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What university teachers need to know - perceptions of course content in higher education pedagogical courses

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ABSTRACT

This article investigates how professional development courses for university teachers are viewed by different stakeholders, specifically students, university teachers, central university management, and the government. The particular focus of the investigation is on the relationship of theory and practice, disciplinary content, and forms of pedagogical knowledge. The results, based on interviews and documents, show that university teachers tend to ask for more practical, hands-on knowledge, whereas the government focuses on the theoretical content of pedagogical courses. Stakeholders were vague in their views about the content of pedagogical courses, indicating that professional development fails to be regarded as a strategic matter.

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Introduction

Continual changes in higher education result in constantly new demands on academic teachers. The effects of massification and broader student recruitment mean that there are ever more expectations for teachers to develop new skills and have brought the notion of 'excellence' in teaching into greater focus (Wood & Su, 2017). University teachers are typically carefully taught how to conduct research but often lack formal pedagogical training (Gosling, 2009). In many countries, this situation is addressed by requiring them to attend pedagogical courses (Gibbs, 2013; Hanbury et al., 2008; Havnes & Stensaker, 2006; Trowler & Bamber, 2005). These courses have become an international phenomenon (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012), and university teaching and learning is now a legitimate field of study, which implies that knowledge from research in the field should form the basis of any course on teaching (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009). However, no consensus exists on what makes for 'good' university teaching or how staff can be prepared to develop it (Skelton, 2004). Perceptions of 'good teaching' are often in the eye of the beholder, as suggested by how the discourse about 'excellence' can become empty and meaningless when it refers to teaching in higher education (Wood & Su, 2017).

Different stakeholders want different things from pedagogical courses. Curriculum theory highlights how educational design results from a process of normative selection and knowledge framing (Deng & Luke, 2008). The different actors involved are likely to

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have diverging agendas and competing goals (Trowler & Bamber, 2005). The aim of this study is therefore to investigate the perceptions of students, university teachers, managers, and the government regarding the content of pedagogical development in higher education. We do this by asking a classic didactical question (Uljens, 1997): what content should be included in professional development programs for university teachers?

Higher education development activities are referred to in various ways, including as faculty development, educational development, instructional development, professional development, and academic development (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012; Gosling, 2009). Chalmers et al. (2012) divided teaching development programmes into formal and informal types. Formal programmes are accredited or required by relevant authorities, and they are offered either intensively or in extended form. Informal programmes include shorter workshops or seminars, online courses, and special events. In this study, the object of investigation is professional development for teachers through formal pedagogical courses, which form an important part of academic development. The study took place in Sweden, where higher education has grown rapidly since the beginning of the 1990s. However, the implications of our study have wider relevance, especially given the worldwide growth of educational development (Amundsen & Wilson, 2012). An investigation into stakeholders' perceptions can provide a broader knowledge base for the content, design, and implementation of pedagogical courses. The study should be of special interest to academic developers because it focuses on an important part of their mission: how to teach teachers to teach.

Previous research and analytical framework

Much research on academic professional development has been primarily concerned with impact, and has aimed to establish whether pedagogical courses affect university teaching and student learning. One group of studies has investigated the impact of pedagogical courses on academics' thinking and teaching, and they suggest that courses affect how teachers view teaching and learning (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Hanbury et al., 2008) and the extent to which they adopt a student-centred approach to learning (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Chalmers et al., 2012). Another group of studies, which have attempted to measure the impact on student learning, suggest there is no direct relationship between teacher development programmes and student learning outcomes (Gosling, 2009; McAlpine et al., 2008; Southwell & Morgan, 2010). Other studies have moved beyond impact and discussed the nature and purpose of academic development, and the assumptions upon which it is based (Loads & Campbell, 2015; Sutherland, 2013). Hence, much of the focus on professional development programmes for university teachers has been on parts other than their curricula, resulting in a lack of theoretically based research on the content of pedagogical courses (Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Skelton, 2004). In this study, our focus was on content as a way to understand curriculum construction (Joseph, 2015). What knowledge is valued and what content should be included in a course or a programme result from a selection process, which is related to cultural, political, and economic contexts (Young, 2013).

What teachers need to know

Three core issues can be identified from reviewing the literature related to the content of pedagogical professional development programmes for university teachers. These issues have all been discussed in the literature and are expected to play a central role in the content of pedagogical courses.

1. The first important question concerns the balance of *theory and practice*. Without theory, practice does not result in expertise, but neither does theory without practice. The classical division between theoretical and practical knowledge is prevalent in the literature and dates back to Aristotle, who divided knowledge into analytically distinctive but practically inseparable categories: disciplinary or theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, and experiential knowledge (Deng & Luke, 2008).

The difficulties associated with balancing theory and practice in pedagogical courses are well documented (Bamber & Stefani, 2016). Fox (1983) warned of the risk of a mismatch between course participants' expectations and the actual course content. Course takers tend to expect quick-fix pedagogical courses covering teaching tips but instead confront content that mainly theorizes and problematizes teaching and learning. Yet, some lecturers claim that theoretical 'concepts do not tell you what to do in the class' (Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009, p. 27). On the other hand, integration of theory is necessary to build competence, and pedagogical courses are expected to support the translation of theory into specific classroom contexts.

2. The second question concerns the *relationship between the content and the discipline*. How close should pedagogical development be to academic disciplines? It may seem obvious that teachers need to know the content of what they are teaching, but does that mean that professional development programmes should also be organized in close relation to the discipline, or can it be generic? The general view in the literature is that teaching and teaching effectiveness can never be separated from the content to be taught (Healey & Jenkins, 2003; Lueddeke, 2003; Shulman, 1987). Simultaneously, higher education faces an increased focus on generic skills (Gilbert et al., 2004). McGuinness (1997) argued that educational development courses must be sensitive to disciplinary differences. Generic principles of effective teaching risk ignoring the content-specific character of teaching: 'Discovering, explicating and codifying general teaching principles simplify the otherwise outrageously complex activity of teaching' (Shulman, 1987, p. 11). According to this argument, strategies for pedagogical courses need to be adapted to the discipline, and teachers must have *content knowledge*, referring to the discipline's substance and structure.

3. The third question is: *What kind of knowledge is necessary for teachers?* Apart from the content, other forms of knowledge may be necessary. *Pedagogical content knowledge* (Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Shulman, 1987) is necessary to transform the content into forms that will help the students to understand and learn. Teachers need to understand the cognitive processes involved in learning as well as group dynamics. Teachers also need *curricular knowledge* (Shulman, 1987) to understand and use material for teaching, such as curricula and testing materials, as well as how to construct exams and design assignments. Constructive alignment (CA) (Biggs, 1996) is an example of such an instructional design, although it also contains elements of pedagogical content knowledge. The idea behind CA is that teachers must understand what the students should be

able to do by the end of a course. The focus therefore includes the alignment of the intended learning outcomes with teaching and learning activities and assessment tasks. This is an instrumental process in which performance objectives should be arranged in a hierarchy, teaching and learning activities should be aligned, and assessments should be directly linked to the course's learning objectives (Biggs, 1996). Finally, because the context influences academic work and educational processes, a teacher must “know the territory” of teaching’ (Shulman, 1987, p. 9). *Context knowledge* refers to knowledge about institutions and their rules and hierarchies, academic organisations, government rules, laws and regulations, and finance systems, which constitute framing factors of education (Dahllöf, 1999).

Method

This study uses a stakeholder approach to investigation, in which the perceptions of actors associated with a programme are investigated (Vedung, 2002). Stakeholders participate in and are influenced by the courses directly or indirectly, but they do not actively implement or organize the pedagogical courses.

Swedish universities are publicly funded and participation in pedagogical courses was compulsory from 2003 to 2011, when the requirement was abolished (Higher Education Ordinance, SFS 2002:761). Since 2011, universities have been able independently to decide whether to organize these courses, and at most higher education institutions, university teachers and doctoral students participate in pedagogical courses (Swedish National Union of Students [SFS], 2015), which are guided by recommendations set by the Association of Swedish Higher Education (SUHF).

Based on these factors, four stakeholders were selected: the government, universities, teachers, and students. Educational developers were not part of this study because they are the primary producers of educational development courses. Data were collected on three levels: national, institutional, and individual. Four medium-sized universities in Sweden were selected for our study: Karlstad University (KU), Linnaeus University (LU), Mid Sweden University (MU) and Örebro University (ÖU). These institutions are geographically spread out and offer doctoral education and research, but as new universities, their main activities are related to undergraduate education. The institutions are large enough to have well-established higher education development programmes as well as students and teachers from a variety of faculties, but they are also small enough (compared to the large research universities) to have a centralized policy on educational development, instead of a number of different faculty-based policies.

Government data were collected in the form of governmental bills, propositions, and government commissions published between 1990 and 2017 that were related to educational development and the professional development of university teachers.

The views of the central management level were represented by documents from the SUHF, internal university documents, vision statements, strategy statements, and annual reports related to educational development. Three interviews were conducted with representatives from central university management. The views of university teachers

were investigated by analysing statements, publications, comments on public investigations, and political columns produced by the Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers (SULF); and by conducting 12 interviews with university teachers. Teachers were selected to represent a variety of faculties and had all taken part in pedagogical courses during the previous three years.

The students' perceptions at a national level were investigated by analysing documents produced by the Swedish National Union of Students (SFS), which represents the collective student voice in Sweden, and by analysing statements in annual reports and opinion texts from SFS and through 12 interviews with students. The policy documents and statements provide the collective perspective held by these stakeholders. The interviews, on the other hand, primarily serve to illustrate these views.

One limitation to the study is the lack of balance in documentation. Many documents describe the perceptions of the government and students, but fewer have been produced by university or teacher organizations. In total, 27 semi-structured interviews were conducted. Students and teachers were selected to represent a broad variety in terms of gender and faculty. The Swedish national student association assisted by providing a contact list of students. The interviews typically lasted from 45 minutes to an hour and were conducted face to face or via telephone. All of the interviews were recorded, and written notes were taken. The policy extracts and interview quotes were translated. All of the interviews covered pedagogical courses.

Interviews and documents were analysed according to an analytical framework, and quotations from the interviews and excerpts from the documents are presented to contribute to the understanding of the results. The framework, which comprises three parts, was developed based on previous research on pedagogical courses. The analysis proceeded through close reading, which mixed both inductive and deductive approaches to content analysis. Based on previous research on pedagogical courses, three core questions were identified that appeared frequently in the literature and that were expected to have implications for the content of pedagogical courses: the *balance between theory and practice* (Bamber & Stefani, 2016; Kandlbinder & Peseta, 2009), the *relation to content and the discipline* (Healey & Jenkins, 2003; Lueddeke, 2003; Shulman, 1987) and the *knowledge necessary* for university teachers (Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Shulman, 1987). In the second step, the material was analysed using a deductive approach of systematically searching for the stakeholders' perceptions in relation to the three questions.

Results

Government perspectives

Between 1990 and 2010, there were five comprehensive public investigations related to the professional development of teachers in higher education. The first four endorsed pedagogical courses for teachers (Swedish Government Bill, 2001; Swedish Government Official Report, 1992, 2000, 2001). The last bill removed the national

requirement for mandatory courses (Swedish Government Bill, 2010). The government texts argued for institutional freedom and clearly stated that the content of pedagogical courses should be decided locally by the higher education institutions:

The design and content can according to our opinion vary depending on the need of the specific university. We are not of the opinion that there should be national guidelines for the content of pedagogical courses for teachers. (Swedish Government Official Report, 2001, p. 202)

The government repeatedly pointed out that teachers need to learn the skills to teach a heterogeneous group of students (Swedish Government Official Report, 2000, 2001):

With a rising number of students, more heterogeneous groups of students and increasing demands of the productivity of higher education it become [*sic*] more important to reflect on which activities are necessary in order to satisfy different needs of support and guidance (Swedish Government Official Report, 2000, p. 74).

In spite of the emphasis on institutional freedom, the reports contained suggestions for the content of pedagogical courses that give an indication of what the government has in mind for professional development of university teachers. The list contained both theoretical and practical course content. Several of the suggestions can be classified as *pedagogical content knowledge* (teaching and learning environments, learning theory, and educational challenges). The texts stressed the importance of practical compared content in relation to theory, explaining that theory and practice should be mixed. They also regarded a focus on information and communication technology (ICT) and the use of computers as a practical need ‘which should be a regular feature in pedagogical courses and in staff development’ (Swedish Government Official Report, 1992, p. 268). *Context knowledge* is only mentioned in passing: ‘education should also include a broader perspective of society, culture, history of ideas and the theory of knowledge’ (Swedish Government Official Report, 2001, p. 202). Neither *content knowledge* nor *curricular knowledge* is mentioned at all.

University management perspectives

At a national level, the Swedish university association argues strongly for pedagogical development. Recommendations focus on *pedagogic content knowledge*, or ‘[being] able to discuss and problematize students’ learning within their own subject area based on educational science and/or subject didactics research relevant to teaching in the university’ (SUHF, 2016, p. 1), and on *context knowledge*, or ‘[being] able to use relevant national and local regulations and [discussing] social goals with higher education and academic teaching in relation to their own practice and the students’ participation in the education’ (SUHF, 2016, p. 1). Theory is foregrounded, and content knowledge is reflected less in the recommendations.

At the university level, there is a paucity of texts that focus on arguments or strategies concerning pedagogical courses, beyond stating their importance in relation to quality. Professional development of teachers is vaguely perceived as part of quality enhancement. ‘Well . . . I can only speculate that they should include different teaching concepts from lectures to seminars, using new technologies . . .’ (University director, ÖU).

Professional development should be demand-driven and located in the departments. ‘The needs and activities of the departments are diverse, the pedagogical plan does not have to be specific in detail but only specify the structure and direction for development of the university’s educational activities’ (Linnaeus University, 2015, p. 3). As opposed to the national view, according to this perspective, courses should be practical, didactics is important, and the university managers explicitly ask for ‘updated and effective teachings methods’ (Dean, MU):

[Through] practical and didactical content, otherwise teachers might teach the same way they were taught themselves. Good teaching methods, how do you integrate new methods in your teaching? Participants in the courses carry out practical moments across the subjects and this has a spreading effect. (Dean, MU)

This quote illustrates the belief that, if teachers can be taught new and better teaching methods, students have an enhanced opportunity to learn. Professional development of university teachers is expected to be a kind of automatic process that has a spreading effect, assuring an acceptable quality and teaching standard at the university, because ‘course content can contribute to increased quality through a platform and avoid too much variation in teachers’ knowledge’ (Dean, MU). The focus is on *pedagogical context knowledge*. If teachers can learn more about how students learn, education becomes better and more efficient. The drive to instruct university teachers in the use of new teaching methods is motivated by the need to widen participation:

That requires different educational and didactic tools and not just the traditional way of teaching when you teach a group that is more heterogeneous, with different demands and different learning styles. Here, a course of 15 credits can help; it is not enough, but it is a start. (Dean KU).

The main theme that emerges among the university representatives is efficiency, in terms of leveraging scarce resources:

but the scarce resources also demand that we use the time and resources we have in the best way we can. . . . Having a varied educational battery and maybe using the resources best. Our funding is not enough. . . . We do not meet students in classrooms for many hours. . . . (University director, ÖU)

In line with this, ideas about *curricular knowledge* are related to constructive alignment as a tool to make students learn. Examination forms are viewed as important and are linked to learning outcomes (Dean KU). The concept of constructive alignment is central to pedagogical courses, as it is expected to increase ‘teachers’ knowledge of educational tools so that they can design and present the course in a flexible and purposeful manner’ (Mid Sweden University, 2008, p. 7). In terms of context knowledge, teachers need to know about laws and regulations in connection with examination: ‘The administrative part can help – which rules apply? What are the rules when you are examining? This is to be an authority The legal administrative part is important’ (Dean KU).

The only course content that is specified as necessary is ICT (Linnaeus University, 2015; Mid Sweden University, 2015). Pedagogical courses should form a practical pedagogical platform, introducing modern ICT-teaching methods.

University teachers' perspectives

At a national level, the teachers' association demands more professional development and an upgrade of pedagogic skills (SULF, 2016). In the interviews, teachers express a need for practice: 'I want to learn how to transform theories into practice and how to design real teaching methods' (University teacher, KU). They articulate the risk that excessive theoretical knowledge may fail to extend a bridge to pedagogical practice, asking for 'hands-on knowledge of how to improve your own course syllabus and the expected learning outcomes in connection to constructive alignment' (university teacher, KU). Pedagogical courses should include practical teaching tips in connection to e-learning and use of modern ICT. 'I want practical know-how ... but not necessarily theories about distance learning' (University teacher, MU).

Few teachers stress the relationship to discipline or *content knowledge*; this relationship is mentioned as necessary, but is ranked below such qualities as commitment and enthusiasm. In terms of *pedagogical context knowledge*, the teachers stress the importance of pedagogical courses being researched-based, and providing information about updated research on teaching and learning in higher education: the courses should 'contribute to preventing teachers to remain in old and outdated teaching methods, instead teaching quality can be improved by presenting new research on teaching and learning' (university teacher, LU). However, more important than providing classical pedagogical content knowledge, is that the courses form a base to stimulate the collegial discussion of teaching and learning:

Discussions on how to teach and learn change after course participation. The conceptual framework within teaching and learning is made mutual among colleagues after the course. We teachers now understand the discourse better in educational science and share the same language' (University teacher, MU).

In terms of *curricular knowledge*, constructive alignment stands out as the most important part of the courses. The teachers should be equipped with concrete teaching tips and apply them to effective teaching methods:

Many teachers demand ICT knowledge and techniques to streamline learning among students. I mean, I have the hours that I have to teach, and that is what I get ... but there are a number of ways to work that can make learning more efficient (University teacher, ÖU).

Constructive alignment gives the teachers a framework for a proper teaching method, and pedagogical courses work as a guarantee that the teachers can teach:

The students should know that this teacher can teach [and has] holistic thinking. [They should know] that there is some common view on how to assess, how to think about examinations. ... (University teacher, ÖU).

Context knowledge is viewed as important. Teachers have a common view that a general overview of laws and regulations is necessary 'to get an understanding of what controls education' (University teacher, ÖU). Several teachers express the need for university

teachers to participate in a common, university-wide platform to develop a shared understanding and a shared language to navigate the complexity of the university as an organisation:

The content gives you an overview of education, and you gain an understanding for the university profession; you get the fundamental notion of a course syllabus, a context and an understanding of where you work and what type of institution the university represents via contextual know-how. (University teacher, MU)

Learning is viewed as taking place in collaboration with and through interaction between teachers. ‘Seminars are a good form, and so are discussions with other teachers’ (University teacher, MU). Collegial discussions on teaching and learning are viewed as central to increasing participants’ understanding of the complexity of universities. Group work and time for sharing common problems is important as an arena for meetings with colleagues from other disciplines. The teachers also ask for concrete teaching examples, such as film clips and practical training, focused on how to organise a student-active course and how to teach effectively. ‘Show me how to act as a university teacher; start with “how”, then move over to “why” ... I want more concrete teaching examples ... show recorded real cases and then discuss ...’ (University teacher, LU).

Students’ perspectives

Although the students’ association requires pedagogical courses for university teachers (SFS, 2013a), official student-produced reports at the national level contain limited information about what teachers need to learn. They focus on generic skills and the need for teachers to learn how to convey their message, rather than on the need for content knowledge (SFS, 2013b).

The students refer to ‘rhetoric’ when describing how teachers need ‘to know how to convey disciplinary knowledge, especially in disciplines that are difficult’ (Student, KU). ‘Teachers should be good speakers when they lecture, rhetoric ... or know how to talk’ (Student, LU). They ‘should know how to say something in a way that students understand’ (Student, ÖU), and they should know ‘how to get it out ... anyone can read; they need to learn how to get their message out’ (Student, MU).

In terms of *pedagogical content knowledge*, the students argue for a ‘student-centred learning’ approach (SFS, 2013a) and emphasise the importance of teachers studying research on teaching and learning. ‘Student-centred learning’ should be applied everywhere and should not depend on the interests of the individual teacher (SFS, 2013a, p. 6). It is described as both a way of thinking and a university culture, in which the student creates and constructs knowledge, unlike older traditions, in which the teacher transfers knowledge to the student (SFS, 2013a, p. 8). In this way, the students ask for an updated way of teaching, requiring a pedagogy that ‘does not start from traditions, but from research about learning’ (SFS, 2015, p. 24):

In order for students to receive adequate education, it is necessary that there is knowledge about the students, their conditions, study habits, results and further careers. Such knowledge is mainly obtained through research in higher education pedagogy and from higher education pedagogical development work. (SFS, 2015, p. 25)

Table 1. Overview of course content according to stakeholders.

Stakeholder	Course content
Government	Theoretical focus, pedagogical content knowledge; learn how to teach a diverse group of students
University management	Practical focus, <i>curricular knowledge</i> (new teaching methods for efficient learning and application of constructive alignment); <i>context knowledge</i> (basic knowledge around laws and regulations to guarantee minimum standard)
Teachers	Practical-focused <i>pedagogical content knowledge</i> concrete tips and tricks, a common language and constructive alignment
Students	Theoretical focus, generic skills and rhetoric, <i>pedagogical content knowledge</i> , as well as research about how students learn

This includes teachers learning how to make students understand things: ‘I want to get an education built on a pedagogical basis. I do not want to have to fight [to understand] everything; the teachers should help me [and help] their students understand things’ (Student, ÖU). Examples given by the interviewed students are also related to variations in teaching and communication methods in regard to students.

Students’ requests concerning *curricular knowledge* are mainly related to how lectures are structured: ‘There should be a structure that can be recognized [and] compared to other courses. Courses need to become more similar, such as in terms of practical things . . .’. (Student, ÖU). Also, ‘pedagogical education’ should be standardised:

[Variation in pedagogical education] creates a potentially unequal situation for students at different programs. Thus, students at certain universities can be taught by teachers who have a pedagogical education and who are updated on the latest methods, while other students at other universities risk being taught by teachers who do not have pedagogical skills. (SFS, 2015, p. 3)

At the national level, the SFS (2013) argued for the need to use the system of pedagogical portfolios of qualifications to support teachers to ‘document the planning, implementation and evaluation of the teaching’ (SFS, 2013a, p. 11). This can be viewed as indicating a reflective approach to their practice and as a demand for increased use of assessment tools to evaluate teaching.

Table 1 summarises the analysis of stakeholders’ perspectives. *Governmental interest* on pedagogical content knowledge can contribute to enhancing learning for an untraditional and heterogeneous group of students. *University* documents and representatives indicate a vague idea of where the pedagogical content knowledge and curricular knowledge are focused: pedagogical courses should be practical and introduce new, efficient and ICT-influenced teaching methods and apply constructive alignment. It should also provide basic knowledge about rules and regulations to guarantee a minimum standard of quality in teaching. *University teachers* stress a practical focus on curricular knowledge, containing concrete tips and tricks and how to use constructive alignment. Courses are expected to provide teachers with a shared language of teaching and learning in higher education. *Students* primarily focus on pedagogical content knowledge. They want teachers to be familiar with research on teaching and learning, learn how to use a student-centred approach, and be taught in rhetorically effective ways. The focus is on theory rather than practice. Curricular knowledge is required, in terms of learning to structure lectures in a clear way. Neither context knowledge nor content knowledge is mentioned. Students perceive that generic rhetorical skills in and clear structures automatically make teachers good at teaching.

Conclusions

This study shows that stakeholders placed less emphasis on the content of pedagogical courses, apart from a common view that teachers need to learn how to use new and efficient teaching methods and apply constructive alignment and ICT-based solutions to become better teachers. This is surprising, given the high expectations regarding the impact of pedagogical courses. The clearest differences found were in the perspectives on theory and practice. Educational developers should consider that governmental guidelines and student pressure might not always be in line with what teachers perceive they need to learn. The interviewed teachers wanted a practical curricular focus, whereas the national associations of students and teachers promoted theoretical pedagogical content knowledge. Closeness to the discipline and to content was not a focus for any of the stakeholders, indicating that a generic perspective on teaching and learning predominates. The recurrent use of the terms ‘rhetoric’ and ‘conveying the message’ indicates a complex perspective on content knowledge among students. On the one hand, the students argued strongly for a student-centred learning approach, versus a teacher-centred way of transmitting knowledge. On the other hand, the students perceived content transmission as isolated from the content itself and believed that a mechanism existed with which to deliver content that is applicable for all disciplines, which contrasts with Shulman’s (1987) scepticism towards generic principles of effective teaching. Moreover, the idea that pedagogical courses can lead to automatic change (Trowler & Bamber, 2005), as expressed by the university representatives and students, indicates a problematic view of knowledge as separate from teaching. Although pedagogical courses appear to be an attractive fast track to enhance quality in education, automatic change will not take place without an in-depth discussion about the content of these courses.

The stakeholders were vague in their views on the content of pedagogical courses. At the national level, the SFS and SUHF are strong advocates of pedagogical development, but only the SUHF has a clear view of what this should include. The government and the central universities clearly state that professional development programmes should be handled and decided at the local level, but local documents do not indicate that pedagogical development is viewed as a strategic question. This failure to use it as a strategic tool has also been noticed by the SUHF (2017), which stands out as the only strategic actor in this field. This indicates that Swedish universities do not view pedagogical development as an issue of strategic importance, which is unexpected, as international research has shown institutional motives related to strategic planning and quality management behind pedagogical courses (Havnes & Stensaker, 2006).

The course content of pedagogical courses seems to result from a selection process (Deng & Luke, 2008; Young, 2013), in which the investigated stakeholders play only a limited role, leaving a potential space for the SUHF and for educational developers to exert influence. In Sweden, pedagogical courses hold unused potential as a strategic tool for quality development.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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