WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE MALE TEACHER?
GENDERED DISCOURSES AND PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION IN SWEDEN 1945–2000

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In Sweden, as in most western countries, progressive pedagogy has influenced the rhetoric of education policy and national curricula. In the early twentieth century, ideas about ‘learning by doing’ and ‘pupil centred education’ came to Sweden from countries such as Germany, Austria and the US. These ideas were primarily influenced by people interested in preschool education, a few persons who started progressive private schools and those who wanted to introduce a more equal and democratic compulsory school system for all children. However, sixty years and two World Wars elapsed before nine-year co-educational compulsory schooling, inspired by progressive ideas, was introduced in 1962 in Sweden.

There has been a long tradition of employing both women and men at the intermediate level of primary schools in Sweden. A parliamentary resolution in 1945 directed that 40 per cent of places in teacher training colleges were to be allocated to women and 60 per cent to men. However, with the simultaneous process of reforming compulsory schooling, it became more and more difficult to recruit men to primary teaching. According to some, this was precisely because of the policy of allocating places according to gender. In particular the national union drew public attention to this problem in their journal: ‘The result of this school policy has already become apparent. One cannot even talk about any real selection, since applications from men are so few.’

The allocation of places in teacher education according to sex was abolished in the early 1970s. Figures from Statistics Sweden show that the proportion quickly changed in favour of women and that by 1976 the situation had reversed, with 60 per cent of places occupied by women and 40 per cent by men.

In 2002, the Swedish National Agency of Education, Skolverket, presented an alarming report regarding teacher recruitment. This report claimed that more than seventy thousand teachers should be recruited to the teacher profession within the immediate future. This problem was not unique to Sweden. For example similar problems were being debated in the British and Australian media. In Western societies worldwide there were increasing concerns that men, in particular, were avoiding the

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1 This study is a part of a project in progress: ‘The teacher in the transformation of society 1940–2003. The discursive construction of the “good” teacher in various arenas’ and is financed by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. The article focuses on the state arena.
3 SOU 1956:18 Seminarieorganisationen/The organisation of teachers’ training college, pp. 171.
4 Folkskolldräners Tidning/Editorial for male intermediate level primary school teachers, no. 17, 1955, p 3.
5 SOU 1978:86 Läroare för skola i utveckling/Teachers in a developing school/p. 107.
teaching profession. According to Statistics Sweden, across the compulsory school sector, 73 per cent of teachers were female and 27 per cent male by 2002.\(^8\)

This gender imbalance is linked to a number of issues. Namely, the dominance of female primary school teachers is frequently blamed for the failure of boys in schools. One proposed solution is to find ways to encourage men to enter this area of education.\(^9\) Consequently there appears to be expectations that men could bring something into teaching which women cannot.

This article seeks to throw light on the issue of the gender imbalance in teaching, by placing this issue in historical perspective. It particular, this article analyses changes in Swedish education policy in relation to teachers and the changing constructions of ‘the teacher’ between 1945 and 2000. Four questions are thus posed: What were the discursively constructed positions of the teacher embedded in progressive school policy in Sweden 1945-2000?; How have these changed across time?; In what ways are these discourses gendered?; And, what are the implications for teacher recruitment that from these gendered discourses?

To answer these questions, the repertoire of teaching positions that have been discursively inscribed in the state arena for the period 1945-2003 are analysed. The state arena is of interest since Sweden has had a Nordic-type welfare state that has a strong centralistic tradition in which ideals of homogeneity, consensus and equality have linked with ideals of pupil-centred pedagogy. However, similar to a number of other western countries,\(^10\) Sweden has quite recently shifted its school policies to incorporate demands of marketisation and consumer (including parent and student) choice.

This analysis is grounded in poststructuralist feminist theory. This theory is important for an understanding of how competing discourses are activated when normative female and male teaching positions are constructed and how the discourses also produce subject positions from which the gendered character of teachers and teachers’ roles make sense.\(^11\) There is a variety of ways of understanding and conducting discourse analysis.\(^12\) The concept of ‘interpreted repertoires’ is used in this article to refer to different discursively constructed teacher ‘types’ embedded in documents that describe different versions of the ideal teacher and which function as prototypes for progressive primary school teachers.\(^13\) In discourse analytic terms, relatively coherent ways of expressing what characterises exemplary teachers and ways of teaching create the building blocks of the teacher prototypes. An historical approach offers ways of understanding how social, economic and ideological changes in society affect the meanings related to these teacher types, their positions, and their fluidity over time.

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\(^12\) Wetherell, et al., *Discourse Theory.*

The empirical material commented on in this article is comprised of ninety Swedish Official Government Reports, *Statens offentliga utredningar (SOU)* between 1945 and 2000 that deal with primary schools and primary school teachers. These reports contain commissions of inquiry and recommendations undertaken by the state and governed by specific terms of reference. For example Parliamentary resolutions regarding the Swedish nine-year compulsory school system were preceded by a considerable number of such commissions of inquiry. Commissions of inquiry were continuously set up by the Government in order to evaluate, control and further develop the nine-year school system.

I have divided the material into three periods. Each period is characterised by distinctive discursive conflicts. The first period, 1945-1962, covers the time in which compulsory school reform was central to the political agenda and ends when the first centrally managed and rule-governed national curriculum for the new school, *Läroplan 1962*14 was issued. During the 1960s there were no major conflicts in state rhetoric about teachers at the intermediate level of compulsory schooling. Thus, the second period, 1969-1980, was stimulated with the implementation of the second rule-governed-national curriculum, *Läroplan 1969*15, and ends when the first goal-governed national curriculum, *Läroplan 1980*16, was issued. During these years the governing of schools through rules was questioned and replaced by a new way of governing schools through goals, with more freedom for schools to find different ways to reach these goals. The third and final period, 1981-2000, covers the transformation of education and a profound shift in education policy towards marketisation.

In order to set the scene, I provide an outline of the historical context and describe some of the major changes in Swedish education policy.

**From governing through rules to governing through goals**

After World War II, Swedish education was completely reconstructed and the nine-year compulsory schooling system was established. Equality was one of the guiding lights for the reforms, with equal opportunity to gain an education being treated as synonymous with standardisation of schooling.17 Timetables and detailed syllabi were issued in order to increase the uniformity of curriculum content and all important decisions were made at the very centre of the state apparatus. In contrast, in the late 1970s, a devolution process began with increased freedom for local authorities to make decisions concerning the allocation of resources. According to the national curriculum for compulsory schooling, issued in 1994, *Läroplan 1994*18, timetables for various subjects could be adjusted, and the scope for the development of distinctive local school profiles and individual choice was broadened. Governing through rules was largely replaced by governing through general goals and responsibilities for pedagogical improvement were transferred from the central state to local authorities.19 Thus, Sweden

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had witnessed a dramatic systemic shift in education policy. Since the establishment of nine-year compulsory schooling every curriculum has emphasised gender equality. The state has expected teachers to equip pupils to act as spearheads of gender equality in education, the labour market, family life, leisure and politics. However, state rhetoric about the meaning of gender was opaque and essentialist and anti-essentialist views regarding the sexes operated simultaneously. Essentialist views saw differences in pathways for males and females as natural, whereas anti-essentialist arguments took the stance that the distribution of either sex in various activities should conform to that of the other.

One approach to gender equality was formulated in terms of quantity; the goal was an equal distribution of the sexes in various spheres of society. Here, arguments were drawn from a ‘conformist’, anti-essentialist discourse of social constructivism, where, it was argued, sex/gender should not function as determinants of educational need, experience or outcome. In this latter view, girls and boys should, for example, be equally distributed over all subjects in compulsory school and in all programmes in upper secondary school.

An alternative approach focused on qualitative gender differences and was based on an essentialist perspective of the sexes, that took for granted that girls and boys were different. In this view, therefore, girls’ and boys’ different knowledges, experiences and values were to be taken into account in education, not to privilege one over the other, but in ways that accorded equal weight to both. This essentialist view of the sexes could potentially come into conflict with and counteract the quantitative aims of equal distribution of the sexes over subjects and programmes. The recognition of sex differences as educationally significant ran the risk of legitimating hierarchies between the sexes, especially since the asymmetry of structural and symbolic gender relations was ignored. However, in state reports about primary schools, the complexity of the gender issue was not reflected upon.

The primary school teacher as a state construction

The teachers presented under the following headlines are abstract constructions or the interpreted repertoire of normative teacher types based on the state reports. In the 1945-1962 period two ‘good’ teacher types appeared on the state stage: the ‘well-informed, versatile and exemplary authority’, and the ‘naturally talented supervisor’.

There were no major innovations in teacher education for compulsory school teachers during the 1945-1962 period. Primary school teacher education for junior level and intermediate level continued and was subject to different programmes with different entry qualifications, that the state still controlled. In contrast, future lower secondary school and grammar school teachers were still educated at the universities. Further, it was still considered important to have both female and male trainee teachers in the approximate proportion of two to three at the intermediate level and the quota system for admission to this teacher education programme remained in force throughout the period.

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The ‘well-informed, versatile and exemplary authority’ was a person who maintained good personal relations with the local people. This teacher was pictured as an authoritative patriarch, though not authoritarian, rigorous but incorruptibly impartial, with a deep commitment to all school children and their families. Important characteristics for both teachers and pupils included ‘Honesty, being dutiful and responsible, possessing patience, and self-reliance, capabilities of overcoming difficulties and making use of time in an efficient way’. The model both for teachers and for important content in school life was ‘God, the loving father’ and ‘God’s care and protection’. The teacher closely represented the ideal of the loving, caring and protective human:

The disciples should regard their teacher as a friend, to whom they have possibilities to turn to get advices not only about schoolwork but also about other worries and troubles. Authority and respect will be grounded on the foundation of confidence.

The teacher was a trustworthy person who both pupils and their parents could consult at any time, day or evening. On such occasions ‘it is of great importance that the message is conveyed that the family and the home should include love between husband and wife and between parents and their children, because the family is the foundation of our society’. In this respect, the teacher was to be a model for both pupils and their parents.

The teacher was referred to throughout the SOU Reports in a masculine form: ‘In his relations with pupils, he should…’. While the teacher was thus constructed discursively as masculine, ‘he’ was expected to unite the identifiably masculine clear and firm authority with the more recognisably feminine caring and protective human ideal. While this construction of the teacher in relation to gender was complex, teachers’ salaries, however, specifically demonstrated that the sexes were not of equal value. Not until July 1948 were women at intermediate level able to advance to the highest salary level. Moreover, it was more financially rewarding for women to teach at intermediate level than at junior level, where the vast majority were women and where the salaries were much lower. Thus, according to the reports from this period, teaching at intermediate level was distinct from and of more value than teaching at junior level, where it was more unambiguously connected with women.

Gender distinctions were not confined to salaries or concentrated in different levels of the age-graded structure. In order to serve as role-models for both pupils and their parents, married men and single women had the right to official apartments attached to their posts. Married women teachers were, however, expected to live in their husbands’ apartments.

Much emphasis was laid on the teacher as a competent evaluator and controller of quality. The teacher was to evaluate every pupil’s personal characteristics, and these teacher evaluations were believed

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25 SOU 1946:15, pp. 54, 57.
26 SOU 1946:15, p. 9.
28 SOU 1946:15, p. 8.
29 SOU 1953:18, ‘Lika lön för män och kvinnor i det statliga lönesystemet’/Equal salaries for men and women in the State salary system, p. 428.
30 SOU 1953:18, p. 288.
31 SOU 1946:8, 1942 års lärarlönesakkunniga’/Experts’ opinions on teachers’ salaries.
to be more informative than marks based on knowledge derived from textbooks. Occasionally, the voices of the teachers can be heard as their points of view were recorded in the reports. In some such instances, women and men positioned themselves differently. When, for example, the school commission suggested that researchers should construct diagnostic tests to evaluate the pupils, the men made every effort to maintain their exclusive rights to be the controllers and evaluators of pupils’ qualities. The women were more inclined to accept external experts, usually men, and their tests as a complement to their own evaluations. However, they still wanted to reserve the right to determine whether and when to use these tests.

In contrast to the former teacher type, the ‘naturally talented supervisor’ was a natural, born teacher. Here, more stress was laid on the teacher’s hereditary characteristics: ‘unique, personal characteristics, natural capacities and interests… The inherited characters are to a considerable extent the foundation for the teacher’s personality’.

In terms of inherent characteristics the construction of teachers, as well as pupils was based on arguments from sciences such as biology and psychology, and it was presupposed that there were individuals who were born to guide free growing pupils. This therefore implied teaching practices based on pupils’ activities. Those state representatives who wanted a supervisory type of teacher instead of the alternative all-knowing, and all-powerful type, sought to construct a dichotomy and hierarchy between the two. They argued for example that ‘the authoritative school [should] be replaced by an activity school, where the disciple has a feeling of joint responsibility for the daily school work’. Teachers, in this view, should work more with developmental aspects of student’s learning and focus less on attempting to control their learning, and therefore tests and evaluations ought to be left to external experts.

As was the case with the paternal authoritative type of teacher, certain attributes were prominent in the construction of this supervisory type of exemplary teacher. On the one hand, and in order to support the children’s free growth, the teacher was required to create ‘a good, homely classroom for everyone’. Generally, these texts were gender neutral and when teachers were referred to, the descriptor ‘teacher’ was used rather than gendered pronouns such as ‘he’ or ‘she’. In contrast, when the pupil was referred to, it was most often in gendered terms; ‘he’ unless sex differences were stressed in ways that required differentiation. Thus, for example, teachers’ obligations were to ‘trace out his natural abilities, develop them and guide him to the right study path’.

On the other hand, the supervisor’s competence to be a good leader was stressed. The teachers were responsible for ensuring that teaching based on supporting pupils’ activities did not end in chaos. Thus, the supervisor must ‘lead and inspire schoolwork’ and act with the ‘correct kind of authority, at the

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33 SOU 1949:35, ‘Skolöverstyrelsens underdåniga yttrande över vissa av 1940 års skolutredningsbetänkande och 1946 års skolkommissions principbetänkande jämförande sammanfattnings av yttranden av skolinspektörer, lärarkollegier och lärarorganisationer’/The National Board of Education’s respectful pronouncement on some of the official reports from the 1940 school investigation and 1946 school commission’s report on principles with summaries of pronouncements from schools inspectors, teaching staff and teachers’ associations, pp. 371ff.
34 SOU 1946:31 vol.VI, ‘Skolans inre arbete’/The internal work of schools, pp. 32, 45, 41.
37 SOU 1948:27, p. 25.
same time appealing and mastering’. This position was explicitly male-coded in the texts.

In contrast to the authoritative teacher type, discourses that constituted the supervisor were built on differences between the sexes. For example, women were described as ‘congenial to things that appeal to emotions and imaginations’, while men were portrayed as ‘congenial to things that appeal to acts of volition and abilities to take actions’. Thus, by implication, even if not explicitly, the position of leader was allocated to male teachers, while the position for creating good homely classrooms was accordingly female.

Until 1950 ‘the well-informed, versatile and exemplary authority’ competed with ‘the naturally talented supervisor’ in the reports on the state arena. However, ‘the naturally talented supervisor’ emerged from the struggle victoriously and was inscribed in the first national curriculum for the nine-year compulsory school in 1962. Hargreaves describes similar ideological conflicts as the two great narratives of traditionalism and progressivism; the ‘limitless servant’, the ‘pragmatist’ and the ‘reflective teacher’ (1969-1980). After World War II, the demand for workers increased in Sweden as trade and industry prospered. Therefore both women and immigrants were needed in the labour force. Simultaneously gender equality became an important political issue. One consequence was an increased need for care institutions and in the 1960s and 1970s prolonged school days were discussed and the number of public morning and afternoon leisure centres increased. Part-time work became more frequent even among teachers, especially women, who had earlier been obliged to work full time.

The sex-based quota system in teacher training was abolished at the beginning of the 1970s. After that the pace of the feminisation of intermediate-level primary school staff accelerated. In Swedish Government Official Reports there were numerous indications of anxieties regarding men leaving primary school teaching for other more attractive occupations. To change the situation, state representatives sought to replace the three distinct teacher categories corresponding to junior, intermediate and senior levels of compulsory schooling respectively, by broader categories of teachers for grades 1-7 and 4-9. One hope was that men would be enticed back into primary schools, coupled with the recognition that they were likely to return only if they were entitled to also teach at the former senior level (grade 7-9). Another hope was that more men would overcome the problem of status differences between teachers:

The present hierarchies, which create status differences between different groups of teachers, are based on different periods of teacher training, wage differences and working-hours differences. The facts are that the stronger the hierarchies, the larger the gender differences there are. If teacher education goes beyond the narrow teaching categories, the hierarchical structure will be reduced.

Overall, then, the restructuring of teacher classifications aimed to address a range of gender-related problems facing the state in relation to its school teachers:

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38 SOU 1946:31, p 70.
I now return to the question of the meanings of a ‘good’ teacher as embedded in the SOU reports. During the 1970s ‘the naturally talented supervisor’ was challenged by the ‘limitless servant’, the ‘pragmatist’ and the ‘reflective teacher’ types respectively. The limitless servant and the pragmatist were inscribed in reports across the whole period, whereas the reflective teacher appeared only at the end of the period, when the first goal-governing curriculum was issued.

During this period grading young pupils was regarded as incompatible with the democratic goals of compulsory school, since, it was claimed, it caused stress and competition. Instead the state preferred a system where pupils at junior and intermediate level compared their current achievements with their own earlier achievements, rather than with other pupils’ achievements. The so-called ‘15-minute dialogue’ between a single student, her or his parents and the teacher was introduced to inform and discuss the development of each individual student’s schoolwork. During these dialogues the State also expected teachers to discuss issues of gender equality.

‘The limitless servant’ as a teacher type was prevalent in almost all of the reports during the period. In short, all reports focused on the need for the ‘limitless servant’s’ engagement in a wide range of educational tasks. The state required teachers to learn to become much more obliging, flexible, and adaptable to other people’s needs. They were expected to accept that pupils, their parents, and other outside or community interest groups had rights to influence schools and schooling:

- The form teacher also has the main responsibility for the cooperation of pupils, parents and to settle contacts with different society representatives and representatives for leisure activities.

Similarly, they were to be open to the advice and input of a range of experts:

- There are reasons to believe that teachers lack self-confidence and also perhaps lack competence… contributions and influences from outsider experts are of great importance.

The state’s view of teachers had changed markedly in a relatively short time. Earlier, the state had given teachers positions and status on the basis of their ‘natural talent’, but in the reports during the 1970s, the state undercut their authority and status dramatically; an act of considerable symbolic violence. This undercutting was especially evident in comments concerning teachers’ complaints about their work which, according to the teachers, had become unwieldy, unmanageable and indeed, almost limitless. In response, the reports repeatedly pictured teachers as querulous and unqualified. One claimed that ‘school staff are insufficiently willing to submit to changes’, while another suggested that ‘teachers turn out unsuccessful with their tasks’. One cause of this lack of success lay in their
poor level of education which ‘has been insufficient and perhaps not always adequate’, resulting in
their ‘lack of... methodological abilities’. Another cause could be more directly attributed to the
teachers themselves: ‘They have not developed their creative abilities enough’. Overall, then, while
teachers might complain of unmanageable demands, the reports responded by asserting that ‘there is
a lot more that should be demanded from teachers’ work’.51

When teachers and pupils were gendered in descriptions of school situations in the reports, the limitless
servant appeared as a man and the pupil as a boy. The precise choice of words is important here. The
reports used words which in Swedish are homonymous and, wrenched from an educational context,
can be used to indicate a sexual relationship, so that in this construction of the teacher, the teacher’s
position could be seen as almost similar to a prostitute’s position. This can be seen in the following
example which concerns instruction in reading and writing and where the words used could also have
sexual allusions. The teacher is obliged to ‘stimulate the pupils when they need to express the joy of
creativity and to express themselves as well as maintain their spontaneous lust52 for... carried by the
lust for these thoughts and feelings is to built on his lust for creative activities... He must learn to not
turn up his nose’.53

The norm for good relations seemingly referred to the relationship between the male teacher and the
schoolboy. However, as for sex education, state representatives were clear that ‘normal’ sexuality was
heterosexuality: ‘Young people must solve their bisexual conflicts and come to a final identification of
their own sex role. They need to experience easy contacts with representatives of the opposite sex’.54

No alternative teacher position was presented in the reports, which means that all teachers, irrespective
of sex, were expected to put other people’s needs before their own. The state investigators also discussed
how to construct this obliging and flexible teacher. Since teacher education was regarded as being out-
of-date, they argued that it must be reformed and that new forms of in-service training for teachers
should also be developed.

From 1969 and the second national curriculum, democracy and equality were even more explicitly
stressed and ‘the pragmatist’ was constructed. The pragmatist was a democratic trouble-shooter. ‘In
a conflict lie developmental possibilities. Active co-operative ways of working make it possible to
take care of and stress the importance of both pupils and school staff’. The most important task for
the pragmatist was to be a real democrat in both word and deed. On the one hand, teachers were not
to emphasise their own opinion at the expense of others’ expression of theirs. They were responsible
for ensuring that everyone’s voice was heard and that pragmatic compromise decisions were carried
through. On the other hand, the pragmatist was obliged to be a leader, who as an authority actively
took sides with equality in regard to gender: ‘The question of gender equality is one example where
education is obliged to be normative and not pluralistic’. The teacher was also expected to take
sides with equality in regard to social and cultural background, geographical place of residence and

49 SOU 1973:1, p. 35.
50 SOU 1973:1, p. 34.
51 SOU 1973:1, p. 31.
52 The investigators have chosen the word “lust” (the same in Swedish), which in Sweden means both sexual lust for and zest for.
issues about law and justice.\textsuperscript{57} The texts that formed the basis of this teacher type were constructed in
gender neutral terms. However, pupils were constructed in gendered terms when law and justice were
discussed. The focus was on boys’ not girls’ behaviour and specific needs and on how to support them
so that they became more law-abiding.\textsuperscript{58}

At the end of the period the ‘reflective teacher’ simultaneously appears in the arena with the
publication of the first goal-governed national curriculum.\textsuperscript{59} From this point onwards local principals
and local schoolteachers had the main responsibility for developing classroom pedagogy in detail
but in accordance with these goals. Their most important task was to initiate and lead local school
development projects and to become like researchers in their own classrooms: ‘It is of great importance
that teachers analyse the problems that occur in their own school. The teachers’ staff meetings could
be used to discuss how to initiate local school development projects dealing with these problems’.\textsuperscript{60}
The state simultaneously started to develop evaluation programmes to ensure that local principals and
school teachers really worked in accordance with these goals.

The teacher’s position was constructed as pedagogically superior to that of university staff who were
seen to play only the role of advisers. ‘This means that teachers and head teachers are also able to lead
their own projects in which researchers participate, implying that the researchers change their position
from being project leaders to becoming advisers in teacher-led projects’.\textsuperscript{61}

As in the case of the pragmatist, the texts that constructed the reflective teacher were seemingly gender
neutral, and the gender equality discourse simultaneously operating opened the position of pragmatist
teacher to both sexes.

Primary school teachers become servants (1981-2000)

In the period 1981-2000, the devolution process accelerated and new relations between central
government and local communities were established. Now, local authorities were responsible for the
allocation of resources for various needs within the existing economic parameters. The policy shift
towards marketisation was fully implemented and the whole school system was positioned as servant,
subordinated to the needs of parents and students. Parent and student choice, and parent and student
influence, were key words during this period.

In order to enhance parents’ influence in primary schools, the state made possible the establishment
of local boards, where parents formed the majority of the members. The possibility of delegating
the right to decide about economic and pedagogical matters to the users was discussed.\textsuperscript{62} In order
to enlarge parents’ choice of primary schools, which earlier were very limited since children were
required to attend the nearest public school, new so-called independent free schools were permitted,
although, like state schools, they were to be under the supervision of the \textit{Skolverket}.

A further move to enhance parental input involved changes to the so-called ‘15-minute dialogues’ about
the individual pupil’s school situation. These became more strictly regulated in order to guarantee
pupils’ and parents’ influence over school work. At least two dialogues per semester were to be carried out. Parallel to these changes and designed to increase parent and child influence, the written national curriculum was reduced from a thick ledger and a number of supplementary books to a thin booklet, in which little more than the national aims for compulsory schooling were stipulated.

During this period the state inaugurated a kind of suitability control of teachers to protect pupils from sexual harassment. These were in accordance with the UN’s convention on children’s rights and followed or paralleled those inaugurated in countries such as Norway, England and Wales, France, Germany, Belgium, Canada and some states in the US and Australia. By this time, the number of women teachers vastly exceeded the number of men. In 1998-1999, 74 per cent of teachers were females and only 26 per cent males across the whole of the compulsory school system.

Two pictures of the ‘good’ school teacher were presented in the reports. Versions of the limitless servant continued to be prevalent, but alongside them emerged a contrasting type, with more specialised competence: the ‘profiled servant’. Both teacher types were positioned as subordinated servants in relation to the consumers of education, as it was up to the consumers to determine their value on the education market.

According to those arguing for the profiled servant, primary schools and primary schooling had failed to satisfy all the pupils’ needs. The profiled servant was a response to this and designed to encourage a range of more specialised skills to meet particular needs. Thus, for example, a teacher might be a specialist regarding a certain disability, a certain teaching method or a particular subject area. Most of the reports that formed the basis of the ideal type dealt with the possibility of establishing independent and profiled schools. Within the public school too, the profiled servant was to have special competences with regard to various disabilities and the provision of support for other teachers. In keeping with this approach, state representatives proposed that centres for the development of a special pedagogy for disabled pupils should be established. Moreover, the state attached great importance to profiled teachers. Their special competence was regarded as ‘most important and a prerequisite for schools to fulfil the requirement of the Education Act and the goals of the curriculum’. As with the pragmatist and the reflective teacher, the profiled teachers were constructed in the texts in gender-neutral terms.

Those who still believed that equal education for all was important, however, continued to argue for the limitless servant. The heterogeneity of the pupils was emphasised in the reports, and key words for teachers included ‘cultural clashes’, ‘cultural meetings’, ‘learning’ and ‘flexibility’. It was of central importance for teachers to stress the aims of equality in all its aspects. To be able to manage the complex situation in the classroom, both the reflective teacher and the pragmatist were incorporated.
The reflective teacher’s abilities were seen to be necessary for reflection, while the pragmatist’s abilities were seen to be crucial for solving the problems that were continually emerging.

When everyday examples from schools were presented in the reports, the teacher figured as sometimes a woman, and the teacher constructed in gendered terms. However, female teachers were never positioned as ‘good’ teachers. Indeed, both the dominance of female teachers and the characteristics of female teachers were at times explicitly seen as critical problems for schools: ‘School is far from patriarchal. Female teachers dominate in school, and they are too much of “mother hens”,69 who only have relational aims in view… School authority is called in to question’.70 A further problem identified in these context was that ‘the typical trainee teacher is a middle-class girl with a genuine “Swedish” background.71

At the same time as the typical teacher was being described as a ‘mother hen’ with a Swedish middle-class background, measures to recruit other social groups to teaching profession were being discussed. The state sought to encourage people with immigrant backgrounds to apply for teacher education programmes, but most of all there was a great demand for men. ‘The universities and colleges of higher learning are commissioned to promote male applicants to teacher education’.72

However, as mentioned above, sexual abuse was a matter of concern to the state. This is noteworthy in the context of education given the predominance of women teachers and the fact that ‘even though women assault children, the great majority of sexual abusers are men’. However, to fulfil the aims of gender equality, it was important that controls over teachers should not frighten men away. Therefore, it was argued that both women and men should come under closer control. ‘This should strengthen men’s position and contribute to strengthening colleagues’, employers’, and parents’ confidence in male teachers… Our suggestions are gender neutral and these measures should contribute to increased equality between women and men’.73

The state took a number of legal measures to gradually transfer the governing of schools to the consumers (that is, the parents and students) in the education market. Consequently, it was argued that teacher education should also be reformed in order to produce future teachers, both all-round and profiled, who were capable of meeting the full range of different needs. The state strategy envisaged a new teacher education where the scope of optional courses was broadened so that there would be a wide variety of courses for teacher candidates.74 Individual teachers and trainee teachers were expected to solve the problems with which the state had failed to cope of predicting future needs and demands for different teacher competencies. The teacher candidates would thus construct their own curriculum and the hope was they would choose those courses which would provide them with the specific competences that were highly valued on the labour market.

There were many possible positions for school teachers to adopt. One position was the servant’s position where by the teacher was dependent and passively adapted her/himself to the needs of the

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69 The Swedish word used in the text (morsig) is a slang expression for matriarchal and in this context in a negative way.
70 SOU 1996:143, ‘Krock eller möte. Om den mångkulturella skolan’/Clashes or meetings. About the multicultural school, p. 95.
consumers. Another was the manager’s position, whereby the teacher actively sought to influence the consumers by advertising her/himself as the best pedagogue. A third position was that of the reflective teacher who, taking into consideration the complexity of cultural variety in society, would avoid general solutions for all pupils, since they would inevitably suppress the needs of most of them. It was also, of course, possible to combine some of these positions. Sachs, Hargreaves and Day, have found similar positions for teachers in other late modern Western contexts.

Whatever happened to the male teacher?

Over the second half of the twentieth century there were substantial problems in Sweden, as in many other countries, with teacher recruitment. A special concern was that men in particular avoided the teaching profession. The cry for more men often found arguments in gender equality, especially in relation to quantitative requirements that both sexes should be well represented in all aspects of social activity. As I have argued, however, state rhetoric on gender equality was opaque. The asymmetry of gender power relations was made invisible and meanings of conformity and essentialism operated simultaneously. If arguments for quantitative equality were taken from a ‘conformity’ discourse, it is important to ask how the qualitative aspects of gender equality were dealt with in texts from the state arena.

When state representatives gave concrete examples from classroom situations, ‘teachers’ and ‘pupils’ most often became ‘men’ and ‘boys’. When during the 1990s, the primary school teacher became female, she was not described as equal with men in qualitative respects. Rather, the female teacher was a person marked by her shortcomings. She was too much of a ‘mother hen’, too middle-class and too Swedish. The inadequacy of female qualities was highlighted by the fact that they were discussed in the same context as arguments were presented for the need to recruit other people, especially men, to the teaching profession.

There were no comparable discussions of men’s shortcomings. On the contrary, when, for example, it became evident that it was men who were the principal sexual abusers of children, and there was a need to control teachers to limit the possibilities of abuse, the state representatives were careful about their use of words. In the name of gender equality, women were included in the group that should be controlled, even though men were the predominant concern. Furthermore, men were not accused of being too Swedish, too middle-class or, certainly, too much like ‘mother hens’, even though the overwhelming majority, like the female teachers, had middle-class Swedish backgrounds. Thus, state representatives ascribed to men higher qualities than those they attributed to women, by highlighting women’s, and disguising men’s, shortcomings.

A similar treatment of gender recurred when, in other situations, state representatives argued for more men in primary teaching. One argument was that men would raise the value of the primary school teacher. The assumption underlying this claim was that men were themselves of greater value and enjoyed higher status than women, and that this greater value would attach to the occupations they entered. Such an assumption not only devalued women but did so in a context in which the official overriding goal was gender equity. Thus, even though state representatives had taken arguments for more

men into primary teaching from the aim of gender equality, their qualitative arguments legitimated hierarchies between the sexes.

A further question concerns the ongoing and unresolved difficulties faced in recruiting especially men to teacher education, even though they were the focus of considerable state efforts. Throughout this period, the state had difficulty recruiting men to the subordinated teaching profession – a problem that continues into the present, with the state currently facing what it describes as an impending crisis. However, there were no comparable analyses in state reports either of why there were too few prospective teachers entering teacher education, or of why the teaching profession had become increasingly feminised.

The reports suggest two possible lines of approach. First, when the sex-based quota system for admission to intermediate primary school teacher education was abrogated in the beginning of the 1970s, the state simultaneously prescribed servant positions for teachers. Second, even after the reform of the structure of the teaching profession, the length of teacher education still corresponded to the age of schoolchildren for which it was preparing its students: the younger the children to be taught, the shorter the programme of teacher education. Shorter education was tied to lower salaries; and lower salaries historically had been, and remained, linked to relatively smaller numbers of men and larger numbers of women.

It is also worth considering the possible relations between the gender discourses embedded in progressive school policy and the shortage of teachers, especially men, in primary schools. Walkerdine has undertaken a deconstructive analysis of progressive pedagogy for primary schools. She argues that the discursive prototype for progressive pedagogy is the bourgeois family; within this prototype, the teacher’s position is that of the nurturing mother serving the omnipotent, active, inquisitive, experimental, and natural boy. In Western cultures, according to Walkerdine’s argument, the teacher’s position thus conforms most closely to that of women, in contrast to that of the pupil, which corresponds closely to that of the bourgeois boy. In the light of this, the cry for more men is surprising.

Part of the explanation for the continued insistence on the need for more male teachers lies in the multiplicity of discursive positions and the attributes associated with the teacher in progressive pedagogy. Over the period of slightly more than fifty years, the Swedish state model of progressive education provided a range of constructions of the teacher other than that of nurturer of the young. As I have shown, the interpreted repertoires of teaching positions embraced a number of different ways of caring and responsibility for pupils and relating to pupils, not all of which embraced nurturing or serving elements. It is possible too, that such a diversity of positions for the teacher was recognised by teachers themselves. Certainly, in the context of both Switzerland and England, and in contrast to Walkerdine’s view of the school as family, with teacher as the nurturing mother-figure, Vogt has shown through extensive analysis of interviews with primary school teachers of both sexes, that both women and men understand primary teaching as entailing both responsibility for and relatedness to their pupils.

Despite this diversity of constructions of the teacher, it is clear that across the period under consideration here, the varied positions of the teacher were distinctly gendered. This is most evident in the earliest reports from the 1940s to the 1960s. The figure of the teacher as the well informed, versatile and exemplary authority was constructed within an anti-essentialist ‘conformity’ gender discourse, whereas the figure of the teacher, whether female or male, as the ‘naturally talented supervisor’ was constructed within an essentialist discourse. In both cases the ‘masculine’ was in a position of advantage. For example, the leader and authority positions with the highest salary were male coded. However, there is no doubt that these advantaged positions, even though they were male coded, embraced notions of caring.

When the rhetoric of gender equality entered the scene from the 1960s, the texts carefully constructed the position of the teacher in gender-neutral terms. The various teacher positions, of limitless servant, pragmatist, reflective teacher or profiled teachers were, in the texts, at least, available to all teachers, irrespective of sex.

Even though it is evident that efforts were made to create superior status positions for the pragmatist, the reports also constructed the reflective teacher, the profiled teacher and more recently, also the servant, in ways that allowed them to be seen as more active and managing. It is also evident that once the political shift in school policy was fully implemented all positions become subordinated to parents’ and students’ demands in the education market.

Further, if we presume that the efforts, during the last fifty years to implement pupil-centred pedagogy into primary schools, have been realised, we have to consider that present and future trainee teachers are recruited from former active, inquisitive, experimental and demanding schoolgirls and schoolboys, who have been taught to express their needs. They have not been taught to take up a servant’s position. The present gender imbalance in the teaching profession suggests that men have learned that lesson better than women!

This analysis of the changing construction of the teacher, in terms of the range of types of ideal teacher gender, in terms of recruitment, length of training and salaries, and in terms of the wider equity agendas and socio-economic contexts, has a number of implications for the current debate and sense of crisis in teaching and teacher recruitment. First, the opaqueness of the concept of gender itself allowed contradictions and alternative views of the nature and role of the teacher to function simultaneously. Second, attempts to address the problem of the recruitment of male teachers were undermined by the failure to address, simultaneously, wider issues of status and income which were tied to gender. Finally, the shift towards a construction of the teacher as servant, associated with the move towards marketisation, appears almost inevitably to have drawn on essentialist understandings of gender to drive men away from teaching. Perhaps if the state’s investigations and reports had analysed the discourses through which they constructed the teacher, as well as the broader social contexts in which those constructions circulated, it would have reduced its own contribution to the undermining of its own gender equality ambitions.