

## Article

# Countering Discourses of Derision: Moving towards Action in Teacher Education in the USA and Sweden

Katarina Blennow <sup>1,\*</sup>, Martin Malmström <sup>2</sup>  and Elizabeth Petroelje Stolle <sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of Educational Sciences, Lund University, 22100 Lund, Sweden<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education and Society, Malmö University, 21119 Malmö, Sweden; martin.malmstrom@mau.se<sup>3</sup> Faculty of Literacy Studies, Grand Valley State University, Grand Rapids, MI 49054, USA; stollee@gvsu.edu

\* Correspondence: katarina.blennow@uvet.lu.se

**Abstract:** This article is about how negative discourses of teacher education position teacher educators and how they might influence or inspire action. We use self-study methods to investigate the political dimension of teacher education in two national contexts: Sweden and the USA. More specifically, we examine the emotions stirred by the positioning related to being a teacher educator and how those emotions can be used to take a line to and resist boundaries that limit us within the profession in the two contexts. We aim to contribute to the self-study field by emphasizing a political dimension, in addition to the personal and professional dimensions of teacher education more often studied by scholars. Using the concepts of positionality, emotions, liminality, and action, we conclude that the liminal spaces offered us time to think about the emotions we have experienced due to the derisive discourses that position us in negative ways as teacher educators, and with that thinking came opportunities to reflect on our identity as teacher educators and what we look to accomplish as teacher educators. A new understanding of liminality as a space of possibility has boosted us to take action. An important conclusion is that emotional labor can be a hindrance in relation to teacher educator action, while emotions can act as clues for opportunities of growth and action. Telling our stories opened space for us to use our emotions to take a line to and resist the derogatory discourse, engage in the political, and move closer to becoming teacher educator activists.

**Keywords:** teacher educator; liminality; activism; identity; positioning; emotions; self-study

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## 1. Introduction

We are living in a time of turbulence, where the future is uncertain, and a lot is at stake. Some of the things many people have taken for granted, such as equality and human rights, are under pressure [1]. These constant shifts in the political landscape impact teacher education in important ways. Evidence suggests that teacher education “matters most” in educational reform [2]. Yet, teacher education is “under constant critique” [3], is framed as irrelevant [4], and has “a long history of status deprivation” [5]. A constant complaint about teacher education is that preservice teachers are not ready for the classroom when they graduate, not least due to the gap between theory and practice in “education” courses [6]. Intensified critique has made policymakers and educational bureaucrats demand a technical-rational approach of teacher education and measurable outcomes of the students’ classroom readiness [7]. That is, the right wing, populist discourses of education frame education in a nostalgic light, where discipline, control, and basic knowledge are highlighted. Teacher education is supposed to contribute to this direction [8,9]. Since the situation might lead to major changes in education and teaching, for some teacher educators, the situation is an emotional rollercoaster. This is the case for the three authors of this article. The political turmoil and contingency in our countries, the USA and Sweden, have made us feel the need to reflect upon what this might mean for teacher educators in our profession. Fully aware that our thoughts and ideologies do not apply to all teacher educators, for us the *Zeitgeist* is the springboard for this self-study.

This self-study brings to the forefront the political dimension of teacher education, as we understand that particular political groups have specific ideas and/or strategies for teacher education, which are then taken up and enacted by the individuals we come in contact with daily. Zeichner and Pena-Sandoval [10] categorized the stances and approaches individuals take up towards teacher education in the following ways: defenders, reformers, and transformers. Defenders maintain that there are no major weaknesses with the current system of teacher education. Thus, they call for investment in the current structures and practices of teacher preparation. Reformers, on the other hand, seek to disrupt and replace teacher education programs in favor of alternative, market-based reforms. Finally, transformers recognize weaknesses in the current system and work to address them but remain steadfast in advocating for the public nature of teacher education. We align ourselves with the transformers. Situated in higher education, we value the public nature of teacher education, yet we also see the social injustices within the system. Thus, we embrace thoughtfully reflecting on the critique and constructively pushing forward.

Historically, most teacher educators have remained silent in the political debate, possibly “as an act of self-preservation” [11]. Naturally, we cannot solve the low status of teacher education, but we can “choose to question and highlight” it [12]. We can seek transformation. In this, we align ourselves with Berry and Forgasz [13], quoting Cole and Knowles [14], who claimed that self-study researchers should go public and be political. Thus, in this self-study, we seek to bring the political dimension into our reasoning about teacher educators’ emotions, an aspect we found lacking in research on teacher educator identity (see, e.g., Izadina [15]). The political dimension of teacher education, to us, is not only about policy formation and the socialization of teachers [16], but also about action in relation to the constant presence of political conflict, where the object of debate (teacher education) cannot be separated from emotions and identities [17]. The most common way of researching emotions in education is using cognitive perspectives, where emotions are personal, internal reactions and are categorized as either positive or negative, depending on whether they contribute to predetermined outcomes [18]. In this self-study, we intend to contribute to previous research [19–21] by approaching emotions as neither essentially positive or negative and attribute political importance to emotions that are usually considered negative, and therefore repressed, by teacher educators. This study, thus, contributes with new ways of seeing/using emotions that can apply to any teacher educator struggling with derisive discourses in a politicized educational landscape while also making a mark on the polarized societal situation.

Therefore, the aim of this article is to describe how the negative discourses of teacher education position teacher educators in specific ways, evoking strong emotions, and how these emotions might influence, or even inspire, action, while also highlighting the political dimension of being a teacher educator [22]. In the article, we use the concept ‘discourses of derision’ [23], defined as text, talk, and communications contributing to negative opinions, attitudes, and ideologies directed *at* or *about* teacher educators/education from both outside higher education and within. To reach our aim, we asked the following questions:

1. What emotions are stirred by the derisive discourses directed towards teacher educators/education?
2. How can these emotions be used to take action in reframing the positioning of teacher educators/education?

## 2. Context

In this section, we elaborate on the context of the study. To start, we give an overview of teacher education reform in the two national contexts, the USA and Sweden. This is followed by a description of the three participants in the self-study.

In popular discourses on teacher education in Sweden, the negative aspects are mainly emphasized, such as insufficient knowledge of teachers and students, the lack of cognitive science, the shortage of teachers in the country, and the lack of discipline in classrooms [8,9]. Interestingly, even though some of the aspects of these critiques are societal issues, teacher

education (most often in the singular) is targeted. A historically constant complaint is that preservice teachers are not ready for the classroom when they graduate, which is often attributed to the gap between theory and practice in 'education' courses [6]. The crisis rhetoric is often voiced by people outside the field of education, and teacher educators and education scholars are positioned as ideological and outdated about learning [24,25]. We assert that these negative discourses of teacher education are important to reflect upon for teacher educators. The bashing of education, education scholars, and teacher education is a universal affair, and closely related to the economy, politics, policy, and ideology. During the last few years, conservative ideas about schooling have received more media coverage. For example, the Elementary Act of 1962 has been considered almost sacred with its notions of equal schooling. Yet, a growing number of commentators believe the Act is responsible for the fall of the Swedish school system. Some conservative commentators call for a return to a time when there was a parallel system in Sweden. We connect this to a global, right-wing, populist turn, as evidenced in both Sweden and the USA, in recent years.

In the United States, public perceptions of teachers and teacher preparation programs, as manifested in major newspapers over the past 60 years, indicates a consistent belief that teachers and teacher preparation programs need significant reform, added accountability, and more corporate tools/processes [26]. In light of these perceptions, the policy environment around the preparation, certification, and licensing of educators has shifted dramatically in the past few decades [27,28]. Specifically, key national education policies (i.e., No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top), and their associated funding sources, changed the educational system from one of inputs to outcomes/standards of performance [29]. With that, most states now link what teachers know with student learning outcomes in regard to teacher preparation, licensing, and evaluation. The National Education Policy Center (NEPC) [30], a research center that sponsors research and constructs/publishes policy briefs and reviews, identified the following trends impacting teacher education, stemming from this shift: (1) marketizing teacher education, (2) shaming teacher education, (3–4) externally regulating teacher education at the federal level and/or state level, (5) internally regulating teacher education (i.e., accreditation agencies), (6) assessing teacher candidates (i.e., certification exams), and (7) prescribing practices. To counter this, the NEPC [30] and Zeichner [31] offered an alternate framework that calls on teacher-education programs to confront the reality that educational institutions have never been, and can never be, neutral politically or ideologically.

Having described the national contexts, we now turn to the participants in this self-study. We are three teacher educators from Sweden and the USA, who first met in Lund, Sweden in 2017 when Elizabeth was an associate professor on sabbatical. At the time, Katarina and Martin were doctoral students. We began collaborating around the emotional work of becoming teacher educators, but we quickly moved into the political realm of responding to the derogatory discourses around teacher education in both contexts, focusing on ways of acting to reframe the discourses.

Katarina is in her second year as an associate senior lecturer at the large university in southern Sweden where she completed her doctoral program. She started her career in education as a secondary Social Studies and German teacher, but it was the idea of immersing herself in some aspects of teaching that turned her towards teacher education. Martin is also in his second year as a senior lecturer at another large university in southern Sweden after completing a post-doctorate. As a former secondary Swedish and English teacher, Martin entered the field of teacher education not only to escape the negative consequences of the global reform movement, which has influenced education in Sweden, but also to engage in research, which had become a passion. One of the research interests of Martin is crisis rhetoric about education. In Sweden, media reports on teacher education emphasize the negative aspects such as insufficient knowledge of teachers and students, lack of cognitive science, and the absence of discipline in classrooms [8,9].

Elizabeth is now a full professor at her home institution in the midwestern part of the USA. She started her teaching career as a middle level English Language Arts

teacher and entered the field of teacher education because of her belief in growing teacher knowledge and pedagogy. In the USA, similar to Sweden, critique of teacher education is ever-present, with numerous individuals, groups, and institutions seeking to frame university-based teacher education as a “failing enterprise” [32]. In response to some of this critique, the state in which Elizabeth lives recently changed teacher certification policies and published new professional and content standards, thus requiring all teacher preparation programs in her state to revise their curriculum/programs. Thus, Elizabeth has been intimately involved in the revision of her institution’s teacher preparation programs and the construction/reconstruction of coursework.

### 3. Theoretical and Conceptual Frame

This study is informed by concepts of positionality, emotions, liminality, and action. As teacher educators, societal beliefs about teaching and teacher education influence how we are positioned and how we position ourselves, thus impacting the stories we tell about ourselves [33]. Positioning theory is relational, and positions are socially situated as “people use words (and discourse of all types) to locate themselves and others” [34]. The normative frames, or larger storylines about teacher education, position teacher educators, affecting the “repertoire of acts” we have access to [35] and the emotions we experience and manage [36]. With that, we sought to explore how positioning triggers emotions, which act as clues for the ways we should act as teacher educators towards both our students (preservice teachers) and those in the public arena.

We agree with Hochschild [36] in that every emotion has a signal function, as it often locates the position of the viewer and uncovers the inner perspective. The actual emotions we experience, and the appraisal process of evaluating these emotions, cannot be “separated from the relational, social, cultural and political contexts in which they occur” [37]. Thus, we understand that the socio-political climate impacts positionality, and, in turn, the emotions we experience. But additionally, it impacts our emotional labor, which we may feel obligated to enact as we “manage feelings” through either surface acting, changing one’s appearance in order not to show a feeling, or deep acting, suppressing an unsuitable emotion or working to induce a suitable emotion [36].

To understand how both positionality and emotions impact our work as teacher educators, we looked to liminality as an important concept that highlights the complexity of identity formation and where we seek to position ourselves. Liminality, derived from the Latin term *limen*, means threshold. Van Gennep [38] described thresholds as phases individuals go through in rites of passages, the act of becoming. Our original study [39] sought to understand liminality in relationship to our teacher educator identities, and we conceptualized the liminal process as something we sought to move through—accepting a metaphorical “death” as we left the K-12 classroom behind, and then passing through the threshold marking the boundary between being a classroom teacher and becoming a teacher educator into the post liminal stage with a new identity.

However, we have now come to a more elaborate and nuanced understanding of liminality. Drawing on Craft’s [40] work of “possibility thinking”, liminality can be viewed as a freeing space where “nothing is fixed, and anything is possible” [41]. Our old notions of liminality saw liminal individuals, people in the transition phase, as somewhat stuck—“neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” [42]. But now we also see the liminal space as a positive, freeing place that allows for immersion and incubation—a space to think, reflect, discover, and learn as one sets on a trajectory of transformation [43]. For us, as teacher educators navigating societal positions, managing emotions, and seeking ways to resist, we feel this liminal space in tangible ways that impact the stories we tell about ourselves as teacher educators seeking to cross a new liminal threshold of becoming teacher educator activists. We initially sought to move through liminality, reaching the ‘other side’ quickly, but now we find freedom and excitement in residing in the liminal space, albeit emotional and somewhat exhausting.

Based on the positioning, intense emotions, and new liminal space, we feel compelled to take action. Thus, we drew upon Arendt's [44] conceptualization of action, which offers three distinct ways humans can do something in the world: labor, work, and action. Labor is natural and centers around consumption to survive. It is repetitive; we need to labor day in and day out to live. Work is artificial; we use craft and skills to build things that do not exist in nature (e.g., build a house, write a book). Action is what people do when they tell the story of their lives, and it involves acting, communicating, and expressing ourselves, yet cannot be done in isolation from others. Therefore, politics is closer to fiction; it tells our political story and authorizes our own lives. With that, Arendt expresses concern that action is being reduced to work, or mechanical behavior; humans are becoming cogs in a machine. Instead, politics, according to Arendt, should be about creative human interchange through storytelling and language. Thus, in this study, we unpack how we take action, authoring our own stories, by embracing liminality, which offers us space to try on identities of advocacy, envision ways of countering the derogatory discourses, and explore acts of resistance, all in the hope of becoming teacher educator activists.

#### 4. Methodology

To answer our research questions, we used self-study methods [45], drawing on autoethnographic approaches as a way of exploring the personal while creating opportunities to consider our experiences in a broader social and cultural context [46,47].

In self-study, teacher educator researchers investigate their own practice with the aim of creating change and improvement. Thus, we voluntarily served as both research participants and principal investigators, noting that these dual roles presented no identifiable conflicts of interest for us. Still, to counter challenges within self-study such as the difficulty of engaging in self-critique and moving beyond the personal to offer new thinking to the field [48], we embraced that self-study research is interactive in relation to colleagues, students, and the literature, as well as to previous practice [49,50]. Self-study research also uses a combination of qualitative methods, such as memory work, personal history self-study, critical friendship [51], and critical incident analysis [52].

Critical incident analysis has been of particular importance in this study. A critical incident is an event or incident that includes some kind of unexpected or unintended disturbance, response, or interaction. The incident has no ready-made answer or resolution [52]. Instead, the critical incident is how the event is interpreted [53]. Tripp [53] identified two critical stages in analyzing critical incidents. The first stage consists of trying to identify what happened and why. In the second stage, a wider perspective is taken, in which the context is taken into account.

Data sources included: (1) written documents consisting of narratives; (2) Google folders in which thoughts, ideas, questions, comments, and notes about the narratives were collected; and (3) detailed notes from our virtual meetings. First, we individually wrote narratives about emotional situations connected to being teacher educators. Then, we gave each other feedback in the Google folders before we met online to discuss and reflect on the feedback. We emphasized specific passages that would be interesting to elaborate on in developed or new narratives. This way of triangulating data sources helped us reflect deeper and develop a more comprehensive understanding of teacher educator emotions stirred by derisive discourse [54].

The narratives were a way of "bending back on the self to look more deeply at self-other interactions" [55], as we employed additional research strategies like notetaking and memory work that situated us as researchers within the cultural context [56]. Ultimately, we collectively wrote 25 narratives that included both free writes (i.e., no pre-established theme) and those centered around a particular idea emerging in the data (e.g., identity, loss, vulnerability, action). Within these narratives, we identified 15 critical incidents [57], or times that we individually reflected upon an occurrence that positioned teacher education in a way that evoked a strong emotional response. In each incident, we employed memory work to develop the incident further, noting who voiced the discourse, what were the

cultural/societal/national circumstances around the discourse, how the discourse positioned us; and how we felt. Based on ethical considerations, we sought to write in general, non-identifying ways, to protect the anonymity of the characters beyond ourselves within the critical incidents.

In critical incident analysis, it is imperative to take the context into consideration, both the context of the situation, and the context of culture [58]. Although we recognize critical incidents can make both positive and negative contributions to an activity or phenomenon, for the purposes of this paper, we only explored those that were negative and associated with derisive discourses. In this way, we consider the cultural context, i.e., the second stage in critical incident analysis [53]. We also used these narratives to see how the transnational perspective sharpened our view of our own experiences, recognizing the importance of culture within an autoethnographic frame. Thus, our understanding of “culture” included language, action, and/or interaction, which also inferred a political stance [59]. The critical incidents offered windows into preconceived ideas about our national education systems, especially when considering recent years marked by the COVID pandemic, the Black Lives Matter movement, and contentious elections in both Sweden and the United States.

Acting as critical friends, we engaged in data analysis, which included: (a) both open coding and direct content analysis [60]; (b) “real-time” dialogue [61]; and (c) “writing as a way of ‘knowing’” [62]. In this, we served as critical friends—trying out ideas on each other, asking challenging questions, and facilitating reflection on events/experiences [63]. We created a critical partnership as close friends, insiders to the phenomenon of experiencing deep emotions around derisive discourses on teacher education, seeking a reciprocal relationship where we encouraged each other to dig in, feel, and explore emotions with hopes of coming out with new ways to be and act [64].

In our analysis, first, we shared our narratives and written documents with each other in an online collaborative space (i.e., Google folders). Using the comment feature, which served as a tool for asynchronous discussion and note-taking, we formulated thoughts, questions, and connections around the 15 critical incidents identified in the data. Then, we individually coded our documents as we reread the data, looking for recurring themes across the critical incidents. For example, identity emerged as a common theme in our critical incidents. So, as critical friends, we asked each other hard questions about why derisive discourses that spoke to our identity highlighted specific emotions like loss or anger.

We also employed direct content analysis where we used predetermined codes drawn from our conceptual frame (e.g., positionality, emotions, and liminality). In the coding process, we were able to see the complexity of each critical incident, the cultural influences on our emotions, as well as various political stances. And, when any of these elements were lacking, as critical friends, we encouraged each other to return to our narratives to revise and expand, fully enacting the autoethnographic approach of discovering the self in relation to the cultural context. For example, during the coding we identified that Katarina and Martin wrote critical incidents about student evaluations linked to the emotion of anxiety; however, Elizabeth did not. In dialogue, we credited this difference to Elizabeth’s experience in the academy. However, when engaged in memory work, Elizabeth was able to recall vivid memories from earlier in her career in which student evaluations created anxiety, and thus wrote about one of these memories to add to the data set.

Simultaneously, we met virtually two times a month for 6 months to share our codes, emerging themes, and persisting questions around the data in real-time. During these meetings, we took detailed notes of our analytic discussions, in which we explored the ways by which we experienced critical incidents over the past few years in similar, yet distinct and unique ways. To attend to our actions, or ‘line by which we took’, we also analyzed our responses to the emotions. Combining these various methods allowed us to systematically analyze our data [65]. Ultimately, our analysis revealed that we each felt similar emotions in our individually experienced critical incidents, as visible in all data sources. Thus, we decided to organize our findings around these emotions, highlighting an exemplar critical

incident that clearly presented the derisive discourses, the emotional response, and the action attached. We do note, our data analysis revealed the complexity of feelings and how emotions are often intermingled and overlapping. However, for the purposes of this paper, we attempted to narrow down each critical incident to one dominating emotion.

## 5. Findings and Interpretations

Here, we share exemplary critical incidents to highlight the vivid emotions all three researchers experienced when stirred by the positioning of teacher education through derisive discourses. However, our selections are not based on perceptions of “we were right and this discourse is wrong”, but rather reflect that the negative discourses did something to us as teacher educators, and we had a strong emotional response to the incident. With that, we note how action was taken, thus linking our two research questions centered on emotions and taking a line to and resisting the positioning from the discourses of derision. Our emotions acted as clues regarding where we stood in relation to outer and inner events [35]. In that, we entered a liminal space; and while unsettling, through analysis of our critical incidents and emotions, we altered our perceptions of the liminal space from an unpleasant place of feeling we quasi “died”, having lost ourselves, into a “realm of pure possibility whence novel configurations of ideas and relations may arise” [42]. The findings section is structured in line with the emotions that led to action.

### 5.1. Loss

Katarina shared an instance in which she started teaching a course where one of the teacher education students had just published an Op-Ed article criticizing Swedish teacher education programs. Curious, Katarina searched out the student and found her on Twitter actively engaged in a debate about teacher education with teachers, students, head teachers, union representatives, researchers, and teacher educators, building discourses about teacher education as loose, with low demands, somewhere you do not learn anything and where anyone can get accepted [9]. Katarina wrote reflectively about how this student’s positioning of her as a teacher educator was a negative voice, which overshadowed other voices in the class, and made her behave/act in ways that she felt were ‘far from me’, or unlike her.

*A couple of days later my colleague and I were introducing the course (we had taught it together three times). Afterwards, my colleague told me I gave a different impression during the introduction, compared with previous introductions. I wondered why, and we both spent time thinking about what had been different. We came to the conclusion that I had given a stricter impression than before, saying things like “we expect you to read the literature before the lectures” with an authoritative voice. I realized that this was because of the twitter-flow I had been reading a couple of days prior, which made me feel like I was losing myself a bit—had I been meeting the demands of this student unconsciously?*

This critical incident highlights the emotion of loss Katarina experienced when she inadvertently changed her teaching: “Was I influenced by a discourse I did not agree with, turned into a kind of teacher educator I did not want to be, with low expectations of the students, throwing suspicion on them?” That is, her response to the social media discussion was to act as if she expected the students to be loose and she needed to be tough on them. When her colleague made her aware that she appeared different than usual, she was immersed in loss and reflected on her own self-positioning, slowly regaining herself.

In reflection, Katarina recognized how taking action for her meant shutting out this negative voice and not allowing it to overshadow other voices in the class or influence her to behave/act in ways counter to her true self. In her narrative, Katarina identified ways to limit the influence of the derisive discourses on herself as a teacher educator by consciously seeing her students during each class with a positive presupposition. This action took the form of standing firmly in a positive appraisal of students, despite derisive discourses framing them as lazy and ignorant.

### 5.2. Anxiety

Katarina and Martin wrote about the same critical incident in which one single student's recurrent negative evaluations caused emotions of anxiety. The student had been severely critical towards teacher education in several evaluations, expanding on how little he had learned and how "crap" the program was, making personal accusations that on several occasions made instructors cry and want to stop teaching. Katarina described talking to her superior about the particular student.

*Her explanation was that the student, because of the academically bad reputation of teacher education and the societal discourses about teacher education, had to position himself outside of teacher education by slaying it at the roots. By doing that, he was not to be associated with it.*

The superior's words regulated the emotions of Katarina by explaining the student's behavior as stemming from societal discourses about the low standard of teacher education, such as the students not learning anything about the practice, and therefore his critique was not to be taken personally. However, Katarina and Martin identified how the student used the evaluation to position himself in relation to teacher education and recognized the emotions evoked as cues for engaging with, and taking action against, the larger political discourses.

Coupled with this particular incident, the data revealed that both Katarina and Martin felt anxious about reading evaluations, expecting to encounter discourses of derision. These feelings sometimes made them want to quit teacher education. Martin described feeling anxious about negative evaluations, even when they were not about a course he taught; the anxiety stemmed from his sense of being a part of teacher education as a whole. Since he sympathized with the teacher educators that were attacked, his teacher-educator-identity was hurt. Having one's teacher-educator identity questioned can create anxiety.

Katarina and Martin reflected in their narratives on creative ways to resist the derogatory discourses often present in course evaluations, and liminality offered space to construct possible solutions forward. One such idea included the implementation of ongoing discussions with students throughout a given semester, offering students opportunities to share frustrations as they arose in a more accountable space, and making small revisions along the way. Additionally, Martin has since opened space for students to share oral feedback at the end of his courses, in addition to the written student course evaluations. This act has made feedback more understandable, constructive, and less confrontational, and, thus, more formative.

### 5.3. Sadness

Martin wrote about a derisive encounter he had while reading a letter to the editor in one of the most important dailies in Sweden. The author of the article worked as a substitute teacher for three months. As an actor out of work during the pandemic, she sought to contribute to society by working in the schools. Her description of the schools was negative, and among other things, she recounted how she had a pistol aimed at her. Her conclusion was that teachers in Sweden have become slaves of easily offended pupils; she demanded rules, and consequences, implying needed changes in teacher education. Other media outlets covered this story, and the author was interviewed to give her "expert" opinion about schooling in Sweden. Martin wrote about emotions of sadness as he encountered this derisive discourse. However, he also wrote about a shift from sadness to hope.

*This would have been extremely depressing and grieving, adding on to the sadness I already felt, had there not been any replies opposing the narrative. At least two teachers, and a few others, gave a totally different picture of what it is to be a teacher. One of them explained how fed up she was with people who think that anyone can teach (the author/actor thought her rhetoric skills would suffice). To me, the teachers' replies were a breath of fresh air.*



Encounters with derogative discourses regarding teaching and schooling in the media lead us, as teacher educators, to feelings of sadness, as we see this as a direct critique of our work. However, this encounter moved beyond sadness to offer hope connected to teachers stepping into the conversation and a feeling of community with them.

In reflection, Martin realized that within the liminal space, he felt tension as he understood his sadness to be linked with feelings of guilt around his lack of engagement in debates such as this. However, the liminal space offered time to reflect on these emotions and tensions. He realized he received internal critique differently than external critique. Internal critique from within the field of teacher education was seen as important and valuable to reflect upon as we sought to be transformers. External critique from outside voices with limited knowledge of teacher education proved more complex for us. As representatives of teacher education, our immediate reaction, whether we liked it or not, was to become defenders in an act of self-preservation. In this particular incident, Martin came to understand that in this setting, action for him was actually inaction. If he acted by engaging in the debate, he would be seen as a defender of (teacher) education, instead of a transformer. Having done research on literacy “crises”, he came, rather, to see his role in these debates differently, positioning himself as an expert in the field and using the debates as empirical data from which to publish in scholarly texts, instead of taking part in the debates. In the liminal space, he reflected on the numerous invitations he has received to present his research, providing space for him to take action in other arenas to problematize the discourses. The initial sadness of the popular discourses of students and education was replaced by a sense of peace when Martin realized his entry point of action. Additionally, as he presented the issues, emotions, and actions with other teachers and teacher educators, he built a community that affirmed him.

#### 5.4. Anger

Elizabeth wrote about a critical incident involving a specific meeting where faculty from across her university were collaboratively revising the teacher preparation program based on new state-level requirements. Elizabeth explained the complicated relationship her teacher education faculty have with faculty of the liberal arts and sciences, as they work in and share the responsibilities of teaching within the teacher preparation program. In this meeting, Elizabeth took offense when liberal arts and sciences faculty referred to their own courses as content courses, as opposed to the education courses that her faculty teaches, “as though our courses didn’t contain content”. She remembered that “it seemed Education was being positioned with a lower status, or less value”. In turn, Elizabeth felt this same positioning as a teacher educator (as opposed to a “content expert”), which highlighted the cultural hierarchy of academia in which teacher education is often positioned below the “hard sciences” and other liberal arts disciplines. She described the emotional labor she had to perform as “off the charts” and “exhausting”. She needed to manage her feelings of anger just to keep up the conversation with the other faculty.

As Elizabeth processed her anger in the liminal space, she wrote about the ways she reacted by positioning herself as an advocate for teacher education to counter the negative narrative. To do this, she took on leadership roles within the curriculum committees, validating her work, and the work of her colleagues in teacher education, with teacher candidates. Thus, she invested in these service opportunities in the university to express her voice and act upon her beliefs for transformation of teacher education. In doing this, her anger turned to hope as she saw new understandings develop across departments and in a shared goal of improving the teacher preparation programs. In this, her actions of self-positioning opened doors of transformation as she was able to effectively collaborate with colleagues in the development of a newly revised program.

#### 5.5. Shame

Negative discourses are sometimes voiced by teachers as well. Katarina wrote about an incident when she and a colleague rented a cottage for a few days to do research.

*Our host told me he was an upper-secondary teacher. I replied something like, ‘wow that is good to hear, I work in teacher education’. I immediately felt a bond to him, connected by pride and joy. Those feelings quickly disappeared into shame though, because our host answered, ‘Ah, well, you know that old saying: Those who cannot teach become teacher educators’. He then said how bad the teacher education was, which he had attended. I felt shame and said, ‘well surely Ingrid and I are not that bad’. Both his ‘old saying’ and my reply could have been attempts at jokes, but neither of us smiled or laughed. I was not prepared to be positioned apart from him; I entered the conversation positioning us together, but he obviously wanted to position himself apart from teacher education/teacher educators.*

The teacher’s quote testifies to the low status of teacher educators in Swedish society, even amongst teachers. This low status is evident within academia as well. And Katarina’s response demonstrates the emotional labor she enacted to “blow it off” or pretend it did not hurt. The shame she suddenly felt in that moment was a sign that her social bond to teachers was hurt, or even cut off. Later, she also felt shame in that she did not counter the teacher’s view on teacher education. This later shame was not blown off but, rather, led to engagement in the liminal space of possibility where she could generate future responses, so as not to be caught “off guard” again.

Katarina’s initial response to the derogatory discourses was to separate herself, or move away from teacher education, joking that surely, she was not that bad. In this way, she severed her ties with teacher education, moving back into the liminal space to reconsider how she fit within teacher education based on her emotions of shame. Katarina found that the liminal space offered her time to think and opportunities to reconnect, coming back to her teacher educator identity. That is, she created and rehearsed responses to counter the derogatory discourses if future interactions like this occurred again. In this example, we see action taking on an alternate form, yet one that counters the negativity around teacher education.

### 5.6. Regret

Elizabeth wrote about a critical incident that occurred in the midst of the pandemic when she was thick in the work of creating workshops to assist teachers in moving their instruction online. However, many of the teachers were facing barriers of access and resources, along with mental health challenges. One night she was working with a particular teacher from an urban school where the teacher was sharing how her students did not have internet access based on a variety of factors. When Elizabeth finished the Zoom call, she was overwhelmed by a sense of regret. That is, she realized that 2020 offered her space to be genuine to the reasons she originally entered the field of education—social justice. However, she lamented how academic expectations and institutional traditions had limited her over the years to fully become this teacher educator. She recounted the derogatory discourses she heard from advisors in her doctoral program, positioning her teacher education research agenda as too politically charged, weak, and dangerous for advancement in the field. Thus, she embarked on research that positioned her well for advancement as an academic, but while pursuing tenure and promotions, she felt trapped in and positioned by normative frames and larger storylines about education and teacher education that limited her ability to engage in the work she found most meaningful. During the emergency of the pandemic, Elizabeth rediscovered her previous intentions of working with teachers of marginalized students. She wrote,

*In these new opportunities I felt re-energized, repurposed and connected more to the ‘ground’ or the places of advocacy (kids and teachers) than I have during most of my career. So, maybe I’m just moving through the liminal stage of being genuine to myself as a teacher educator and academic . . . just writing this is helping me to see my own release of the positioning, expectations, and requirements of the academic system and a freedom to pursue the work I deem most important.*

For Elizabeth, the liminal space allowed her to recognize again who she wanted to be as a scholar and teacher educator and understand what had limited her in the past. Elizabeth's actions in response to this regret were to revise her academic workload, prioritizing the transformative work of teacher education she had put off previously. This brought a renewed sense of purpose from the opportunities COVID brought as Elizabeth came alongside teachers, helping the most marginalized and disadvantaged students during such unprecedented circumstances. Engaging in this work offered Elizabeth freedom to act, coming back to her true self. However, she understood the privilege she had in this action, as she is positioned differently within the academy as a full professor.

## 6. Discussion

As seen in the findings, during the pandemic, we found liminal spaces that offered us time to think about the emotions we have experienced due to the derisive discourses that position us in negative ways as teacher educators, and with that thinking came opportunities to reflect on our identities as teacher educators and what we look to accomplish as teacher educators. We came to realize how important it is to stand up to one's ideas about education, counter derogatory discourses, and engage in the work of social justice. To do this, the data revealed that we sought to embrace liminality as a transformative space where we, the inhabitants, have opportunities to let go of previously held views [65] and engage in 'new ways of being and doing' [66], even when it disrupts long-standing academic norms. This new liminal space offered us opportunities to take a line to and resist societal and political storylines that limit us within the profession. We felt this liminal space of maturing into teacher educator activists in tangible ways as we embraced, for a period of time, the loss, anxiety, sadness, anger, shame, and regret, which compelled us to action as transformers and activists, thus impacting the stories we tell about ourselves as teacher educators.

During the process of this self-study, we were often surprised that, despite our different national and institutional contexts, the experienced discourses of derision and the emotions we felt were often so similar. For example, our schools' responses to COVID differed significantly. Swedish schools remained open the entire pandemic, and all USA schools shut down for at least a period time, with many school districts teaching online for over a 12-month period. In this, we recognized fundamental ideas of education emerging, as Sweden recognized the importance of school for children socio-emotionally to endure the pandemic, while many groups across the USA saw schools as a threat to student and teacher safety. Still, regardless of the response, teachers and teacher education programs remained under the limelight as lacking and limited, and thus we encountered and were forced to manage negative emotions evoked from the derisive discourse, despite the context.

Emotions are political partly in the sense that they allow us to connect to the world and choose what we care for. They direct our engagement and action. In these turbulent, uncertain times, our self-study came to center on "how emotions in and of politics can be used to envision and energize action for a future where we hold on to what most people value in our present civilization: democracy, equality, human rights" [67]. Landahl [68] argued that emotional work is a fundamental part of teachers' work, and in different times this labor is more or less craving depending on the divergence or convergence between a teacher's goals and the overarching commission of the school system.

For the authors of this paper in our different national contexts, the present times and discourses of derision around teacher education represented in the analyzed critical incidents have created much dissonance. The dissonance calls for extensive emotional labor. But as we seek to author our teacher educator activist stories, we rather recognize the limitations of using emotional labor to reach our goals. We have come to understand that it is when we are not using emotional labor that we come closer to resistance. This result adds to previous research on teacher educator emotions [23], which focuses on emotional management. Instead of blocking out our emotions or trying to mask our emotions and put on other emotions, COVID provided us space to feel our emotions deeply, wallow

in them slightly, and then reflect on using them for good and change. This self-study helped us understand how negative discourses position us, which makes us feel genuine emotions. Instead of hiding and ignoring these emotions with surface acting, we came to see the power in embracing emotions as signals that we are in a new liminal space as we mature towards activism, incubating and developing our ideas/acts/repertoires. And in this liminal space, we found freedom and unity to approximate and try out various acts of activism, which can counter the derisive discourses in the political sphere. This use of liminality is an important outcome in relation to previous research on teacher education, where liminality is complex, dark, and something to move through [69–71]. For us, with the help of emotions, we see liminality as a space to construct our political roles as teacher educators.

Additionally, Arendt's [44] conceptualization of the ways by which humans can do something in the world helped us further understand the outcomes of this self-study. When being teacher educators is only about 'producing' new teachers according to the expectations of politicians, the media, and others, or when we are conducting the research that is expected of us or that gets us our degree, we are performing work. This is when we experience the emotions so prevalent in our narratives, which places us in the liminal space where we can author our own lives as teacher educators. By telling our teacher-educator stories, we became aware of the limitations of work without action. And, in this liminal space, reflecting together through writing and real-time dialogue, we identified ways to act, communicate, and express ourselves towards transformation and activism, so we can go public and be political [13]. Thus, telling our stories allows us space to use our emotions to take a line to and resist the derogatory discourses, engage in the political, and move closer to becoming teacher educator activists.

## 7. Implications and Further Research

While engaging in this self-study, we recognize that not all teacher educators have encountered derisive discourse in the same ways we have over the years. Yet, we also recognize that many teacher educators across various national and international contexts will resonate with the derisive discourses we shared in our critical incidents, as well as the emotions evoked. While our study is not generalizable, we offer teacher educators, and others within the teaching profession, ways to embrace, experience, and then use the emotions stirred by shifting political landscapes and derisive discourses about teacher education, to take action towards transformation. Using autoethnography to tell our own stories as teacher educators navigating societal positions, managing emotions, and seeking ways to resist, we experienced the liminal space in tangible ways that allowed us to revise and reframe our stories in pursuit of becoming teacher educator activists. In this way, using self-study was the perfect research methodology for us because by acting as critical friends, our close relationships allowed us to dig deep with our emotions in transparent and vulnerable ways, moving beyond the surface to consider visions for transformation. However, self-study is only one way to explore this phenomenon of derisive discourses, teacher emotions, and action. We recognize the need for additional research (i.e., larger scale, alternate research methods, different participant populations) to explore the complexities of the political, identity, and educational reform/transformation.

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