

9 Teachers as a political force

Teacher unions, teacher cultures, and teacher education in Sweden and Finland, 1970–2020

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Teachers' unions' views on how teacher education should be conducted and organised are central parts of teacher culture. Discussions about teacher education show not only how teachers view their role in school and in society, but also how they attempt to strengthen their professional interests (Hagemann, 1992, p. 120). In this chapter, we analyse how teachers' unions in Sweden and Finland have attempted to influence reforms of teacher education from the late 1960s to the present. The purpose is not only to highlight aspects of teacher culture, but also to analyse the role of these unions in reforms of teacher education; prior research on the actors behind reforms of teacher education has focused mostly on political parties.

Finland and Sweden are in many ways similar, but there are some interesting differences that make for a fruitful comparison. In Finland, teacher education and the school system enjoy a good reputation, while in Sweden, they are considered to be in deep crisis. In Finland, all teacher categories are united in one union, while in Sweden, two separate unions have survived to this day, and have fought a long-running battle about the design of teacher education. Swedish teacher education has been reformed approximately once per decade since the 1960s. In Finland, there has been no major structural reform of teacher education since the 1970s.

In this chapter, after providing historical and research context, we begin by investigating how the two Swedish teachers' unions have argued and acted in order to influence reforms of Swedish teacher education from around 1970 until the present. Their arguments reveal not only different ideological views on the role of the teacher, but also competing professional strategies. We then compare how issues on which the Swedish teachers' unions held opposing views were handled by the Finnish teachers' union, where the different categories of teachers unite behind one common policy. With the help of this comparison, we draw conclusions about how the division or unification of the teacher profession affects union policies.

Historical background

In the mid-nineteenth century, a parallel school system developed in Sweden and Finland, with grammar schools for the elite and folk schools for the majority. Folk-school teachers and grammar-school teachers followed separate educational paths. Folk-school teachers were trained in seminaries with no connection to the universities; this seminary education was shorter and more vocationally oriented

than the university-based education of grammar-school teachers (Furuhausen and Holmén, 2017). Thus, in both countries, two different teacher cultures developed: the so-called ‘seminary tradition’ and the more academically oriented ‘grammar-school tradition’.

With the comprehensive school reform of 1962, the folk- and grammar-school teacher categories gradually disappeared. However, Swedish teachers are still divided into two unions with roots in the parallel school system. The Swedish Teachers’ Union (*Lärarförbundet*, LF), which originates from the folk-school union, today mainly organises preschool, primary, and lower-secondary school teachers.¹ The National Union of Teachers (*Lärarnas Riksförbund*, LR) originates from the union for grammar-school teachers, and mainly organises upper- and lower-secondary school teachers.

Initially, the unionisation of Finnish teachers was even more fragmented than in Sweden, as there was also a division along linguistic lines. However, in February 1974, four teachers’ unions consolidated into the new *Opettajien Ammattijärjestö* (OAJ), which incorporated teachers from the entire educational field (Hollstén, 2005, pp. 14–15; Kangasniemi, Hyttinen and Tanni, 2012, p. 39). In 1986, the unions for higher education, adult education, folk high schools, and for the educators of preschool teachers also joined the OAJ (Kangasniemi, Hyttinen and Tanni, 2012, p. 104; Lappalainen, 1998, p. 182), rendering it a single organisation representing the interests of teachers across the board.

Research on teachers’ unions

International research on teachers’ unions reveals that the most common historical pattern is the development of two or more unions. Divided school systems usually resulted in separate organisations for primary- and secondary-school teachers. Conflicts between unions have also historically been common, since they have held different views on, for example, school development and the role of the profession. Today, countries such as Sweden, England, Germany, and France have at least two unions. However, there are a few examples with only one union, such as Finland and Mexico (Moe and Wiborg, 2017).

Wiborg (2017) has studied the influence of Nordic teachers’ unions on education policies. However, although noting that the Scandinavian countries (unlike Finland) have several unions, she focuses on the role of the large, pedagogically progressive unions for comprehensive school teachers and their corporatist cooperation with the social democratic state. As this chapter will illustrate, the smaller and more conservative union for secondary school teachers has, at least in Sweden, also played an important role in the political dynamics of school reforms.

Criticising unions from a public choice perspective, Moe (2017) highlights Sweden as a country which has pushed through education reforms by weakening union power. He also considers Finland, with its uniquely strong teachers’ union and an internationally recognised high-quality education system, as an exception which should not be imitated since ‘it is quite unlike almost all other countries of the world in its fundamentals’ (ibid., p. 286). However, Sweden and Finland are similar in the structure of their school systems and in the way education reforms

have traditionally been conducted. This warrants a comparison of their teachers' unions' influence on reforms, an area where there are important differences.

Earlier studies of the development of teacher education in Sweden have focused mainly on the political actors and changes in national policy documents. The role of teachers' unions in the process is only briefly mentioned (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach, 2015; Schyllerkvist, 1993; Sjöberg, 2010a). Prior research illustrates how teachers' professional positions changed as a result of reforms in school and teacher education, but not how teachers' unions acted and the views they expressed about different reforms (Nilsson-Lindström and Beach, 2013; Sjöberg, 2010b; Stenlås, 2009). The only exception is an article about the different opinions held by unions in the process before the reform of 2011 (Lilja, 2014).

Both Swedish unions have given their own accounts of their actions regarding teacher education from the 1960s to the 1990s (Carle, 2000; Lunde, 1993). In Finland, the unified teachers' union, the OAJ, has written its own history, to some extent also describing its policies regarding teacher education, especially its ambition to create academic education for all teacher categories. Independent scholars, such as Hannu Simola, have described how the OAJ promoted the elevation of folk-school teacher education to the level of grammar-school teachers (Simola, 2005, p. 460).

Sources

In Sweden, each major reform of teacher education was prepared by a government-appointed committee of inquiry which wrote an official report. Before the bill was drafted, the report was sent to different associations, universities, and authorities, among them the teachers' unions, soliciting their views and counterproposals. The responses from the teachers' unions are the main Swedish sources for this chapter. Other sources include the official letters sent by the unions to the Ministry of Education or to Parliament, also programmes for teacher education and pamphlets from each teachers' union directed to the public and to politicians.

In Finland, broad-ranging official committees on teacher education that published their results in the Finnish series of committee reports became rare from the late 1970s onwards. The system of parliamentary committees was abandoned entirely in 2002 (Rainio-Niemi, 2010, p. 261). Instead, the number of working groups within the Ministry of Education rose. This, in part, reflects the fact that, in Finland, major education reforms had already been implemented in the 1970s and only minor issues were discussed in the 1980s and 1990s. Because of the reduced importance of committees in Finland, this part of the investigation relies largely on archival sources from the OAJ.

Sweden: two teachers' unions in ideological conflict

Swedish teacher education has been repeatedly reformed, with major reforms in 1968, 1988, 2001, and 2011, and minor changes in 1977 and 1992 (Furuhagen and Holmén, 2017; Furuhausen, Holmén and Sääntti, 2019; Ringarp and Parding, 2018). Social democratic and liberal-conservative governments, with differing

views on teacher education, initiated alternating reforms. However, the two teachers' unions were also active actors for and against various reforms, especially in connection with the reforms of 1968, 1988, and 2011. These will be discussed in more detail here.

The reforms of 1968 and 1988

The comprehensive school reform in 1962 had brought the two categories of teachers together into the new school organisation, creating an interface for growing conflict between the unions. However, the unions remained separate. The former grammar-school union (LR) represented upper-secondary school teachers as well as teachers of grades 7–9 in comprehensive school, while the former folk-school union (LF) represented teachers of grades 1–9. When comprehensive schooling replaced the old parallel system of grammar and folk schools, many politicians and educationists wanted to abolish the dual teacher education system as well. The idea was to create a modern form of teacher education that bridged the gap between the two teacher categories and brought them closer together.

In 1968, after a lengthy reform process, a new system of teacher education was established, based exclusively on teacher training colleges. This reform soon caused conflict between the teachers' unions. The main reason was the strict division between teacher categories. Those studying to be teachers for grades 1–3 and 4–6 received their education, including in subject studies, at the teacher training colleges. As before, student subject-teachers took a bachelor's degree in their subject at university, and only completed the final year of training, with didactical studies and classroom practice, at a teacher training college. The LF openly opposed this division from the outset, and expressed this opposition in its response to the official report that proposed the 1968 reform (SOU, 1965:29). Representing former folk-school teachers and class teachers in primary school, the LF did not want to establish the proposed sharp division between grades 6 and 7, arguing that this would counteract the basic intentions of the official report: to unify class and subject teachers through a partly shared education (LF, 1965).

The response from the LR, on the other hand, was positive. With its roots in the grammar teacher tradition, the LR wanted teacher education for grades 7–9 to be reserved solely for its members, the subject teachers, while the class teachers should have their own education for grades 1–3 and 4–6 (Carle, 2000; LR, 1965).

Thus the LF, representing mainly class teachers, was disappointed by the 1968 reform, and especially the line it drew between the education of class teachers and subject teachers. The union started to work towards a total renewal of teacher education in 1970 (Lunde, 1993, pp. 220–222). In January 1972, it proposed to the Social Democrat education minister that a committee should be appointed to review teacher education. The aim was to educate teachers with broad competencies, able to handle pupils of different ages, and cross the border between grades 6 and 7. Furthermore, it proposed that the teachers for grades 7–9 should become generalists, able to teach more subjects than at present (LF, 1972). The LR reacted the following month by advising the minister that there was no need for a new committee since teacher education had been recently reformed.

When, in early 1974, it became clear that a new committee was inevitable, the LR corresponded with and met the ministry to influence its guidelines and future work (Carle, 2000, pp. 220–222; LR, 1972–1974). In 1974, the education minister, Lena Hjelm-Wallén, appointed the Committee of Teacher Education (*Lärarutbildningsutredningen*, LUT), in which both teachers' unions were represented, and gave it instructions in line with the wishes of the LF (Lunde, 1993; SOU, 1978:86, pp. 471–479). In 1978, LUT's official report (SOU, 1978:86) proposed a radical renewal of teacher education. The basic idea was to abolish the different education programmes for grades 1–3, 4–6, and 7–9. Instead, there would be a 'comprehensive school teacher' for grades 1–9, albeit with some subject and age group specialisations. Again, the two unions expressed very different views in their responses to the 1978 report.

The LF, which mainly represented class teachers, was pleased with the LUT committee report, finding it to be in line with its own long-held views. It saw the comprehensive school as one homogenous school form that consequently should have only one category of teachers. The union had long argued for this single category of teachers, reasoning that all teachers in comprehensive school, regardless of the age of their pupils, basically had the same assignment. Under this reasoning, the boundary between different categories of teachers should not be placed between grades 6 and 7, but between grade 9 and upper-secondary school. In teacher education, the LF also emphasised preparation for pedagogical and social work, rather than subject knowledge (LF, 1979; Lunde, 1993, pp. 224–226).

The LR did not support this new suggested form of teacher education. It opposed the amalgamation of different categories of teachers, arguing that different skills and types of knowledge were needed to teach children of different ages. Instead, it proposed a model with two overlapping types of comprehensive school teachers: one for grades 1–6 and one for 4–9. The LR also wanted to preserve the link between the final grades of comprehensive school and the start of upper-secondary school. With its background in the grammar-school tradition, the LR claimed that the proposal would not give student teachers aiming to teach grades 7–9 sufficient subject knowledge, while those aiming to teach grades 1–6 were supposed to teach too many subjects. Instead, the union recommended a higher degree of subject specialisation (Carle, 2000, pp. 223–227; LR, 1979).

Due to the public debate about teacher education, and a change of government from the Social Democrats to a centre-right coalition in 1976–1982, it was 10 years before a new form of teacher education could be implemented (Schyllerkvist, 1993, pp. 31–33). Finally introduced in 1988, with the Social Democrats once more in government, the new teacher education retained some basic ideas from the LUT report of 1978. Hjelm-Wallén, who returned as education minister, had been influenced by public criticism, and adjustments and compromises were made (Swedish Government Bill (1984/85:122). Most importantly, the proposed single teacher category for grades 1–9 was replaced by two categories, for grades 1–7 and 4–9, more or less as the LR had proposed (Carle, 2000, p. 227).

Conflicts between the two unions did not disappear but were less pronounced when teacher education was totally reformed once more in 2001 by the Social

Democrats, as this reform did not entail a strict division, with completely different educations for different groups of student teachers.

The 2011 reform

When centre-right parties regained office in 2006, they initiated what in 2011 became yet another teacher education programme. The reform of 2011 was initiated by an official report from 2008. Compared to the reports preceding the reforms of 2001 and 1988, this downplayed the social responsibilities of teachers and schools, and ideas about a new role for teachers with alternative teaching methods. Instead, it emphasised subject knowledge and didactics. The ideal of a generalist teacher, who could follow students through large portions of comprehensive schooling, was abandoned. Instead, separate degrees for class teachers (grades 1–3 and 4–6) and subject teachers (grades 7–9 and upper-secondary school) returned. The report clearly stated that teaching pupils of different ages demanded different skills and knowledge sets, and were therefore different teacher specialisations (SOU, 2008:109).

A teachers' union dispute, almost as sharp as the conflicts in the 1970s and 1980s, followed. Again, age group specialisation caused the greatest conflict (Lilja, 2014). The LF (2009) response strongly opposed dividing student teachers into different degrees and specialisations. It saw teaching as one profession, regardless of the age of the pupils and argued for a single degree for all students in teacher education, with some specialisation. A division into several different degrees would counteract the development of the knowledge base and professionalisation of the teachers. Regarding subject knowledge, the LF pointed out that it must be more adapted to school practice.

Conversely, the LR, the union for subject teachers, was enthusiastic. It (2009) appreciated the reintroduction of a separation of class and subject teachers through different degrees, with different categories of teachers receiving more specialised education focused on the skills required to teach different age groups. As before, the LR advocated for traditional academic views that emphasised subject knowledge. The new form of teacher education commenced in 2011, with a design that followed the proposals from the official report.

By 2020, although the two unions still held differing opinions on teacher education, neither wanted an entirely new teacher education programme (LF, 2018). However, developments after the 2018 election highlighted the political desire for change in teacher education, and the Social Democrats, Green Party and both liberal parties agreed on the need for reform.

At the time of writing in the autumn of 2020, the official report and proposals have not been published, so how the unions react remains to be seen. It is clear that the two unions' actions and different views have contributed to repeated reforms of Swedish teacher education. Their conflicts have also revealed ideological differences, showing the strong tensions within the teaching culture concerning the importance of subject knowledge and, ultimately, the role of teachers. Such conflicts were handled differently in Finland, where teachers from different teacher cultures formulated common policies within a single union.

Finland: a single union arguing for flexibility

The 1970s and 1980s: formulating a common policy

After the 1962 Finnish parliamentary decision to initiate comprehensive school reform, a struggle between folk- and grammar-school teachers over the control of lower-secondary schools ensued (Jumppanen, 1993). At this point, therefore, the Finnish political frontlines on education were similar to those in Sweden. However, in the early 1970s, several factors made Finnish teachers' unions willing to cooperate and merge. Experiments with radical school democracy created the fear that the radical student organisation *Teiniliitto* would dominate the schools if teachers remained divided (Kangasniemi, Hyttinen and Tanni, 2012, p. 44). Most importantly, changes in regulations made it impossible for unions under a certain size to negotiate wages, which encouraged the creation of larger unions (Hollstén, 2005, p. 33).

In order to function efficiently, the newly formed Finnish teachers' union, the OAJ, had to formulate a policy that resolved the ideological differences between different categories of teachers, as well as the potential conflict over grades 7–9. In a vision document, the OAJ (1975) emphasised that education should provide broad competencies. In order to secure employment for teachers, it was important that regulations allowed for flexible use of teachers, and it argued that in-service training should support that objective.

In Sweden, the LR and the LF, representing subject and class teachers, respectively, had fought a long-running battle for access to teaching positions in lower-secondary school. Since the OAJ represented both class and subject teachers, this did not happen in Finland. Instead, the OAJ (1975) wanted to connect preschool classes taught by class teachers to primary school, while moving grade 6 to lower-secondary school. This would have improved the employment situation for the OAJ's members at the expense of preschool teachers who were then represented by another union. The proposal was never implemented, but illustrates how resolving tensions between class and subject teachers could inspire new policy directions.

The OAJ (1975) also stressed the importance of monitoring teacher demand and regulating admission to teacher education programmes. Curtailed admission would shield the OAJ's members against competition from newly educated teachers. Until 1983, the OAJ yearbook stressed the importance of limiting the annual intake of student teachers. This position gradually softened until 1987, when rising numbers of unqualified class teachers led the OAJ to suggest increasing the admission of student teachers (OAJ, 1981–1987).

Finnish teacher education became university-based in 1974, and was elevated to a master's degree in 1979 (Vuorenpää, 2003, p. 106f, 121). Initially, the OAJ maintained that all teachers should have educations of similar length. However, upper-secondary school teachers demanded a half-year longer duration, and the OAJ reconsidered its position in 1977 (OAJ, 1976–1978, pp. 18, 19).

1989: the Commission for Development of Teacher Education

The report of the Commission for Development of Teacher Education (*Opettajankoulutuksen kehittämistoimikunta*, 1989:26, p. 75f), released in 1989, aimed at

renewing teacher education by bringing the education of class and subject teachers closer together, and increasing flexibility by allowing teachers to change teaching assignments after a short in-service training. The OAJ expressed a hope that the commission's suggestions would give teachers broader competency to teach at different stages, but stressed that the structure of the programme should not change and that its high academic level should be upheld (OAJ, 1989, p. 49; OAJ, 1988–1989, pp. 2–3). The commission aimed at making all teacher education four years long, but the OAJ reiterated its position that the length should be four to four-and-a-half years (OAJ, 1988–1989, p. 7). However, the economic crisis of the early 1990s interfered, and the reform did not take place (Vuorenää, 2003, p. 172).

The 1990s: defending the profession against unwanted reforms

The recession in the early 1990s led to a review of public administration and regulation in Finland, in line with international trends of deregulation and decentralisation. The OAJ entered the crisis from a position of strength, as by now it organised virtually all Finnish educators, from primary-school teachers to university professors. A Ministry of Education working group report released in September 1991 attempted to unify, standardise, and harmonise regulations on the education of different kinds of teachers. The Committee of Teacher Eligibility tried to do the same for regulations on legally mandated teacher competency in different kinds of schools (Opettajien kelpoisuustoimikunta, 1991:31, p. 1; Vuorenää, 2003, pp. 173–176).

In 1992, the Ministry of Education tried to reduce its expenditures by integrating its system of normal schools for teacher education into the municipal school system. Supported by the OAJ, the headteachers of normal schools initiated an intensive media campaign to oppose this. They approached politicians and even published a book that was given to all members of parliament (Vuorenää, 2003, pp. 179–183).

In October 1992, the Ministry of Education assigned two working groups, one investigating how to end the status of normal schools as state schools, and the other on how universities could provide practical teacher training if normal schools were discontinued (Vuorenää, 2003, pp. 184–187). In 1979, a working group within the OECD, an important initiator of New Public Management (NPM) reforms, had recommended that, in order to achieve change, it was necessary to focus on *how* change was to be achieved, not *if* there should be change in the first place (Yliaska, 2014, p. 105). The Finnish actors defending the normal schools countered this tactic effectively and reinstated 'if' into the question (Opetusministeriö, 1993b, p. 20; Vuorenää, 2003, p. 187). They were eventually successful as the schools remained part of university organisation.

The crisis in the early 1990s incited debate on cutbacks in Finland's ambitious and expensive teacher education programme. Its long duration was criticised, both by politicians and within academia, since it was argued that a shorter course could achieve equal results. One idea was to make it part of the vocationally oriented Universities of Applied Sciences established around that time (Vuorenää, 2003, p. 187). As the bachelor's degree was reintroduced in Finnish universities, it was suggested that this could be sufficient for class teachers.

The NPM trend in the 1990s steered away from management through regulations towards management by objectives. In the Finnish university sector, including in teacher education, evaluations became commonplace from the early 1990s. For example, a project for evaluation and follow-up of the exams in the pedagogical sector produced a preliminary report in 1993 and a final report in 1994 (Opetusministeriö, 1993a; Opetusministeriö, 1994). This led to the Finnish parliament passing an act on exams and teacher education in April 1995. However, the Board of Education and the Association of Finnish Municipalities considered it problematic that this act did not recognise holders of the new bachelor's degree in pedagogy as qualified to work as teachers. The Research Centre for Educational Sociology in Turku proposed lowering the standards for class teachers to a bachelor's degree, and for preschool teachers, to a certification from the Universities of Applied Sciences. A strong countermovement in the educational field, with the OAJ as a leading force, stressed the importance of teachers as education experts who needed a full academic education (Vuorenpää, 2003, p. 199f; Sääntti, Puustinen and Salminen, 2018, pp. 11–13).

In its plans for 1993, the OAJ declared that it would safeguard the high academic level of teacher education, and indeed, work to elevate it further. The education of preschool teachers should be elevated to the university level, it argued, and training schools should remain in the university organisation and not be moved to the municipalities (OAJ, 1993). In spite of the challenges it faced, all of the OAJ's objectives were achieved.

In 1995, the bachelor's degree in pedagogy was reintroduced, and the exam for preschool teachers who, from the autumn of 1995, would be trained at universities, was also placed at that level. However, class teachers would still need a master's degree in pedagogy, and subject teachers, a master's degree in their main subject (Finlands författningssamling 576/1995). No major structural changes of teacher programmes were made, but it became easier for teachers to change educational tracks and jump between teaching in different types of schools and even in adult education. In this respect, the change was in accordance with the aims the OAJ had expressed since the 1970s.

The trend towards evaluations continued when the Council of Higher Education was replaced by the Council for Evaluation of Higher Education in 1996 (Jussila and Saari, 1999). Its recommendations for teacher education, i.e., increased flexibility, was in line with OAJ policies.

The 2000s

In a leaflet on teacher education, the OAJ (2000a) argued that the central factor behind Finland's success in the tech industry was its high level of education, which was guaranteed by competent and well-educated teachers. In making this argument, the OAJ aimed for all teachers to have a higher university degree, the competency requirements for employment as a teacher to at least be maintained, to strengthen the attractiveness of the teaching profession by raising its status and salary, and for teachers to be guaranteed in-service training and professional guidance.

In a 2001 response to a development plan for teacher education from the Ministry of Education, the OAJ claimed that it would be difficult to find a place in teacher education to prepare teachers to teach different age groups. Instead, they supported the idea that teachers should receive in-service training for specific needs in the schools in which they applied to work (OAJ, 2000b).

The OAJ complained that the teaching profession was not as highly valued as before, among other things because of the wage development. In addition, teacher education did not get the respect it deserved within the universities (OAJ, 2000–2002b). However, it can also be argued that, by then, Finnish teacher education and the teaching profession had entered an era of renewed appreciation, fuelled by success in international evaluations such as PISA. During the first decades of the 2000s, Finnish teacher education did not face any challenges similar to those experienced in the 1990s. This also meant that teacher education became less central to the OAJ's work. The OAJ's publications no longer suggested changes to teacher education, and merely provided information about the existing system (i.e., OAJ, 2010).

Conclusions

In Sweden and Finland, school systems were divided into parallel folk and grammar schools until the introduction of the comprehensive school. The teachers at these institutions had separate teachers' unions and separate forms of teacher education. Different teacher cultures emerged within these two unions, with divergent views on teacher education: the so-called 'seminary tradition' and the 'grammar-school tradition'. When the parallel systems were amalgamated through the comprehensive school reform, reforms to unify teacher education were carried out in both Sweden and Finland. In Finland, the unions representing folk- and grammar-school teachers were united into one. However, in Sweden, two separate unions have survived until this day and have engaged in a long-running battle about the design of teacher education. This struggle has divided not only the two unions but also the political field.

The LR, which emerged from grammar schools, advocated for academic ideals such as the importance of subject knowledge, while the LF emphasised the vocational, pedagogical and social parts of teacher education, reflecting its background in the folk-school tradition. In the lower grades, where most of its members taught, subject knowledge was less important compared to pedagogical and social issues than in secondary and upper secondary school. Thus, in Sweden, the historical differences between the two traditions constitute a living conflict in teacher culture today.

Besides their pedagogical and ideological differences, the two unions were also involved in a power struggle. The main battlefield for conflict was lower-secondary school, grades 7–9, which catered to students at the point where the two tracks of the parallel school systems had overlapped. The LR wanted to push the border between the different teacher categories down, to between grades 6 and 7, while the LF wanted to raise it up, to between grade 9 and the start of upper-secondary school. Both unions strived to extend their education ideology over as large a part of the education system as possible to ensure employment for their members and a future influx of new members to their respective unions.

Wiborg (2017) argues that the influence of Scandinavian teachers' unions and their progressive ideology on education policy declined from the 1990s onwards, both as a consequence of strengthened centre-right parties and a rightward shift within social democracy. However, she only focuses on the larger unions for subject teachers. In the Swedish case, opposing values, rooted in the academic teacher culture of the LR, have to be taken into account. A political loss for one teachers' union might be a win for the other, and was not necessarily a sign of a general decline in union influence.

In Finland, the OAJ came to represent both class teachers for younger children and subject teachers for older children. Therefore, the OAJ could not achieve net improvement in opportunities for its members simply by pushing the dividing line between teacher categories up or down. Instead, the OAJ argued for flexibility, making it easy for teachers with various educational backgrounds to find employment in different parts of the education system. It argued vigorously for in-service training to enable teachers to acquire the skills necessary for their particular place of work.

The fact that Finland had only one teachers' union might have facilitated a view of subject knowledge and general pedagogical skills as complementary rather than conflicting. The united teachers' union contributed to the comparatively stable development of the Finnish system of education, and of teacher education in particular. In Sweden, by contrast, conflicts between pedagogy and subject knowledge became institutionalised, since each perspective was backed by a union, and contributed to frequent reform of teacher education.

Thus, our study reveals that teachers' unions are crucial for the development of teacher education, a factor that has been overlooked in earlier research, which has focused mainly on political actors. When analysing the polarising political conflicts over Swedish education policies since the 1970s, it is important to take into consideration that each of the country's two political blocs found an ally among the teachers' unions: the LF has generally backed the Social Democrats, while the LR has favoured the policies of the centre-right. This has contributed to the fast-turning wheel of reforms, with teacher education reconstructed with every change of government.

Moe (2017) has argued that strong teachers' unions undermine performance since they can effectively obstruct political reforms, and that the Finnish exception probably is a function of the high quality of its teachers. However, a comparison between Sweden and Finland suggests that rapid reforms, with frequent shifts in pedagogical principles, might also erode the quality of education, and that a strong teachers' union can shield the school system from such disturbances. It is likely that in Finland, the OAJ has facilitated the recruitment of high-quality teachers by creating an attractive, undisturbed work environment, and by successfully defending master's level teacher education.

Note

- 1 Throughout the chapter, we use LF for *Läraförbundet* (established in 1991) and for its predecessor, *Svenska läraförbundet*. LR is used for *Lärarnas Riksförbund*.

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