Changes in teacher education in Sweden in the neo-liberal education age: Toward an occupation in itself or a profession for itself?

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Abstract
In the last two decades, the Swedish welfare state has been radically transformed in a neo-liberal direction, including extensive decentralisation and marketisation of the education sector with significant consequences for the work and professional identities of its teachers. Teacher education has also been directly included in this transformation. The present article addresses the changes that have been introduced. We are concerned that key elements of theoretical disciplinary professional knowledge may be lost in the transformation at serious cost to future teachers and teacher professionalism, and that research knowledge that would help in this respect is no longer being financed for production nor communicated as examined knowledge in teacher education in Sweden today.

Keywords: professional knowledge base, profession for itself, disciplinary pedagogy, education theory, didactic turn, generification

Introduction
Sweden is commonly regarded as a striking example of a social democratic welfare state with active government involvement in welfare matters (OECD 2011). However, in the last two decades the State has been radically transformed in a neo-liberal direction, including extensive decentralisation and marketisation of the public sector, with this bringing about significant changes in relation to education policy and the management and organisation of schools and teachers’ work (Beach 2008; Lundahl et al. 2013). These changes have also been extensively researched in this (Allan 2014; Lundström and Holm 2011) and other journals (Carlgren and Klette 2008; Solbrekke and Englund 2014) and the evidence of their existence and effects is compelling. As, for instance Brante et al. (2015) pointed out recently, teachers from both Swedish teacher unions are amongst the professionals in Sweden who most emphatically see their work and working conditions as dramatically changed in recent years by the
neo-liberal reforms and the introduction of new public management, in terms of workload and levels of external control, with this creating negative effects on core professional duties and job satisfaction. Teachers see their work as having a changed character due to the increased bureaucratic control, increased accountability and increased performativity.

Teacher education has also changed character in recent years, particularly through the most recent Teacher Education Green and White Papers such as the recommendations of the 2007 Teacher Education Committee (SOU 2008:109) and Swedish Government Bill 2009/10:89, which have been identified as having reversed a policy trend in teacher education from the 1950s and 1960s to the beginning of the new millennium (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach 2013). This trend had been one toward a more unitary profession with a shared educational theoretical knowledge base. The new policies changed the composition of this theoretical component and also moved teacher education back toward a structure with separate courses and content for prospective early-years, primary school, vocational, and secondary school subject teachers. At one and the same time as changes affecting the working conditions of teachers have been introduced, important changes in the classification and framing of teacher education have also occurred (Sjöberg 2011).

The present article addresses these changes in terms of their implications and value for teachers as a professional category, i.e. as a group that has solid theoretical knowledge and experience for conducting and developing reflective practices in specified occupational fields. In doing so, it identifies three things in particular. These are first that there has recently been a drift away from theoretical research-based knowledge of practice in teacher education toward academic subject studies and practical-vocational content. Second, that there is good reason to be very wary of these changes and their effects. Previous research has pointed out how changes such as these may risk undermining the foundations for professional judgement by emphasising practical-behavioural know-how and subject content knowledge in teacher education at the expense of professional know-why knowledge (Eriksson 2009; Kallós 2009) such that content of the kind which can contribute to authoritative subjective relationships between teachers and learners and teachers and other education stakeholders may have been lost (Linqvist et al. 2014; Solbrekke and Englund 2011, 2014). Third, this is far from ‘a Sweden only development’. It has also been noted in England and Wales by, amongst others, Lauder et al. (2009) and Lawn and Furlong (2009), in Europe more broadly in, for instance, Goodson and Lindblad (2011: eds.) and Beach (2008), and in the USA by Apple (2001), Sleeter (2008) and Zeichner (2010). In all cases, developments have been noted to have accompanied a broader neo-liberal transformation of the public sector. The present article affirms this and also adds further empirical evidence and critical analysis. Concepts and ideas
developed by Bernstein (2000, 2003) and Beck and Young (2005) concerning the erosion of the theoretical content in professional education programmes are made use of.

**Aims, frame and methods**

The work behind this article principally involved a detailed reading of teacher education policy recommendations and reforms in the form of Government and Parliamentary Green and White Papers from the 1965 Teacher Education Expert Committee up to and including the most recent Teacher Education Commission Report (SOU 2008:109: *Sustainable Teacher Education*), and the Swedish Government Bill (2009/10:892: *Top of the Class*) that followed from it. However, previous research and National Examination Ordinances (NEOs) for teacher education programmes across this period have also been of interest, as have the Local Examination Descriptions (LEDs) for current teacher education programmes at ten randomly chosen teacher education deliverers; three multi-faculty universities and seven semi-universities (Högskolor). These texts depart from NEO requirements and provide local descriptions of current examination objectives and requirements at specific institutions. They show in other words how national ordinances are locally interpreted.

The Green and White Papers and the NEOs were concentrated on the most. They represent what Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) call political texts that are open to a method of investigation based on critical discourse analysis as a means of identifying and investigating the ideas and intentions that inform text foundations, composition and mission statements (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012). They call the method political discourse analysis. It involves identifying and coding individual statements or discourse fragments from political texts in terms of what they try to establish as the ‘truth’ on particular topics and how they do this. Key points of analytical interest are who created the material that is being analysed, what topic is being addressed, which position is taken by the authors, who or what is said to benefit from the arguments they make and in what way and, finally, what does the text contribute in terms of official knowledge.

When considering these questions in an earlier publication in relation to the history of the teaching profession in Sweden (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach 2013), national teacher education policy was seen to have been effectively revised or reformed through parliamentary acts more or less every ten years in the past half century and, for this reason, we have elected to study political texts from this period. When reading the texts again, but this time also including the NEOs, we could confirm, also following Beach et al. (2014), that there was a clear pattern to be identified. In the early rounds of reform, the Green and White Papers all recognised and described the difficulties facing democratic school development in Sweden (SOU 1965:29), which they then in part linked to the limitations of teachers’ professional theoretical knowledge and the lack of a common pedagogical content for professional action and judgement-making appropriate for a more progressive, inclusive and democratic
school system. These ideas were linked back to the 1946 School Commission deliberations on a common comprehensive school and the knowledge needs of its professionals (SOU 1948:27, 1952:33). What was emphasised was the need to unify the teaching profession by forming common educational-theoretical content knowledge for all teachers that would strengthen the professional knowledge base of teaching. This knowledge was also emphasised as important examination content in the NEOs from the equivalent period.

This idea about the knowledge needs of teachers for a common comprehensive school and its demands on teacher education existed in formal policy through to and including the deliberations of the 1997 Teacher Education Committee (SOU 1999:63). Brante (2010) and Brante et al. (2015) refer to this kind of knowledge foundation as forming the profession’s cognitive base, as an intellectual element in a profession that is composed of scientific research that can be coupled with professional practice as know-why knowledge that can be linked to professional know-how.

The Teacher Education Green and White Papers

The Teacher Education Expert Committee Recommendations from 1965 (SOU 1965:29) formed an important point of entry for the present analysis. This text emphasised two things in particular in the above senses regarding a common professional knowledge base. The first was the value of general pedagogical research and research on teaching methods under the name applied/practical pedagogy (Swedish: praktisk pedagogik). The second was the importance of including this content in teacher education. These intentions were followed by the 1974 Teacher Education Commission (LUT 74) recommendations in 1978 (SOU 1978:86). These recommendations repeated the former ones but also added three further points. The first was that the level of realisation of aims to date had been insufficient. The second was that this could be improved by teachers becoming not only better informed consumers but also knowledgeable producers of educational research. The third was that teacher education could and should play an important part in introducing this research knowledge and grounding research skills. The idea was that by not only reading but also doing research the skills and insight needed for understanding and contributing to the development of professionally useful practical and theoretical knowledge would be more assuredly created (SOU 1978:86).

The LUT Commission had been appointed by a Social Democratic government. Its recommendations were, however, critiqued quite strongly from the political right (in relation to the length and costs of teacher education implied) and by the academic subject teacher union, which identified teacher professionalism in terms of subject knowledge translation and communication skills. The union identified the recommendations as likely to be ineffective and their enactment was delayed by this and because of a change of government in 1976. The LUT recommendations were partially realised in official policy later on through the 1984/85 Comprehensive
Teacher Education Reform after the return to power of the Social Democratic Party in 1982, but in very different contextual circumstances to those that had applied earlier. Teacher education was now a formal university education inside large multi-field/multi-faculty institutions and the previously established research subject of practical pedagogy (praktisk pedagogik) had been abandoned (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach 2013).

In 1997 a new teacher education inquiry commission was appointed called the Teacher Education Committee. Its recommendations were published in 1999 in the wake of a series of (neo-liberal) reforms in the school sector (SOU 1999:63). The recommendations expressed measures for strengthening the school-based part of teacher training, introducing new courses combining didactics and interdisciplinary thematic studies, and reorganising teacher education and its examination structure through integrating several formally separate educations (in child and youth- and pre-, primary and secondary teacher education, as well as sports, music, household crafts and handicrafts teacher education) into one common programme. A new research field was also recommended to help hold the programme together (SOU 1999:63). It was described as intended to support school research and research of particular relevance to teacher education. This was perhaps the most profound recommendation from the committee and also the one that has had the greatest effect on the professional knowledge base of teacher education.

The new field was called Education Science (Swedish: utbildningsvetenskap). It was recommended to replace the existing pedagogy discipline (Swedish: Pedagogik) as the main source of education theoretical content for informing professional action and decision-making (SOU 1999:63). This was needed according to the committee recommendations for two main reasons. These were, first, that disciplinary pedagogy had failed to provide the focus and content of the research-based theoretical knowledge needs for professional intervention by teachers and for actions based on common/shared professional standards in the past, and was also unlikely to be able to do so in the future. Teaching was described as having polytechnic cross-disciplinary scientific knowledge needs and foundations and the new field was described as better able to cater to this situation than disciplinary pedagogy had been.

The common policy ambitions from the 1950s and 1960s to the 1990s were thus in one sense interrupted by the recommendations of the Teacher Education Committee. However, this was not in the sense of a loss of ambition with regard to professional unification and the development and communication of education theoretical content, which remained intact as a formal political aim. What was instead represented was an expressed loss of faith in disciplinary pedagogy as the main source for contributing to this, and an attempt to undermine the hegemony of this discipline in relation to this content area. The ambition for unification and a common theoretical pedagogical and methodological knowledge was changed instead more recently through the most recent round of reform, initiated by the appointment by the
right-wing alliance government of the so-called Sustainable Teacher Education Commission in 2007 (SOU 2008:109) and the subsequent Act of Parliament following it based on Swedish Government Bill 2009/10:89. As is clear there, prospective teachers are now once again to be educated in separate programmes and not one, and prospective subject teachers will once more study for their profession in academic subject departments most of the time, and education research departments less of the time.

National Examination Ordinances and Local Examination Descriptions

The National Examination Ordinances (NEOs) and Local Examination Descriptions (LEDs) from ten separate teacher education deliverers form a further part of the data analysed for the present article. The former, from 1968 onwards, were concentrated on the most. They represent the political formulations at the level of national government authorities for what constitutes official knowledge and how to gauge and assess its acquisition by students and their abilities to reproduce it. They establish and communicate national standards in other words whilst the LEDs represent local interpretations and express how national standards have been classified and framed at a policy level on a local basis.

We examined NEOs over the time period from 1968 to the present day to identify which national standards are expressed, how, and how these expressions may vary (or remain consistent) over time. We examined LEDs only within the recent policy cycle (in 2014), which we did in order to identify current local differences and deviations from the national line. Differences over time were found with respect to NEOs, which have changed during the period from the 1968 Statutes for Teacher Education to the present day, but differences between the present day LEDs were very small across institutions. In line with earlier suggestions about a changing paradigm in teacher education, NEOs have become less concerned with pedagogical research, more prescriptive in terms of content, and increasingly wordy. Brief comparisons can give a picture of this.

The 1968 ordinances expressed the aims and objectives of the teacher-college-based training for primary, secondary and upper secondary levels as follows (SFS 1968:318, 813). Deviations and differences in recent NEOs are presented later in the text:

- Students should acquire basic knowledge of pedagogy, pedagogical research and development and work practices in the profession
- Students should acquire knowledge and skills in subject teaching methods and specialist subject theoretical content
- Students should acquire basic practical skills for teaching
• Students should acquire insight into the teacher’s task of developing the pupil’s personality and of the foundational values that characterise the school curriculum
• Students should acquire an interest to follow pedagogical research and development and to continuously innovate, develop and improve their teaching with regard to the latest pedagogical research

These examination statements are broadly in line with the White Paper content at that time. They constituted about 120 words (in the original Swedish). Disciplinary pedagogy and pedagogical research were given high priority, along with methodology, practical skills, and knowledge of curriculum theory and practice. The examination aims were also formulated with a clear basis in teacher education as an education for a profession whose content was placed firmly in the hands of the teacher colleges. The scientific knowledge base consisted of disciplinary pedagogy (pedagogik) and the value of a link between school teaching and pedagogical research and development work was expressed.

The 1993 ordinance statements formed under a right-wing and centre party coalition government in 1991 differed quite substantially from the above (Högskoleförordningen 1993:100, Appendix 2). In it, as opposed to the progressive values expressed in 1968, traditionalist values such as developing better subject knowledge competencies for individual student teachers are emphasised, and references to general educational theories have been removed. This applies most specifically to content typical of a critically reflective academic study of education conditions. There has been a didactic turn in the professional knowledge base in other words, with an emphasis on the techniques of communication of subject and basic knowledge. The examination of a future teacher’s pedagogical capabilities now concerns knowledge about school content, how to structure and present this content, and awareness of specific teaching strategies that can be used to address students’ learning needs in particular classroom circumstances and for particular learners. The same shift in emphasis is thus found in the recent NEO as in the most recent White Paper text.

Also different today when compared to 1968 is that descriptions of the goals of the teacher education degree now comprise more words and express a far higher level of detail control than was the case some 50 years earlier and that there are different versions of them for the new (different) teacher education programmes that have been composed following Government Bill 2009/10:89. They are divided into objectives that are grouped into the subsets of Knowledge and Understanding, Skills and Abilities, Values and Attitudes and there is no longer any reference to specialised content about the sociological, political, philosophical, economic and ideological characteristics of teaching as a profession or education as a professional field, nor of learning as a socially, culturally and historically embedded practice.
This is absent in descriptions of examination requirements in the current NEOs and LEDs, even though this kind of content is necessary for teachers according to international researchers such as Apple (2001), Darling-Hammond (2006), Lawn and Furlong (2009) and Zeichner (2010), if they are to grasp the development of their conditions of labour and employment or change their practices with scientifically founded professional assurance (Beach and Bagley 2012, 2013).

The common shared professional knowledge component that has replaced educational theoretical knowledge is now taught and examined in what is called the Education Science Core Component (also see Swedish Government Bill 2009/10:89). It currently comprises two terms (approximately 40 weeks) of academic work. It is spread across 4–5 years of study and divided into a number of themes approximating roughly five credit points each. Studies are described as directly related to future professional work. They include, as expressed in all of the LEDs in the sample, the history of the school system and its organisation and conditions, the school’s core values (including basic democratic values and human rights), curriculum theory and didactics, theory of science and research, concepts of child development, and examined components on learning and special education, relationship-building, conflict management and leadership, grading and assessment, evaluation and development and digital literacy. Generic competencies are specified. Of the more specific teaching skills, only the ability to use language to support children when they learn to read, write, listen and speak is given space, along with knowledge about affective and motivational learner characteristics.

Regulatory documents have actually become more focussed on the individual student teacher and they now more regularly express therapeutic aims regarding their development and personal knowledge. The focus is on the student teacher’s own achievements and the construction of a teacher identity for a school that is organised and run as a goal- and results-driven enterprise. The knowledge needs of the teaching profession are thus defined more in organisational terms and in accordance with an NPM agenda than in relation to a collective professional identity and duties, and the educational theoretical and practical knowledge underpinning their realisation. This is a radical change in relation to the formulations in 1968. Collective professional perspectives were expressed there and student teachers were addressed as neophyte members of a professional group whose duty was to realise the aims of the compulsory comprehensive school project and promote the development of their pupils.

**Teacher education, changing education politics, and professional knowledge**

A country’s teacher education is shaped by policies and procedures that are intended to enable access to the knowledge and skills that policy designers feel are appropriate for teachers to perform their school and classroom duties in the interests of pupils
and the wider community. There are, however, different views about exactly what is needed in these respects. The present article tries to address this. It does so in two steps. First, we tried to identify patterns of discursive continuity and change over time within and between different political texts regulating teacher education content and examinations. We were looking for what is constituted as important (official) knowledge, whether changes have occurred and occur in this, and what these changes are and are said to relate to. We also identified such changes. What we will do next is discuss them in relation to current educational conditions and changes in these conditions.

Concerning the patterns we have identified, in the mid-1960s and early 1970s the knowledge needs of teachers were expressed in teacher education policy and examination ordinances as part of a political project that was coupled to the development of a progressive compulsory comprehensive school system. Educational theoretical knowledge was described as very valuable within this project, which was driven in political texts produced under governments that were led from the political left and followed by policies from the 1980s to the 1990s that were formulated in a consolidating fashion in relation to this project. After this, things began to change. In the policies formulated at the turn of the millennium, the organisation and production of knowledge in disciplinary pedagogy was questioned and the influence of this discipline over teacher education content was significantly reduced (see e.g. Swedish Government Bill 1999/2000:135), before then being almost completely marginalised through the enactment of the Green Paper recommendations from 2008 (SOU 2008:109) following the parliamentary act based on Swedish Government Bill 2009/10:89.

Both Bernstein (2000, 2003) and Beck and Young (2005) have described this process of the undermining and marginalisation of the education discipline and its theories in teacher education, which they do in relation to two processes. These are first the emergence of a new (Mode2) type of regional knowledge formation in teacher education to replace disciplinary education theory. They are, second, the degeneration of this knowledge to generic (mundane, every-day) forms on the other, when demand structures outside of the formal disciplines and vertical discourses of academic research are allowed to intercede in curriculum development. Examples of these demand structures include the concerns of employers; including new private employers; and government ideology.

As described by Bernstein and Beck and Young, regional knowledge is formed as a composite knowledge structure when a number of academic subjects are brought together in relation to a particular field of practice. Medicine is often used as an archetypal example. But it was also this kind of knowledge ambition that was expressed in relation to Education Science in the recommendations of the 1997 Teacher Education Committee (SOU 1999:63), which the committee felt disciplinary pedagogy could contribute to, together with other disciplines. However, things did
not play out as intended in relation to these recommendations and what has developed instead seems to be more of a collection of knowledge components for supporting generic and problem-solving skills (Solbrekke and Englund 2014). These sorts of components are often emphasised in ‘modern’ university vocational curricula according to Beck and Young (2005), which tend to become overwhelmingly focused on practical workplace based training rather than theoretical preparation.

This is a very important point. Recently, education and care in schools and preschools has successively become more and more embroiled in relationships that involve the direct buying and selling of education services and are now developing as part of a market of both municipal and private organisations that are competing with each other in terms of the cost effectiveness, and teaching has a changed character as a result (Lundström and Holm 2011). It has become an economic form of labour that is rewarded through coupling status and salaries to new technologies of discernment and discrimination outside a teacher’s immediate control that anticipate, create the means of production of, and identify and represent teachers as a ‘productive’ occupational group of individuals rather than a professional class (Beach 2008). Pupil performances are used to gauge teacher effectiveness and value, and teachers are both rewarded and disciplined by recourse to these performances and teacher education has also changed at the same time, but importantly in ways that reduce the importance of scientific educational theories about these changes (Apple 2001; Sleeter 2008; Zeichner 2010).

There are several reasons that these developments are very important for teachers as future professionals. One of them concerns, as expressed above, understanding how politically introduced changes to the education system in recent years have significantly altered the relationships schools and their agents may form with respect to education functions and social change (Allan 2014; Solbrekke and Englund 2011, 2014). It is about studying and comprehending by which means and in what ways political decisions have quite simply changed the ways schools are governed and which interests they serve (Beach 2008). Another dimension concerns what can be done about this. If international measurements are to be trusted, the changes have not been positive and teachers are often afforded the blame for this. Understanding policy processes and being able to apply policy critique concerning recent reforms could help them respond to this critique and begin to take back control over (and responsibility for) school development as experts in their field and as a (more) powerful profession (Darling-Hammond 2006).

Decentralisation and the outcomes from the municipal education reforms of the 1990s are examples of the kinds of political decisions and projects that teachers could critique and talk back to in these ways. At the time of its introduction in the late 1980s, the decentralisation of education in Sweden had been actively discussed since the publication of the major School Commission Reports from the mid-1970s, such as SIA (SOU 1975:53), as a means to further democratise the school in relation
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to what was expressed there as a need for increased local professional control and
citizen participation in public affairs (Swedish Government Bill 1988/89:4). Yet this
is not how it was introduced. However, like the teacher education reforms suggested
by LUT 74 in the same period, decentralisation reforms were enacted first a long
time after the original recommendations were made and in very different political
and economic circumstances, in the wake of a heavily mediatised global and national
financial crisis and strong criticism of an expensive and overly bureaucratic welfare
state promoted in the media by the political right. The concept became wedded to an
ideology of economic effectiveness in the public sector and ideas such as individual
choice, competition and strong leadership.

The consequences of decentralisation under these circumstances were not even
similar to those that were initially outlined in the mid-1970s. Instead of increased
power and professional freedom, teachers have actually had to give up their
autonomy to school leaders who have acted as the extended arm of employers in
local education decision-making (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach 2013; Solbrekke and
Englund 2014) and, instead of greater public involvement in education, the public’s
role has been curtailed to consumerist choices of economically managed units in
an educational marketplace (Lundahl et al. 2013). Teacher effectiveness and local
mismanagement of decentralised schools are often blamed for failures that they
really have had little role in forming and teacher work has been converted into a
form of economic labour power for providing profit for private investors or savings
in the public sector, with subsequent negative effects on quality (Lundahl et al.
2014).

Knowledge about the above transformations in the education field and their
implications; such as from what, by means of which, and on whose initiative changes
have been advanced; as well as how they have developed and in whose, which or
what interests; would normally be part of studies in the education disciplines and
educational theory. However, this content is now absent in policy and examinations
in teacher education according to our analysis. Yet, as Lundström and Holm (2011)
have also suggested, the development and expansion of decentralisation and market
solutions are among the most important changes in education in the last 30 years.
They have coincided with salary dampening, an intensification of teachers’ work,
changes in professional values and identities, and an extension of teachers’ tasks as
an effectivity feature. A new type of service-minded and flexible teacher has been
discursively created. Professional practices have shifted in accordance with this
and teachers are being increasingly encouraged to be receptive to the demands of
the market at the expense of their professional judgments, ethics and autonomy
(Carlgren and Klette 2008). Teaching as a matter of customer service seems to be
replacing teaching for developing democratically responsible and knowledgeable
pupils and teaching as a responsible profession seems to be being replaced by
teaching as a managed and audited activity (Solbrekke and Englund 2014). However,
none of this needs to be included in teacher education as examined content according to current examination ordinances.

This lack of emphasis on changing policies changing education and professional conditions and possibilities is also found in other places. One example is in relation to the most recent rounds of funding allocations by the Swedish Research Council Education Sciences Committee (UVK), which was established in 2001 to produce knowledge of specific relevance to teacher education and the professional work of teachers. At least as far as general educational theory is concerned, shifts in funding volume have been very clear in these terms in recent years. Three directions can be determined. One is from general educational theory and the politics, history, sociology, ideology, psychology and philosophy of education towards didactics (particularly in the maths and science subject areas). The others are within what is left of educational theory funding, where there has been a shift in emphasis toward the psychology of education from the other sub-disciplines and within the psychology of education itself toward neuro-cognitive aspects.4

Discussion

The present article identified and discussed patterns of discursive continuity and change within and between different political texts regulating teacher education aims, content and examinations, which were then compared to recently identified changes in the organisation of schooling and the content and control of teacher work. Five specific developments and claims were discerned. They are as follows:

• The political discourse in the 1950s and 1960s was about the need to develop pedagogical research of relevance to teachers’ work as a way to generate a capacity for extended professionalism within the teacher corps for the progressive local management and realisation of the new compulsory comprehensive school project. The development of a ‘knowledge base’ of educational theory through educational disciplinary research for informing professional action was identified as a way to support this. This knowledge was to be communicated in teacher education.

• The possession of research skills and knowledge for teachers (teachers as researchers) was identified as improving the realisation of a progressive profession in the 1970s. This research knowledge and skill was also to be communicated in teacher education. Teachers were to become producers of educational knowledge not just consumers. The policy intention was expressed from by political left and opposed by the right.

• From the 1980s and 1990s contemporary policy documents first became more detailed in relation to descriptions of appropriate professional content for teachers, who were then to work in a decentralised school market. The value of pedagogical research and studies for teachers is toned down and then
marginalised in the new millennium. There is a switch in emphasis from education theory to academic school subjects and a generic know-how content. 

- Parallel to this, market reforms and NPM enter the education field. An individualised teacher identity forms whose labour can be standardised, compared, rewarded and bought and sold within schools that are run as goal- and results-driven enterprises. Teaching as work is now formed and regulated in terms of the standardised quantifiable labour of individuals in an audited occupation.

- Teacher education reform in the direction of subject content knowledge and generic professional knowledge and skills has occurred in the wake of these changes, which are not identified as important enough to warrant focus in national teacher education policy or examination ordinances and local examination descriptions. Educational theories and content in teacher education that might make them visible, analysable, understandable and possible to critique and challenge have been marginalised in regulatory texts, removed from NEOs and are no longer as extensively publicly funded as before.

Taken together, the above points clarify developments around the weakening of education theory and disciplines and of their influence on teacher education that may create serious questions about the future autonomy of the teaching profession and the role of teacher education in relation to it. Teachers are no longer addressed as thinkers, designers and co-developers of education who need abstract, powerful, theoretical knowledge content as key professionals in the realisation of the national school project in the national interest. They are addressed as ‘doers’ responsible only for communicating official school knowledge and evaluating and assessing pupil performances in relation to it. There has been a shift from ‘know-why’ knowledge to know-how. Core disciplines, like the history, sociology, philosophy and (except for a new fad of brain-based neuro-cognitive content) also the psychology of education, have waned, and teacher education is again being reduced to teacher training. Teachers have become what Carlgren and Klette (2008) refer to as “new-professionals” whose occupational identity has slipped from the distinction of professional responsibility to that of professional accountability. Their work is now largely determined and defined by others, standardised by contract, controlled through/by an economic/legal rationale of NPM, constrained and ‘re-responsibilised’ by external auditing according to pre-determined indicators, expressed through a restricted professional language comprising a horizontal pedagogic discourse that is primarily framed by political goals that are simply to be carried out in compliance with the decisions of employers and/or politicians.

Solbøkke and Englund (2011, 2014) also make exactly these points. They mean that, compared to work in classical or even so-called semi-professional fields, the kind of classification of work represented corresponds to a form of disempowerment that should cause us to question precisely what kind of professionalism is being
developed in these circumstances. Full professional responsibility presupposes the opportunity, space, knowledge and predisposition to act independently from other professional categories on the basis of acquired formal practical and theoretical knowledge in the interests of a particular clientele. It demands the time and space for professional discretion and an education to prepare for this collective responsibility (Brante 2010). This intention was expressed in policy texts and examination ordinances from 1965 to 2000 but has been removed since then. Teaching is now an activity that is discursively constituted in political texts as objective labour, at least in terms of the structure of interests and capabilities of operating critically and reflectively in the interests of a profession, broader society, and all pupils.

As asserted in theories of professions and professionalism, access to knowledge that provides status by means of a foundation in recognised academic research is powerful professional knowledge (Brante 2010; Darling-Hammond 2006). However, teacher education in Sweden today only provides access to this kind of knowledge in highly limited degrees, and this is now principally in knowledge fields related to the school’s academic subject areas, which is an iconoclastic but otherwise completely illogical foundation on which to build a professional identity for teachers, and always has been. First, teachers are relatively weakly educated in subjects compared to most other academics so the academic subjects cannot give them an uncontested mandate and autonomy in professional decision-making and the construction of a profession that can act autonomously in the interests of its clientele. Second, the main challenges toward teacher professionalism do not come from subject directions. They come from political and economic quarters and concern the ideological over-determination of teacher education and the economic control and new public management of schools and the people in them. It is therefore research knowledge about these processes that would help empower teachers to develop and control their practices professionally, not academic knowledge about the school subjects they will teach. This has also been recognised internationally of course (Apple 2001; Zeichner 2010). However, this kind of knowledge is neither communicated nor examined in teacher education today, or currently extensively financed for production. This is quite clear through policy changes that are particularly interesting and dangerous as they are occurring specifically in the wake of the neo-liberal transformation of the public sector and public sector work in private interests.

Conclusions
In the last two decades, Sweden’s social democratic welfare state has been radically transformed in a neo-liberal direction. Teacher education has also changed character alongside these changes through a policy drift away from an emphasis on educational theoretical knowledge toward academic subject studies and practical-vocational know-how, with this significantly affecting the possibilities tomorrow’s teachers may have for asserting a strong professional identity based on abstract
knowledge. In the 1960s and 1970s, teachers were constructed in political discourse in terms of a burgeoning profession with broad collective responsibilities for education development. Today, they are constructed as an audited form of economic labour power. The discursive construction of teaching has shifted from a construction of a professional collective able to act for itself (i.e. a profession for itself) to a construction describing the objective work of individuals in an externally monitored and audited occupational category (i.e. an occupation in itself).

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Notes

1 http://www.sgi-network.org/pdf/SGI11_Social_Justice_OECD.pdf, OECD social justice indicators, accessed 2014-11-30, 13:07

2 http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/13/93/30/100696be.pdf

3 NEOs are the national political regulations about which degrees may be taken within higher education in Sweden at undergraduate, postgraduate and research level: such as, for instance, the Higher Education Ordinances from 1993 (Högskoleförordningen 1993:100, Bilaga 2) revised in 2013. They describe examination content domains (the ‘general what’ that will be examined) and the different qualifications, objectives and requirements that must be met for each degree.

4 This is clear when results from the funding awards for 2012 to 2014 are compared with those from earlier periods; particularly those before 2006: also see e.g. http://www.vr.se/forskningsfinansiering/bidragsbeslut/storautlysningen/utbildningsvetenskap.4.405c4f3813823f65fee4e3b.html
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