The Political Nature of Teacher Professionalism
On the Professional Projects of Sweden’s Teacher Unions


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In Sweden, increasing the social status of teaching and making it an attractive career choice for the most talented Swedish students has become a highly prioritized education policy objective. This is often discussed in terms of a need for the professionalization of teachers. If successful, such processes are believed to result in increased professionalism among Swedish teachers, that is, an increase in the quality of work performed in Swedish classrooms (cf. Lindblad 1997). In this thesis, focus is given to the policy strategies of the two Swedish Teacher Unions in relation to such demands for teacher professionalization.

However, the concept of professionalism, and consequently the desired outcomes of processes of professionalization, is not easily defined, opening up for political struggles over the meaning ascribed to them in different contexts.

The use of professional terminology in relation to Swedish teachers was introduced within debates and discussions on Swedish education policy in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Lindblad 1997; Sjöberg 2011). As such, it was an integral part of the political process of educational decentralization and deregulation. The transformation of the Swedish educational system should be regarded as part of a wider trend of educational restructuring starting in the 1980s and spreading across the western world with the rising influence of neo-liberalism (Apple 2006; Ball 2003), resulting in a reevaluation of the role of education in society at large. The most obvious result of this development was the alignment of education with the ‘economic success’ of individual nation states, making it into a factor of production vital for the competitiveness of states within a logic of a global ‘knowledge economy’ (Seddon, Ozga and Levin 2013; Ball 2008). As a result of these changes in the framing of education in general, the professional development of teachers has become a central political ambition of many states, not least since the importance of effective teachers for raising student achievements in international tests and comparisons has been emphasized by influential organizations such as McKinsey & Co. (2007) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD 2009).

However, what Foss Lindblad and Lindblad (2009) have termed ‘the professionalizing talk on teachers’ is, within this context, charged with values such as effectiveness, competition and individual accountability. These are central values of the neo-liberal educational project (cf. Seddon et al. 2013) but far removed from the traditional understanding of professional work as comprising values such as autonomy, discretion, collegiality, adherence to ethical principles and being based on a high level of trust (Freidson 2001; Svensson 2010). Consequently, ‘processes of [neo-liberal] globalization have disturbed both practical and theoretical boundaries that once anchored understandings of teacher professionalism’ (Seddon et al. 2013, 7).

Without denying the influence of the neo-liberal educational project on national education systems in most states, there is, however, a strong emphasis within contemporary research on education policy developments that this ‘globalization of educational policy’ has not erased the influence of local contexts (Seddon et al. 2013; Ozga 2011; Spring 2009; Green 2006; Dale 1999). Rather, the historical legacies of individual educational systems continue to exert a strong influence on how education policies are framed and given meaning in...
different contexts. Likewise, the ideals of a traditional understanding of professionalism remain appealing, not least for occupational groups previously considered as ‘semi-professions’ (e.g. teachers, nurses, social workers) within deregulated systems of public service provision (Evets 2003).

Consequently, the meaning ascribed to the idea of teacher professionalism is constructed in complex situations where the influence of global trends of (neo-liberal) educational reform is mixed with historical legacies of specific national/local contexts. Within these localities, there are a number of different actors, at different levels of society, pursuing different political agendas, resulting in, what Hardy & Maguire (2008) call, an ‘interpretative struggle’ over the meaning of what is to constitute a professional teacher. As a result:

[...] the trajectory of teacher professionalism depends, in turn, on the ways educators engage in spatial, temporal, relational and knowledge boundary work in order to create a platform for their professionalizing projects and the necessary symbolic politics of claiming professionalism and, therefore, space for educational work (Seddon et al 2013, 4).

At a general level, it is the intention of this thesis to critically examine such political negotiations over the definition of and meaning ascribed to the idea of teacher professionalism in the context of contemporary Swedish educational policymaking.

In doing so, focus will be placed on the policies of the two Swedish Teacher Unions – The Swedish Teacher Union (Lärarförbundet) (STU) and The National Union of Teachers (Lärarnas Riksförbund) (NUT) –, as they are the primary vehicles for the occupational organization of teachers in Sweden. As was stated above, the introduction of professional terminology in relation to Swedish teachers was a part of the political process of educational decentralization and was, thus, imposed on teachers by education policymakers, external to the profession (Lindblad 1997).

Even so, as is argued by Lundström (2007) and Persson (2008), both Swedish Teacher Unions quickly adopted a discourse of professionalism, used in order to argue for better salaries and working conditions on behalf of their members.

Over a decade later, the professional discourse is still a defining feature of the Unions’ policies, despite a situation where teachers’ work is described as increasingly unappealing, not least made obvious by the decreasing attractiveness of teacher education as a career choice among the most talented students. Furthermore, a decade into the new millennium, Swedish teachers continue to express uncertainty about the purpose of their work, feelings of intensification – not least in relation to a growing administrative burden following upon increasing accountability – and lack of public recognition, despite the increase in the ‘professionalizing talk on teachers’ (Foss Lindblad & Lindblad 2009) that has been naturalized in education debates, teacher education and the general public discourse.

In the sociological literature on professionalism it has been argued that the concept of professionalism, within deregulated systems of public service provision, has been transformed into a disciplinary mechanism (Fournier 1999) used by managers to control the behavior of employees and to facilitate processes of organizational change. In relation to the Swedish educational context, the use of professional rhetoric in political reforms aimed to transform the work of teachers in line with the logic of organizational effectiveness – associated with the neo-liberal educational project – has been analyzed by, for example, Beach (2008, 2011) and Sjöberg (2011). Furthermore, there are studies of how such reforms are experienced by individual teachers within the context of their everyday work (e.g. Parding 2007; Lundström 2007). There is, however, a lack of studies focusing the level of occupational organization, that is, the collective politics of Swedish teachers. Consequently, it is the ambition of this work to analyze the way the Swedish Teacher Unions participate in
the political negotiation of the meaning and content of the work of Swedish teachers. Particularly, it will focus on how the symbolic resources of professionalism are used by the Unions, within this interpretative struggle or negotiation, in order to construct professional projects (Larson 1977/2013) aimed to increase the social status and attractiveness of teaching in society.

**Aim and Scope**

Against the background of two educational reforms directed towards the professionalization of teachers – the introduction of a teacher certificate and the reformation of teacher education – the aim of this thesis is to critically investigate and problematize the Swedish Teacher Unions’ use of the concept of professionalism within the political negotiation of the meaning and content of teacher professionalism. In doing so, the thesis will address the following questions:

1. In which ways are the professional projects of each respective Teacher Union constructed, and do they interrelate?
2. How can the Teacher Unions’ use of the concept of professionalism as a political strategy be interpreted and understood within the context of contemporary Swedish educational policymaking?

In order to provide answers to these questions, the thesis is empirically focused on the Unions’ reactions to two Swedish educational reforms, aimed at contributing to the professionalization of Swedish teachers. Following their election victory in 2006, ending 12 years of continuous social democratic rule, the center-right government of Sweden initiated an extensive program of educational reform. In 2008, two Public Commission Reports were presented, outlining reforms later implemented during 2011, the realization of a system of teacher certification (SOU 2008:52 prop. 2010/11:20) and a reformation of Swedish teacher education (SOU 2008:109 prop. 2009/10:89).

These reforms are interesting to use as points of departure for at least two reasons. First, they are reforms very clearly directed towards the work of teachers, presented in order to achieve higher societal status for teachers by leading to processes of professionalization. Second, they mark a decisive shift in Swedish educational policy, away from a very long tradition, starting in the 1960s, of unifying the educational system itself and the conditions of the teachers working within it (see e.g. Stenlås 2009; Lindensjö & Lundgren 2000). Thereby, the reforms constitute a context for analysis comprising the mixture of international policy trends and national historical legacies within which the content and meaning of teacher professionalism is negotiated. Both reforms are aimed at the professionalization of teachers, but not for the sake of the profession, but as a central strategy of increasing the declining results of Swedish pupils in international performance evaluations. As such, they are easily interpreted as reforms inspired by the international trends of educational effectiveness framed by the idea of a knowledge-economy. However, both reforms are simultaneously constructed in a way that ends a long tradition of educational unification within Swedish educational policy by contributing to a separation of different teacher categories within the educational system. By doing so, the reforms strike at the heart of the historical divide characterizing the relationship between Sweden’s two Teacher Unions, further emphasizing the two reforms as an interesting analytical context for the present work.

The focus of this thesis, however, is not on these reforms per se, but on the Swedish Teacher Unions’ reactions towards them. The reason for choosing the Teacher Unions as the
objects of study has to do with their position as the only basis for occupational organization of any political significance in Sweden. As is argued by Oftedal Telhaug, Medlings and Aasen (2006) unions have occupied a central position within the construction and workings of the classical Nordic welfare model. Being the voice of labor in this political-economic settlement, their role as partners, and not adversaries, of the political establishment was cemented, resulting in continuing high levels of organization and, thus, to making the Unions the primary objects for investigating the collective politics of contemporary Swedish teachers.

Furthermore, the fact that Swedish teachers are still organized in two separate Unions, belonging to different Union confederations, makes for an interesting point of departure for the analysis of this work. The different historical origins of the organizations may have consequences for how they act politically in order to increase the social standings of their members by trying to develop an occupational identity as a full-fledged profession from rather different perspectives.

Overall Findings and Concluding Discussion

Intraprofessional Boundarywork
Initially it was argued that the concept of teacher professionalism is given content and meaning in negotiations between a number of actors in complex contexts characterized by a mixture of international and local influences. Within such ‘interpretative struggles’ the importance of processes of boundary work by educators were underlined (Seddon et al. 2013). Boundary work is also an important concept within the sociology of professions as the primary strategy involved in claiming and defending a professional jurisdiction (Lamont & Molnár 2002; Fournier 2000; Abbott 1988). This question is touched upon in all three studies of this thesis, but is given extra attention in study II. The basic answer is that the professional projects of the Teacher Unions – though united in the effort of increasing the social status of teachers in society by way of strategies for professionalization – are fundamentally different at their core, resulting in, what in study II is termed, intraprofessional boundary work. In other words, the Teacher Unions are not only involved in boundary work in relation to other professions, lay persons and market pressure, as argued by Fournier (2000), but also in relation to one another over key issues concerning fundamental values of teaching as a professional occupation.

As was touched upon in study I, one essential issue highlighted within both of the reforms discussed in this text, is the question of how different teacher categories relate to one another. Are all kinds of teachers members of one single profession? And if so, what are the fundamental values of such a unified teaching profession? As has already been argued, the reforms discussed in this thesis are part of an educational reform program breaking a very long Swedish tradition of educational unification. As the certification of teachers was implemented, preschool teachers were not included in the teacher certificate, as a separate preschool teacher certificate was constructed. Furthermore, in the initial Commission suggestion (SOU 2008:52) a number of teacher categories were actually not included in the certification reform at all. For STU, this is a fundamental problem as the eradication of differences between teacher categories is at the very heart of their professional project, not just in the context of this study but historically as well. NUT, on the other hand, does not raise any concerns about the diversifying effects of the implementation of a teacher certificate, as the idea of unification is not part of their policy agenda.

In study II, focus is turned to the latest reform of Swedish teacher education. One of the most pronounced aims of this reform was to increase the specialization within teacher
education by replacing the common for all teacher degree, introduced in the reform of 2001, with four new separate ones. Consequently the question of the unity of the teaching profession was raised again. As was showed in study II, STU was very critical to this reform as they argued that its separation of teacher education into different degrees was a threat to the professionalization of teachers in general. Just as in the case of the teacher certificate, NUT didn’t see this as problematic, on the contrary, they argued for more specialization (and more degrees) than was actually suggested in the initial Commission report. In study II, the referrals of the Unions are used in order to try to investigate this divide between the Unions in relation to one of the central aspects of a professional project, the articulation of a professional knowledge base from which to make claims on a professional jurisdiction.

One of the fundamental parts of all efforts of defining a professional occupation is that it is founded upon a scientific knowledge base, transmitted through some kind of higher education program (Evets & Svensson 2010). If one is to understand the professional projects of the Teacher Unions, investigating their views on teacher education is, thereby, of central importance, not least because of the very close relationship between professional practice and professional education, described by Fransson (2009). As shown in study II, the Unions views of the content and focus of teacher education is decidedly different, explaining much of their divergent views on the issue of professional unity discussed above.

The view held by STU, centered on the uniqueness of teacher education and the need for teacher education specific subjects based on a scientific foundation of didactics, is very much in line with the overall trend of educational unification that has guided Swedish educational policy making since the end of WWII. As a result, the political ambitions of STU have been well aligned with the political majority for most of the latter part of the 1900s.

The political situation has been decidedly different for NUT. Descending from the union of the grammar school teachers of the parallel school system, NUT has often defended a more traditional view of the knowledge base of the teaching profession; a view highlighting traditional subject knowledge as the fundamental competence of teachers. This view is still present in the way NUT argues for the importance of keeping teacher education very close to traditional academic education programs and that teacher students must be allowed to study their subject courses in the same way that other students do. This is a fundamentally different view from the idea, championed by STU, of teacher education as something so unique as to require specific subjects and being clearly separated from traditional academic university courses or programs. As is argued in study II, the central role of didactics, present in the STU referral, is given a decidedly more peripheral role by NUT, as one of several complementary competences within the educational science core. Consequently, the Unions divergent views on the unity of the teaching profession may be understood as resulting from their different views on the knowledge base of teaching. STU outlines a common knowledge base for all teacher categories centered on didactics – how to teach – as the central expertise of teachers. NUT, on the other hand, argues for the centrality of subject knowledge as the primary expertise of teachers, resulting in a view highlighting differences between various teacher groups in terms of what is to be considered the essential knowledge base of a united teaching profession.

As is obvious, the Unions are not just disagreeing over the question of professional separation; they are also disagreeing over the basis for the professional knowledge base of teachers and the relationship of teacher education to traditional academic structures.

This divide has, of course, historical roots. The relationship between NUT and traditional academia is a very close one, given the fact that NUT traces its history back to the academically trained grammar school teachers of the parallel school system. For STU, whose members have traditionally not been university trained, this is a more complex relationship,
explaining – arguably – their view of teacher education as so unique as to require an educational logic of its own, separated from the structures of traditional higher education and its subject disciplines.

There is, in other words, reason to conclude that there exists a kind of intraprofessional boundary work between the Unions, resulting in a number of consequences for the negotiation of how to establish meaning and content in relation to teacher professionalism within the context of contemporary Swedish education.

A Symbolic Politics of Professionalism

The second question of this work addresses how we might interpret and understand the Unions’ use of the concept of professionalism as a political strategy within the contemporary Swedish educational policymaking. This question is primarily dealt with in studies I and III.

From the institutional perspective comprising a part of the theoretical foundation of this thesis, the meaning ascribed to ‘teacher professionalism’ is decided within interpretative struggles over meaning among, in this case, education policymakers and the Teacher Unions. Such struggles over meaning, Hardy and Maguire (2008) argue, are often the result of growing uncertainty or crisis within an institutional field, opening up possibilities for different kinds of actors to mobilize resources in order to bring about change in institutional arrangements.

The Swedish educational system may very well be described as an institutional field characterized by both uncertainty and – if one is to believe the media image – crisis. During the last thirty years it has been transformed in fundamental ways through a (more or less) continuous process of reform (Lundahl 2002a, 2005; Lundgren 2002), resulting in an educational system characterized by decentralization and deregulation. The move away from a centralistic system controlled by a large bureaucracy and into a more diverse system founded upon the logic of NPM-styles of public service provision (Brunsson & Sahlin 2000) has resulted in new types of governing structures, but also in new ways of talking and thinking about the role of the educational system in society at large. One part of this process of reform, relating directly to the work of teachers, was the introduction of what Foss Lindblad and Lindblad (2009) call ‘the professionalizing talk on teachers’. As has already been stated, this was introduced into Swedish educational policy discussions by policymakers and not teachers or their organizations. Even so, the professionalization of teaching has become the central policy ambition of both Teacher Unions and education policymakers alike.

In study I, different interpretations of the certification reform is presented in order to shed light on the different ways it may be read. Political unity is obviously at hand, as both Unions supported the introduction of a system of certification, despite being critical of several aspects of the way it was intended to be implemented. For the Unions, being associated with other certified, high-status, professions was considered of greater importance than the eventual problems created by the very rapid implementation process suggested. The certification would serve to prove the complexity and skills needed to work as a teacher and would create a market monopoly, as uneducated persons would no longer be allowed to work independently as teachers. In many ways, departing from how the professional project was described by Larson (1977/2013) as aiming for market monopoly and increased social status, the introduction of a state sponsored certificate could be considered the ultimate success of a professional project (cf. Abbott 1988).

However, the reform could as easily be read as a very effective way for education policymakers to increase their control over teachers, thereby restricting the autonomy
characterizing the ideal-type professionalism described by Freidson (2001). In this way, the introduction of a certificate may be viewed as part of an educational discourse stressing the accountability of teachers when it comes to the effectiveness of the educational system as measured in international tests and evaluations. Thus, the increase in ‘professionalism’ referred to in the Green paper may also be interpreted as being of the organizational kind constituting a disciplinary mechanism (Fournier 1999) by which to increase the control over teachers – within a deregulated educational system – from a distance.

From the discussion so far, it seems that education policymakers can use the Unions’ focus on increasing the social status of teachers by way of professionalization in order to implement reforms that may be interpreted as counteracting the essential values of ideal-type professionalism as described by Freidson (2001). As is argued by Evetts (2010), the co-existence of two versions of professionalism within contemporary western societies complicates the negotiations of meaning associated with them in important ways. Simultaneously, there is a normative pressure towards professionalization as the primary way of organizational/occupational development within the deregulated systems of public service provision of most westerns states (DiMaggio & Powell 1991b), making it difficult for the Unions to develop alternative approaches for increasing the social status of the profession. This may explain the rhetorical similarities between the professional projects of the Unions in spite of the fact that they are so fundamentally different at their core, as underlined in studies I and II.

As is argued in study III, this normative pressure forces the Unions to use professional terminology in order to increase the legitimacy they need in order to strengthen the social status and the working conditions of teachers in general. Consequently, as has been shown in all studies of this thesis, the Unions use ideas of professionalism in order to frame their arguments for or against different education reforms. This is exemplified, in study II, by the way STU argues against the reformation of teacher education on the basis that it would have negative effects on the overall professionalization of teachers at the same time as NUT argues that the same reform is vital for the specialization of teachers necessary for such professionalization to be possible.

At the rhetorical level, as shown in study III, following the introduction of the teacher certificate, both Teacher Unions have been influenced by, what DiMaggio and Powell (1991b) termed mimetic processes. In order to maximize the legitimacy of their professional aspirations, they try to become isomorphic with the most successful image of a profession available, the medical profession. As is argued by Sahlin-Andersson (1996) these processes of imitation is directed towards standardized representations of the imitated group in question and has, as such, not much to do with the actual practices of the modeled organization in question. Thus, following the introduction of the teacher certificate, both Teacher Unions have applied medical terminology in their efforts of increasing the legitimacy of their arguments. Teachers doing their probationary year were suddenly referred to as ‘interns’; the importance of allowing teachers to be able to decide what supportive measures a certain pupil requires was reframe as a demand for teachers to be given ‘rights of prescription’ and demands for increases in classroom based research for the professional development of teachers was formulated as demands for ‘clinical’ educational research, as was discussed in study III. As the practice of medicine is, arguably, quite different from that of teaching, study III argues that the professional rhetoric used by the Unions is de-coupled from the actual practice of teaching and, consequently, that it works primarily as a strategy for increasing the public legitimacy for the Unions efforts to increase the social and financial rewards of their members.
In other words, the Teacher Unions’ use of professionalism within the context investigated in this work is primarily as a symbolic resource used to facilitate internal processes of identity construction as belonging to the category of professions and the external legitimacy needed for increasing the social status of teachers in general.

Returning to the different ways of understanding the effects of educational restructuring presented by Lindblad and Goodson (2011) this work concurs with the view that current processes of educational restructuring result, primarily, in processes of de-coupling, separating, to an extent, the political debates on education from the everyday work of teachers.

As was argued already by Lortie (1975) teachers in the United States have never been professionals in any way associated with any traditional understanding of the term. Foss Lindblad and Lindblad (2009) argue along the same lines in relation to Swedish teachers today, as they claim that the introduction of ‘the professionalizing talk on teachers’ was primarily intended to create new kinds of ideas of professional teachers, suitable for the ambitions of the agenda of neoliberal educational restructuring. Even so, the political use of professionalism, within the context of Swedish education made it a useful resource for the Teacher Unions to adopt, not least because of the social value and normative pressure associated with processes of professionalization.

Another reason for understanding teacher professionalism as a symbolic resource decoupled from the practice of teaching in the case of this work is the strong dependence of the Unions on the political system. A combination of the institutionalized role of unions in Sweden in general and the intraprofessional boundary work between the two Teacher Unions are reducing their possibilities of formulating a strong narrative of what teacher professionalism in Sweden ought to be. Instead, the historical conflicts between the Unions and their very different sources of identification makes them sensitive to political trends as they must fight each other for political support for their respective agendas of professionalization. This sensitivity is underlined by the way the political reorientation inherent in the reform program of the current center-right government managed to challenge the relationship between the Unions. This is so, not least, since the current policy agenda is relatively well aligned with the policies of NUT, a situation that has not been present for most of the second half of the 1900s. It seems obvious that neither the current influence of the agenda of educational restructuring, or the historical ambition of unifying the Swedish educational system have managed to reduce the differences of identification constituting the foundation of the Unions political agendas.

The intraprofessional boundary work resulting from these fundamental disagreements is, thus, of vital importance for any understanding of the political negotiation over the construction of teacher professionalism within Swedish educational policymaking.

**Thoughts on The Future of Swedish Teacher Unionism**

In their discussion of teacher unionism in England in the 1980s, Ozga and Lawn (1981) described a tension between ‘unionism’ and ‘professionalism’, arguing that teachers were primarily workers who used professional strategies when suitable for their overall political goals. In contemporary Sweden, following the transformation of the public welfare sector, the Unions have positioned themselves more as professional associations than traditional unions. This may be explained, using the institutional approach of this work, as having been caused by a normative pressure towards professionalization. As a result of the mimetic processes making the Teacher Unions adopt medical terminology in order to create legitimacy for their policy suggestions, they are removing themselves from more traditional union strategies. One example of this can be the fact that, since the conflict over the
decentralization of employer responsibility for teachers from state to local levels, no major teacher strikes have occurred despite extensive dissatisfaction with the continuously lagging salaries of teachers in relation to other occupations. Consequently, it could be argued that the efforts of appearing professional may have reduced the Teacher Unions willingness to challenge the political system by going into conflict. Instead, they are using more cooperative strategies in order to influence and gain the support of the political establishment. As a result – and in accordance with Swedish political tradition – the relationship between political policymakers and unions becomes tight, making, in fact, the Unions a part of the same establishment they are to negotiate with. Using more activist strategies in this situation becomes a gamble, as the Union initiating such actions risk, not only to alienate itself from a favorable position in relation to education policymakers, but also to lose political influence in relation to the other Union. Consequently, more unionist actions become unlikely, should they not be supported by both Teacher Unions. One again, the influence of the intraprofessional boundary work between the Teacher Unions is underlined.

This development also constitutes a fundamental difference between the Swedish Teacher Unions and their English or American counterparts. As the ideas of the neoliberal agenda of educational restructuring gained influence in their national contexts, the Anglo-American unions adopted a more traditional activist position in defense of the traditional values of public education. So far, the Swedish Teacher Unions have moved in the opposite direction, possibly because of the strong dependence on the political system discussed above.

However, the argument above departs from the idea that the Teacher Unions, despite their internal differences, are devoted to a shared project of raising the social status of all teachers. Should the separation of teacher categories, somewhat initiated by the reforms discussed in this thesis, take hold, another scenario may be possible. If the Unions were to give up on the idea of a common project and accept a clear division of teacher categories, their dependence upon each other, and, simultaneously, on the political system would be reduced. In such a situation, their respective professional agendas could be strengthened, resulting in a need to mobilize members in order to acquire legitimacy for more focused professional projects freed from intraprofessional boundary work. However, even if such a development would strengthen the agency of the respective Union, as different categories of teachers would be considered different professional groups with different kinds of expert knowledge, it would, arguably, also contribute to enforcing a more clearly manifested status difference between them. Nevertheless, given the very long political tradition of educational unification aimed at eradicating such differences and the fact that STUs professional project is so clearly centered on the idea of a unified teaching profession, such a development would probably meet severe resistance. However, the strength of the international influence of the neoliberal restructuring agenda and the organizational changes it has brought about should not be marginalized, not least as it is, in relation to Swedish educational policy traditions, a relatively new phenomenon. The future of teacher professionalism in Sweden, in other words, is still to be decided within the ongoing negotiation between different actors over how to give it meaning and content. In relation to this, the future development of the relationship between the two Teacher Unions may prove to be of great importance.

The argument of this thesis is that the Unions use of professional terminology is to be regarded as a symbolic politics used in order to increase their influence within the political negotiation of the meaning of teachers’ work within the field of Swedish education in order to increase the social status of teachers. Even so, the existence of processes of intraprofessional boundary work is undermining their position within this ‘interpretative struggle, making the Unions dependent upon the education policy establishment. In other
words, the fact that Swedish Teachers are organized in two separate Unions is weakening their position within these political negotiations. As is underlined by a comparison with the Union of Education Norway, if a united professional project were to be accomplished, its strength in relation to the educational policymaking level would be increased. At this time, however, not least as a result of contemporary Swedish educational policy developments, such a turn of events seem unlikely.

Instead, in order to increase the legitimacy of their professional ambitions the Swedish Teacher Unions are using not only arguments connected to the ideal-type kind of professionalism described by Friedson (2001), but from its organizational contender as well. Both Unions are, thus, actively using arguments from the neo-liberal restructuring agenda in order to find political support for their policies. Sweden’s future as a competitive knowledge society, for example, is frequently used in order to argue for the need of decisive investments in improvements of teachers’ salaries and working conditions. Another example is the OECD argument of the importance of creating effective teachers if nations are to be able to improve the results of their education systems in international tests and evaluations. By using such arguments in order to acquire political legitimacy, the Unions are contributing to a gradual reconfiguration of how teachers are understood and talked about within the context of contemporary education debates, highlighting the need for more research to be conducted in order to understand the details of such developments.

Another area in need of more research is how the professional projects pursued by the Unions are affecting the professional conceptions of their members. The Unions – as organizations on the meso level – are acting as filters between the political macro level and the micro level of individual schools and teachers. As such, not least because of their high level of organization, they become central intermediaries shaping the preconceptions of their members on the issue of how teacher professionalism is to be understood within the context of the contemporary Swedish educational system. Therefore, continuous research on the developments of the professional projects of the Teacher Unions is of importance if we are to fully understand how political negotiations over the idea of teachers as professionals will be develop and given meaning in the future.