressions of both amusement and some annoyance, this problem was smoothly taken care of by the university board making a couple of minor formal adjustments (Franke & Wärn,

2003a). To the credit of the Chancellor, she also wrote to the government in principle supporting the right of universities to establish genuine faculty boards for teacher education (Franke & Wärn, 2003b).

Nevertheless, the Faculty Board for Teacher Education at Umeå University is now gone. It is difficult not to interpret this fact as at least a temporary victory for those who feared and resented the establishment of the board a decade ago. It is equally difficult not to view it as an expression of a more general reactionary trend in education politics and society at large. However, such thinking does not imply that the subject of Education (*pedagogik*) is in itself more conservative or progressive than any other field of academic expertise. Rather, the local course of events at Umeå seems to reflect the fortuitous interaction of two different kinds of polarised fields of interest. In the more general and long-standing tension between conservatism and progression in school politics, the conservative camp lost in 2000 but presently has the upper hand. This change is to the advantage of traditional academic *pedagogik*, I guess, in lessening the threat to funding and positions represented by more practice-oriented school educators.

Now, be that as it may, during the eight years that the Faculty Board for Teacher Education at Umeå University was allowed to exist, no less than 25 doctoral theses in educational work were successfully defended. It is hoped that they represent a significant contribution to the possible improvement of our schools, whatever may be now in the stars for teacher education in the years to come.

Inge-Bert Täljedal is a Professor Emeritus of Histology. His scientific publications are largely found in the area of experimental diabetes research. He was Vice-Chancellor of Umeå University (1999–2005), and Chairman of the City Council of Umeå (1994–1998).

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