

Aspects of Recent Reforms of Teacher Education in Sweden

Pogledi na sodobne reforme v izobraževanju učiteljev na Švedskem

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Abstract

This paper outlines some aspects of the reforms of teacher education in Sweden. The main features of the last reform and their context are analysed. The focus of the paper is the complex situation of teacher education as a professional programme within the higher education system. An underpinning notion is that the higher education system, the traditional Swedish universities, have not recognised the strategic importance of teacher education. This attitude of the universities to teacher education is regarded as the main reason for the most striking failure of Swedish teacher education. So after thirty years within the higher education system whether teacher education can in reality be regarded as research-based education can be seriously questioned. In the end the Bologna process is touched upon and a critique is raised against the Swedish way of adapting to that Bologna process as expressing the same low level of awareness of professional education as the traditional universities.

Keywords

Sweden; teacher education reform; research-based education; Bologna process.

Povzetek

V tem članku bomo orisali nekaj pogledov na reforme izobraževanja učiteljev na Švedskem. Analiziramo glavne značilnosti zadnje reforme in njihov kontekst. Članek se osredotoča na kompleksni položaj izobraževanja učiteljev kot profesionalnega programa znotraj visokošolskega sistema. Nosilna teza je, da visokošolski sistem in tradicionalne švedske univerze izobraževanju učiteljev niso priznale strateškega pomena. Takšno držo univerz do izobraževanja učiteljev razumemo kot glavni razlog za zelo očiten neuspeh švedskega izobraževanja učiteljev. Tudi trideset let po tem, ko je postalo del visokošolskega sistema, lahko utemeljeno vprašamo, ali izobraževanje učiteljev v dejanskosti lahko obravnavamo kot na raziskovanju utemeljeno izobraževanje. Ob koncu se dotaknemo bolonjskega procesa in namenimo kritiko švedski adaptaciji bolonjskega procesa, ki izraža enako nizko osveščenost o profesionalnem izobraževanju kot tradicionalne univerze.

Ključne besede

Švedska; reforma izobraževanja učiteljev, na raziskovanju utemeljeno izobraževanje; bolonjski proces

1 Introduction

In Sweden and elsewhere we have experienced during the last decades that teacher education programs have been reformed several times. In a historical perspective it is maybe correct to state that the speed of reform has increased. If the impact also has increased is maybe a question to reflect upon as what the cause of the intensified reform ambitions could be. A tentative answer could be that the growing awareness of the more sweeping change of society shapes a cry for secure change and that teacher education as a prime agent of change for governmental ambitions for school improvement and thereby societal change is deeply interrelated. The relationship between change in society and need for reform of teacher education program have been addressed several times and so also in the important survey of teacher education in Europe conducted by TNTEE in the late nineties.¹

Another aspect, a bit paradoxical, of ambitions to reform teacher education is maybe to be found in David F Labaree's statement on what he assume to be nucleus of problems elated to TE, he writes: "Teaching is an enormously difficult job that looks easy."² So, on the one hand we have a profession which is a prerequisite for modern society, of which all adults have experience and which looks to be easy to master. On the other hand we have failures, things doesn't evolve in schools as planned, schools seems to be hard to develop into new forms of teaching and fulfilment of other societal assignments is perceived as failures. Reform programs originate in different political notions of demands within present society and the analysis proceeds to the need of adjusting the teaching profession into demands in present society.³ The issue raised in this paper is how current trends and reforms of teacher education in Sweden addresses this problem, mainly in terms of enhancement of teacher education as a higher education program, changes initiated by the latest reform. The paper concludes with a glance at the national evaluation of teacher education and some aspects on the Bologna process implementation.

2 Features of the last reform

As in other countries the tradition of teacher education is dual, consisting of a seminar tradition focusing on practical aspects of teaching in primary school

¹ F Buchberger, B P Campos, D Kallos & J Stephenson (eds) *Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe*, (Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe, Umeå 2000, p. 20).

² David F Labaree, *The Trouble with Ed Schools*, (Yale university press, 2004, p. 39).

³ The governmental report on the need for a renewed teacher education, *Att lära och att leda – en lärarutbildning för samverkan och utveckling* (SOU 1999:63, p. 16).

and an academic tradition focusing subject studies for secondary school teachers.⁴ Those traditions were brought together in teacher education colleges which were established in the 1950s. In the end of the 1970s these colleges were abolished (with one exemption). One could view the process slightly different – stating that these colleges were integrated into the Swedish system for higher education and as such illuminating a process of modernization of professional programs.

The decades before integration in higher education teacher education programs had a focus on general educational knowledge which was perceived as essential for teaching. After the integration but not necessary due to integration; focus shifted to less general knowledge. The introduction of didactics emphasized the complex interrelation between subject and teaching in particular subjects.

The latest reform in the years 2000-2001 is in line with this development and it is illuminating that it doesn't encapsulate a special subject as being *the* core subjects providing general knowledge essential to all teachers.

This reform contains a threefold division of teacher education program:

- A general field of education. The program could vary in length but this field is fixed to 90 ECTS. It contains areas of knowledge that are central to teaching profession, “such as teaching, special needs education, child and youth development” together with “interdisciplinary subject studies”. The field was designed to be studied by all teacher students although not identical for all. The field focuses on core knowledge. It was not stated that these courses should be courses in education/pedagogy. It was to be a decision for the local higher education institutions conducting the program in respect. This field aimed at giving different kind of teachers a shared language – but not identical knowledge.
- An educational area with emphasis on particular subjects or subject areas. It should comprise at least 60 ECTS and include a school based period of 15 ECTS for every module of subject studies of at least 60 ECTS.
- A specialized educational area of at least 30 ECTS. As an example a student with the aim to be a primary school teacher could take a specialization in children with disabilities.⁵

This division of the program into three areas was one novelty, but there were also others. A short description of the reformed teacher education program could be like the following. The new teacher education program was one program

⁴ For an overview and analysis of the development of the Swedish teacher education system and its heritage in terms of two cultures, Inger Arreman Erixon *Att rubba föreställningar och bryta traditioner, forskningsutveckling, makt och förändring i svensk lärarutbildning* (Umeå 2005). The dissertation includes chapters in English.

⁵ *A new system of teacher education*, Government bill 1999/2000:135, Fact sheet, Ministry of education and science, U0023, August 2000.

with one teacher degree. Prior to the new system there were eight different teacher degrees such as pre-school teachers, primary, secondary and upper secondary teacher degrees. They became replaced with one degree of different length; from three years to five and a half year fulltime studies. The system aimed at promoting life long learning in the sense of diminishing obstacles for competence development, such as dead end situations. It also aimed in this respect to give an opportunity to all prospective teachers to meet during their study period, to develop certain perspectives and a shared language as a tool for future collaboration.

Flexibility was another aspect of the renewed program. Students were granted an enhanced opportunity to do sequential choices. In the old system all choices have to be made before entering a program. For example the upper secondary teacher student was required to select topics before entering the program. In general (but as reform implementation always becomes shaped by local situation, the system varies in parts from university to university) the program now starts with one semester common to all, namely the first part of the general field of education. During that semester the students then make choices for the future. This gives the student the opportunity to change from his or her first plans for a degree. A student which starts with the ambition to be a pre-school teacher could make choices so him or her in the end up as a secondary school teacher. The program is also flexible in design as all modules are to be open for in-service education also, giving employed teachers an opportunity to competence development. This flexibility has given teacher education institutions a quite challenging planning situation. One could state that flexibility is an outcome of a long process of decentralization in the Swedish educational system.

A third aspect of the reform to be mentioned is the increased pressure to give the program a scientific base.⁶ The establishment of Teacher colleges mentioned above could be understood as the first step in this direction, the integration of teacher education into the higher education system as the second and the reform here described as the third. In the governmental report and the proposal this was clearly stated. In depth the proposal outlined a research strategy for teacher education aiming at finally giving the program a sufficient research base and thereby giving it necessary conditions to deliver what was required.

A fourth aspect was the promotion of closer relationship between teacher education and schools in several respects. One was the establishment of regional improvement centres. These had double aims, to create change within schools and teacher education. By a closer relation it was anticipated that teacher

⁶ In Swedish there is another concept than “scientific base”; the term used is “forskningsanknytning” which literary translation would be “research connected”. In this paper I use the concept “research based education” and I give below an outline of the broader connotation of the concept.

education as a governmental tool for change of schools was given enhanced opportunities to support school improvement. But it was also understood that a closer relation should provide teacher education with more of the necessary proved experience, input from teaching in current society etc. An additional aspect of this changed relationship was the transformation of traditional practical training into “school placed education” where school teachers were given a stronger position as a “local teacher educator” and new sharing opportunities, in a more equal situation.

A fifth aspect is the strengthened demands on advancement in terms of introducing subject didactics. The notion was that only subject knowledge is insufficient for teaching in modern society. Added is an understanding of the shortcoming of traditional students teaching or practical experience. An integration between subject knowledge, subject didactics and school placed education were regarded as a solution.

A final aspect is the ambition to give teacher education as a professional education a new legal position within each and every university conducting such programs. By law university was forced to establish new and special boards with full responsibility for teacher education programs and related research. This novelty was due to an understanding of universities as having neglected their responsibilities in this respect. An outcome was establishment both of faculties for teacher education and faculties for educational sciences.⁷

To summarize – the renewal of teacher education in proceeded in decentralization, putting emphasis upon:

- the need for a close relationship between subject studies/equivalent and knowledge labelled as central to teaching profession,
- the need for teachers to develop a shared language,
- the need for a close relationship with schools and
- the need to enhance the research base for teacher education.

I will proceed by a discussion of what could be understood by the concept “research based teacher education” as this is the biggest challenge in the current situation within Sweden. In addition it could be stated that this could be regarded as one of the main failures of the last three decades of teacher education reform although progress have been made. As an example, the proportion of teacher educators holding PhDs are far below average.

⁷ Only a minority of these boards carry the label “teacher education”, regardless if they were established as faculties or not. The majority carry other labels such as “educational science”, more below on evaluation outcome.

3 Development of a research based teacher education

The relation between research and teacher education is as complex as potential. One could approach the relation as an issue of research in relation to profession or subject or an issue of research on teaching or teacher education. But it could also be understood as an issue of research and scientifically based education on the one hand and a practical and experienced focused education on the other. Thirdly, one could ask:

- if it is teaching who shall be connected to and based on research or
- if it is research who shall be connected to and focused teaching?

As it is a question sometimes addressed with strong emotions – let me just state that as far as I understand the situation – teacher education is in need of having a strong component which could be labelled “proved experience”. This has been a stronghold for teacher education but in the knowledge society that alone is not sufficient. A teacher education program must also be based on research and it needs to utilise research trained teacher educators but with a slightly different identity than having been the tradition. Have a glance at this sketch describing the situation created by the new teacher education in Sweden. The renewed program gives new opportunities for teacher’s competence development and research related to teaching profession:

Teacher education program	Teacher degree	Required additional studies before entering PhD program	Identity
Before reform 2001:	<i>Pre-school teacher</i>	Usually more than one year in pedagogy / educational science	Expert in the university subject pedagogy/educational science
	<i>Secondary teacher</i>	Usually more than one year in pedagogy / educational science or in subject	Expert in the university subject pedagogy/educational science or specialist in other university subjects
	<i>Upper secondary teacher</i>	Usually no further requirements, able to proceed to PhD-programs in subject	Expert in university subject
After reform 2001:	<i>Teacher</i>	All teachers are qualified for PhD-program in relation to the teacher education degree	Expert in relation to profession as math teacher, language teacher etc

One could ask if all kinds of teachers have to engage in research. A response would be that the renewed teacher education in Sweden promotes an understanding of teachers work with small children not as less advanced but different. Daily tasks differ but demands on teacher’s ability to make independent, critical and complex judgments don’t differ. A second response

would be that an education without a sufficient amount of teacher holding PhDs in areas of knowledge, central to the program in question, would not be a research based education, which is a prime quality. Without having teachers with such qualification a program is danger to became reproductive and without possibilities to improve by research. But there is of course several aspects of the notion of research based education. Let me stick to that for a moment.

A general feature of the renewed teacher education is the idea of teacher education as a research based program. An increased pressure is placed upon development of a new culture, exploring the full impact of teacher education as a higher education program. Within the university system teacher education has to deal with a triple challenge of being both a professional education, a professional education within the higher education system and thirdly a governmental tool for change in schools and therefore also in society.

To be “research based” could be understood in a range of variation which could be illustrated as examples below, examples is gathered from personal experience of discussion within university and literature on this theme and examples are intended to illuminates diverse notions.⁸ Research based education can, and have thus, been perceived as:

1. that teacher who teaches holds a PhD or equivalent;
2. that conducted teaching includes research methods;
3. that conducted teaching includes theory;
4. that a module illuminates and/or enter deeply in methodological and/or theoretical issues which is related to theme contained in module reading;
5. that module reading introduces new knowledge provided by latest research;
6. that a field of research are elucidated through lectures and reading (in width and in dept).
7. that module reading in scientific in the narrow sense of stringent use of concepts, reflexivity abstracts, quotations, references etc.;
8. that teaching contains scientific components in which students by them self produces new knowledge and understandings;

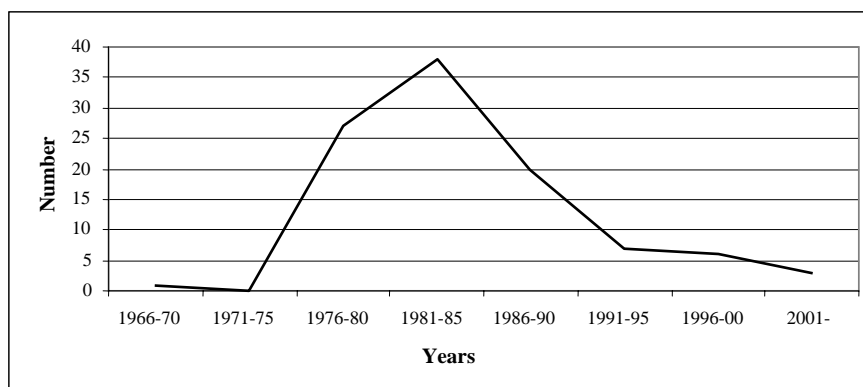
⁸ Among literature used was; Lena-Pia Carlström Hagman, *Forskningsanknytning - ett försök att lösa upp en knut*, (Kristianstad 2002); Stefan Björklund, *Forskningsanknytning genom disputation* (Uppsala 1991); Barbro Andersson, *Forskningsanknytning i Göteborgs högskoleregion: inventering av åtgärder och problem* (Regionstyrelsen för Göteborgs högskoleregion 1983); Christina Chaib, *Undervisning i förändring: om forskningsanknytning vid lärarutbildningen: en kvalitativ problembeskrivning* (Jönköping, 1983); Bertil Carlsson, *Forskningsanknytning i praktiken: några erfarenheter från Högskolan i Växjö* (Växjö, 1981); Göran Levin, *Om forskningsanknytning: rapport från en projektgrupp inom Lunds universitet* (Lund 1981); Göran Andolf, *Utbildning och forskning: debatten om den högre utbildningens forskningsanknytning 1957-1973* (Stockholm 1975); Ethel Öhlund, *Perspektiv på forskningsanknytning: bakgrund till empiriska studier* (Umeå, 1979); Bengt Abrahamsson, *Forskningsanknytning: om sambandet mellan forskning och grundutbildning* (Stockholm 1977). In addition governmental reports etc has been used.

9. that teaching contains scientific components in which students by them self produces new knowledge and understandings in the format of degree thesis, papers or articles;
10. that teaching approaches includes a scientific attitude to findings, perspectives and conclusions;
11. that teaching has its foundation in a scientific attitude to teaching methods;
12. that the main aim of teaching and education is the development of an analytical, critical and independent attitude;
13. that the level of a module is that advanced that it is a prerequisite for post-graduate studies;
14. that teaching in a module and/or education in one or many respects is superior to other teaching/education.

Those examples of different understanding of the notion of research based education could be summarized in four categories of understandings:

1. that *module content, readings and/or learning outcome* are related to research in a several respects;
2. that *teachers* are doing both teaching and research;
3. that those *institutions* providing education also provides research opportunities and conducts research;
4. that *students* after passing modules/programmes can advance to research

Some further light could be shred upon the relationship between education and research by tracking the use of the concept “research based education” in articles and books within the Swedish library system.



During the peak period for such articles and books two major things happened in the Swedish higher education system. Firstly – professional programs as teacher education and nursery education became integrated into the system. This development provoked a debate on essence of reform as aiming at

enhancement of program by providing not only scientific knowledge but a more broad impact of research and related critical attitudes. Secondly, the higher education system was expanded and an amount of new university colleges were established.

The enlargement provoked another debate with focus on the importance of a close relationship between education and research. As those new institutions were supposed to provide education but not research. As a background it could be mentioned that decades prior to the peak showed here a new position of employment had been introduced within university; the lecturer. Also that reform created debate on the relationship between teaching and research. In short; there was a tradition within universities having professors which utilized a small amount of their working time to instruction of students. The introduction of the lecturer was due to the growing number of students. The main question in the debate was – how will the quality of teaching change when it became conducted by a person not devoting most of the working time to research? The worry was that such a teacher would soon be outdated in his or her knowledge. As a process it could be understood as a labour division implying that research and teaching became detached from one another.

Some final remarks on the issue of a research based education as it have been a central ambition for reforms of teacher education program. As indicated above, research based teacher education needs to be understood as both research conducted *in* teacher education and *on* teacher education. The development of the research base for teacher education program demands change in terms of what sort of research we conduct. The research have to provide the area with knowledge of central importance for the improvement of teaching and thereby student learning. Researchers *in* TE have to conduct research in close relation to educational praxis to be able to provide educational praxis with perspectives contributing to the enhancement of educational praxis. Its focus could either be on educational praxis in relation to school subjects as history, mathematics and science or it could have focus on broader professional and school related issues as bullying, harassment, supervision etc. An outcome of enhanced research base in a broad understanding would also have implication for research focus and thereby also for content in teacher education programs. A professional education as teacher education develop its own understanding of requirements necessary to be able to give proper education aiming at fulfilment of the assignment themselves have identified or established or received.

4 Outcome of latest reform

A central question some years after a new reform is usually – did things change to the better? One aspect of such an evaluative question is often a comment of the supposed decrease or increase in subject studies. The question is more or

less wrongly formulated as it makes a dichotomy based on volume in a supposed one dimensional situation. The case is that some parts of the Swedish teacher education received an increase in subject studies (or equivalent, as all programs not depend on certain subjects), namely pre-school teacher education and primary teacher education. Studies with focus on these professions have their roots in the seminar tradition. Teacher education with a more academic tradition, mainly upper secondary teachers where changed in another direction. These studies where forced to incorporate and integrate didactical perspectives. It was understood as insufficient to only master the subject. It is perceived to be a necessary condition for excellent teaching but not a sufficient condition. It has to be added with communicative skills and other aspects of being a teacher, making the teacher to be able to fulfil also the social and democratic task.

The reform of teacher education was on the hand well prepared and aligned in a tradition of decentralization but on the other hand implemented with haste and pressured. Some imperfections or failures can thus be perceived as related to the extreme tempo in implementation. An overall evaluation would be that the renewed teacher education program is a leap forward, although it is neither sufficient nor satisfactory.

I will here try to illuminate both shortcomings and progress. A national evaluation of all teacher education programs in Sweden was conducted by the National Agency for higher education during 2004-2005.⁹ The evaluation was designed as follows and was both a regular evaluation and a special evaluation with focus on implementation.¹⁰ The process starts with the task for the local staff to write a self evaluation which after some month has to be submitted to the agency. The second step is visits by an evaluators group consisting of experts from other universities and countries, student representatives, an external person (for example a headmaster) and some administrative support. The third step was an opportunity for the local staff to respond on a written description of the program in respect and after that the agency makes public their judgment of the situation. After some month there is follow up meetings and so on.

As teacher education is of such importance in society the evaluation created headlines in newspapers, public hearing at he ministry and a lot o debate in media. I will here comment upon these aspects high lightened in the beginning of this paper. Of course each and every university received different outcome but I'm here trying to give a general overview of the critique.

⁹ Evaluator's reports are published in three volumes, unfortunately only in Swedish.

¹⁰ The National agency for higher education conducts evaluations of every subject and programs every 6th year. Aligned to the governmental decision on the implementation of a new teacher education there was a decision on an special evaluation of the new program and in the end those two were done as one evaluation with two tasks; state of art and implementation.

The establishment of a general field of education was crucial to the new program. It was designed to produce solutions to many of the problems and weaknesses related to teacher education. In the evaluation it was perceived as having severe problems with quality in terms of low demands on students, high degree of fragmentation together with lack of consistency and progression in studies. The initial ambition with the general field of education did not become reality. Studies within the field became too general and the recommendation in this respect is to strengthen the relationship between this field of study and subject studies (or equivalents).

The high degree of students' opportunities to make individual choice was regarded as giving students problems in doing informed choices; resulting in finalizing degrees consisting of studies of inferior relevance to work in schools and thereby also problems of employment. One finding was also that some universities had created systems in which some core knowledge not where compulsory for all students, such as how to teach initial learning and writing skills.

The development of closer relation to schools and the new form for school placed education was seen as in need of further improvement and clarification of rules as well as working methods. Special follow up activities have been focused on the organizational situation and power for these special boards for teacher education. The issue of the improvement of the research base for the program is also a central follow up activity. One aspect of the increased emphasis on this was the introduction of a compulsory degree thesis for all.¹¹ Currently a special report is written on those reports, estimating their quality. In a more general perspective the program can be understood as having been granted organizational conditions for being research based. The basic step forward was taken decades ago with the integration of program into higher education system. Despite this, it will probably take decades before teacher education receives the same position as traditional faculties, if ever. A crucial aspect is of course funding mechanism which now days don't recognize the area.

Concluding remarks – the Bologna process and teacher education in Sweden

As indicated in this paper reform of teacher education is not a single occasion, it is, and should be, an ongoing process of enhancement although reforms need time to mature. In this paper I've outlined the essence of the thorough reform of year 2001, I've stressed the importance of building a research based teacher education and I've touched upon some failures of reform. At the very moment, all teacher education institutions are making change of programs due to critique received in the national evaluation of last year. One could state that the reform

¹¹ The work on this thesis is equivalent to 15 ECTS.

of year 2001 is still under implementation. It is not only under implementation, the reform is currently being reformed.

In addition to that process another one is currently making deep impact – the Bologna reform. As a concluding remark on current reform trends in Sweden I will address the question of reform of teacher education in this context. The Bologna process is not a teacher education reform but a university reform and as such it has implications for teacher education. As teacher education is a unique and strategic link between higher education and research on the one hand and prior school system on the other; the Bologna process is of great importance for teacher education. The problem indicated below is due to the weak position for professional education within traditional universities.

The Bologna process aims at enhancement of quality in higher education and it proposes instruments as quality assurance systems, mobility and so forth for increased transparency so that the rich potential in the diverse European higher education systems can be released in opportunities of mutual learning. The issue of the Bologna reform and teacher education could be approached in multiple ways; here I will only make some brief comments in relation to aspects presented above on reforms of teacher education. I will focus on Sweden and leave further comparisons and promotion of European dimension to the reader.

One perspective of the Bologna process is that the reform tries to deal with a major change in the higher education system in each and every country – the massive expansion. This change is not only a matter of increased numbers; it is a change from elite education to education as a mass enterprise. This change in number also affects the societal role of universities and the role of research and scientific attitudes and perspectives. Teacher education is usually the single largest program at those universities who among other programmes conduct teacher education. Higher education as a mass enterprise cannot afford to act as detached from the surrounding society. Students from higher education must have developed skills and attitudes in demand, in the Bologna terminology – employability. The roles of research also change due to this massification. Of course society still needs pure research but the emphasis on applied research is growing. Citizens demands that their contribution to research in terms of taxes should pay back through improvement of every day life, for example better schools for their children.

One could ask why the European research community produces such a tiny contribution of this kind.¹² Answers to the question are to be found in the traditional academy. In Sweden teacher education have been a part of higher education since three decades but still universities doesn't regard that area of

¹² For one example, se *Green paper on teacher education in Europe* (p. 10) which states that we still lack knowledge on “effects and consequences of different systems and models of teacher education.”

study and research as such an important area as is indicated by the number of teacher students. To be blamed is not only universities – also governments have to take responsibility as funding mechanisms for research in and on teacher education still is detached from normal funding procedures.

The Bologna process could be regarded as a quality process within the traditional university. Teacher education have different relations to higher education, in more precise wording, it contributes within higher education in different ways. As a university based education it is a problem that universities still not in reality recognize the importance of professional education. In this respect the Bologna process share its weakness with the traditional universities. As in the rest of society – the weaker part, the part with less power adapt to the part with power. From a Swedish perspectives it seems as teacher education now adapt to traditional university notions instead of exploring its own distinctive character as a professional program within the higher education system. The national evaluation of teacher education in Sweden displayed richness in weaknesses but we also experience richness in strength. Where teacher education in Sweden needs transparency for progress it appears now as being in a process of mainstreaming within the local university.