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Sociologididaktik

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Abstract

This thesis explores how sociology didactics is understood and articulated within Swedish teacher education, a field where the subject didactical foundations are under-researched. Starting from current policy ambitions to strengthen subject knowledge and practical methodology by connecting theory and practice in teacher education, the study examines how sociology teacher educators understand the role of subject didactics, how they handle the fact that *sociology didactics* is not clearly defined, and what they see as possible ways forward. The empirical basis is qualitative interviews with teacher educators operating both in a subject teacher program and a profession program in social sciences and sociology. Using Basil Bernstein's theory of the pedagogic device, the analysis shows that subject didactics is frequently treated as something separate from subject knowledge. The thesis argues that making existing, but often implicit, didactical practices visible is key to strengthening sociology didactics as a field of research in higher education and in the long run the teaching proficiency in sociology.

Keywords: sociology didactics; subject didactics; teacher education; teaching proficiency; pedagogic device; recontextualization; vertical knowledge, horizontal knowledge.

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1. Introduction

On December 3rd, 2024, special investigator Peter Honeth presented the official report *Ämneskunskaper och lärarskicklighet - en reformerad lärarutbildning* (SOU 2024:81), which proposes reforms to Swedish teacher education. The report emphasizes strengthening subject knowledge, cognitive science, and practical methodology. Specifically, it suggests increasing the number of credits dedicated to subject studies and subject didactics to help build a more robust foundation for teacher education (SOU 2024:81). What will happen with the initiative is yet to be seen, but there appears to be a widespread recognition of the need to strengthen the scientific foundation of teaching. This is seen as crucial not only for improving teaching proficiency but also for bridging the gap between theory and practice in teacher education. Recent governmental initiatives from the last two administrations, as well as documents and reports from university committees and academia, have highlighted the urgency of addressing this issue (Skolkommissionen 2015; Lärarutbildningskonventet 2019; SKR 2021; SOU 2017:35; Gulz & Haake, 2025; Letmark, 2025).

In educational research, a similar concern is expressed regarding the gap between theory and practice, pointing towards subject didactics as a possible pathway for strengthening teaching proficiency. Studies over the last twenty years suggest that the challenges within teacher education are common across disciplines and point to the central role of subject didactics as part of the answer (Alsterlund, 2023; Carlgren, 2023; Sjöström, 2020; Kindenberg & Wickman, 2018; Hansén & Sjöberg, 2006).

The alignment between academic research and policy reform highlights not only the need to strengthen the scientific core of teacher education and connect theory with practice, but also points to subject didactics as a pathway forward. However, much remains to be understood about how this can be achieved in different disciplinary contexts.

While this issue has been widely discussed in general terms, its implications vary significantly across disciplines. In some disciplines, such as language subjects, subject didactics plays a major role in teacher education (Brantevik, 2016), while in others, it plays little or no role. Research on teacher education and sociology didactics is quite limited in a Swedish context (Ginnerskov, 2023; Azarian, 2018). These limitations are not confined to sociology alone but extend to the broader field of social sciences within higher education and teacher education (Bronäs & Selander, 2002; Sandahl,

2018; Olsson, 2016). A research gap therefore exists within the field of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education concerning subject didactics in the social sciences generally, and sociology didactics within teacher education specifically.

During my own training as a sociology teacher, I experienced this reality firsthand and was compelled to develop my own subject didactic approaches to teaching sociology. This experience made me acutely aware of the tendency to teach in the same way one has been taught. Consequently, I had to make a conscious effort to avoid replicating university-style lectures for my high-achieving secondary school students. Instead, I sought out strategies to adapt my teaching to the needs of my pupils.

However, I believe it would have been far more effective had I acquired these skills during my university education rather than through the challenges of my initial years in the classroom; an experience that was demanding for both myself and my students. This highlights the need for sociology teacher education to place greater emphasis on the development of subject specific didactics, not only to support beginning teachers but also to promote teaching proficiency in general.

To address this need and contribute to filling the research gap in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, this study was designed as part of an effort to understand how teacher educators view the issue in relation to their programs and courses in teacher education. How do they reflect on the fact that there seems to be no clear definition of what sociology didactics is, and how do they believe this affects the teacher proficiency of the future sociology teachers they are educating in their programs? What path do they envision for the development of sociology didactics in teacher education going forward?

1.1 Problem statement

In the field of teacher education in sociology, there is a particular need to develop sociology didactics, as there is currently no clear or shared understanding of what sociology didactics actually is. At present, there is also little research exploring how subject didactics is integrated into teacher education to strengthen teacher proficiency. More research is needed to define and clarify the scope of subject didactics as a field of study and its role within teacher education.

This study responds to that need by exploring sociology didactics through interviews with three teacher educators to understand their perspectives and reasoning on the topic. Through these interviews, the study aims to explore how sociology

didactics is understood and articulated in teacher education, and how this may contribute to discussions about teaching proficiency in sociology.

2. Research Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how sociology didactics is understood and articulated by teacher educators within Swedish teacher education, and how this may contribute to discussions about teaching proficiency in sociology. Using the example of a sociology teacher education program at a Swedish university, the study explores how subject didactics is perceived in a field where it is less established, offering insights into its role within teacher education and into how teacher educators reason about its significance for both teacher education and teaching proficiency.
To achieve this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:
1: How do teacher educators perceive the role of subject didactics in teacher education?
2: How do teacher educators reflect on the development of sociology didactics?

3. Literature Review

Any attempt to describe a research field in an overview runs the risk of presenting it one-dimensionally. In her report, Stina Hallsén (2013) distinguishes between research *for* teacher education and research *on* teacher education, organizing the field into four broad themes:

1. the relationship between teacher education and the teaching profession, including student perceptions of their education
2. the content of teacher education
3. the governance and autonomy of teacher education
4. the history of teacher education

The first two themes are particularly relevant to research *for* teacher education and the main focus of this study. The purpose of this study is not to present the historical development of Swedish teacher education or to explain government policy, nor is the study focused on student perspectives. Instead, since this study is interested in understanding both the relationship between teacher education and the teaching profession and how the content of teacher education is selected, this section will present

research in these areas of research *for* teacher education. It is important to note that while the review focuses primarily on research for teacher education, brief references to research on teacher education (such as governance and policy) are included when they help contextualize the discussion.

3.1 Definition of Terms Used

The following section will define the central terms and explain how they are understood in this thesis.

3.1.1. Teacher Education

The term *teacher education* will be used throughout this thesis. The reason for this is as Elstad (2023) suggests since teacher education refers to "program content, form and features as academic programs within higher education" (p.80). Furthermore, as Elstad explains, the meaning of teacher education can vary between users. In this context, teacher education is used to describe university-led programs in which both subject knowledge and pedagogical knowledge are seen as central components in preparing future teachers for their profession. Also, in this thesis, teacher education refers not to the organization or administration of these programs, but to the programs of higher education themselves and their content. Some confusion can sometimes arise from the fact that the term is used in Sweden to refer to both (Elstad, 2023).

3.1.2. Teaching Proficiency

In this thesis, *teaching proficiency* refers to the professional skills that enable teachers to transform subject knowledge into teachable and meaningful content for their students. The concept hence includes both the teacher's subject knowledge and their ability to adapt and communicate that knowledge in ways that promote learning. In other words, didactic skills.

Shulman (1987) describes this understanding of teaching proficiency as *pedagogical content knowledge* (PCK); the unique form of expertise that distinguishes teachers from subject specialists. According to Shulman (1987), teaching requires more than deep subject knowledge or general pedagogical skills; it demands an understanding of how specific content can be organized, represented, and made accessible to learners.

PCK therefore integrates subject knowledge with didactical knowledge about how to present, illustrate, and assess that content for particular students in particular contexts.

This interpretation resonates with Ekendahl et al.'s (2015) discussion of subject didactics within social science education. They emphasize that teacher education should help future teachers develop the ability to restructure and contextualize subject knowledge so that it becomes relevant and comprehensible in the school setting. Effective teaching in social sciences, they argue, depends on a teacher's skill in selecting, focusing, and transforming complex societal issues into pedagogically meaningful learning situations.

In this way, *teaching proficiency* can be understood as the mix of subject knowledge, didactical knowledge, and the ability to make informed didactic choices about *what*, *how*, and *why* to teach. It represents the professional judgment that allows teachers to connect disciplinary understanding with classroom practice, and thus embody one of the central goals of teacher education. In relation to Hallsén's (2013) distinction between research *on* and *for* teacher education, the concept of teaching proficiency belongs clearly to the latter: it concerns the practical and conceptual knowledge teachers need in order to teach well, and how teacher education can best support the development of that professional competence. The definition of teaching proficiency presented above, supported by Ekendahl et al. and Shulman will be used continuously in this thesis.

3.1.3. Subject and Discipline

A subject exists on more than one level and is not necessarily identical at each level. The school subject sociology is not the same as the academic discipline sociology. This is partly because of who influences the policy that shapes the content. In schools, subjects are defined and developed by politically appointed officials, while policy in the academic world is, at least to some extent, more influenced by academic initiatives and decisions (Sandahl, 2020). For example social sciences is a subject in school whereas it does not have an equivalent in higher education but is corresponded by the academic disciplines of sociology, political science and economics.

3.2 The Organization of Swedish Teacher Education

Elstad presents the generalized foundational structure of current Swedish teacher programs in the table below:

Area	Core of educational sciences	Practice (internship)	Assignments (essays, independent work)	Subject specialization studies
Credits	60 ECTS	30 ECTS	25-30 ECTS	0-240 ECTS

The generalized foundational structure of current Swedish teacher programs (Elstad 2023 p.86)

Even though variation between universities exists, this structure reflects the general division of the different parts of teacher education in Sweden. In addition to the full teacher education programs, there is also an optional route through the so-called "short programs," which are based on the fact that some teachers first study their subject and then complete the "pedagogical training" (Elstad, 2023). In addition to these paths, there are also routes that work in the opposite direction, where teachers who already hold a teaching degree can add subjects to their qualification through so-called proficiency programs (Skolverket, 2025). In the end however all students receive the same degree and the requirements for the different types are also the same (Elstad 2023). In this study, teacher educators active in both the full teacher education programs for future teachers in social studies and sociology, as well as in a proficiency program in sociology for upper secondary school teachers, are interviewed.

The organization presented in Elstad's table above is divided into four slightly different categories by Ingrid Carlgren (2023). Carlgren suggests that Swedish teacher education has traditionally been organized around four main areas: subject knowledge, which focuses on the content that teachers need to know; pedagogy, which covers learning theories and the psychological aspects of teaching; methodology, which involves the strategies and techniques used in teaching; and teaching practice (internship), which allows teacher students to gain hands-on experience in real classroom settings. The similarity between this model and Elstad's lies in the separation between the practical and theoretical aspects of education. In Elstad's case through the more theoretical components of essay writing, educational theory (in separate courses)

and subject knowledge and the practical component of the internship. Similarly, Carlgren groups the four categories into the theoretical parts (subject knowledge and pedagogy) on one hand, and the practical parts (methodology and internship) on the other.

Both models reflect a similar understanding of the separation between the theoretical and practical elements within teacher education (Carlgren, 2023; Elstad, 2023). Teacher education is a frequent topic of debate in Sweden and Elstad presents a list of the most frequent criticisms of Swedish teacher education. Among eleven points three are of particular interest of this study:

- The lack of balance between theory and practice
- The components of the programmes do not align
- There is an insufficient focus on the practice of teaching that appears too late in the programmes
  (Elstad, 2023, p.103)

As Elstad observes, the seemingly simple task of teaching has led to policy shifts that have left teacher education without solid frameworks to enhance teaching skills, an unsufficient professional language, and a limited professional knowledge base. The ambition to improve teacher education has in fact led to oversimplified answers to what teaching proficiency is and a one-dimensional perspective on solutions to complex challenges. Instead, Elstad argues, we should seek to diversify instructional strategies in subject specific research to enhance teaching proficiency (2023).

However, the integration of these areas into a cohesive body of knowledge, or as this thesis expresses it, teaching proficiency, is something that teachers typically develop during their careers through their own teaching practices. The separation of the components in teacher training leaves students with an unclear conception of teaching proficiency during their training (Carlgren, 2023). While students may learn about didactical theory, subject knowledge, and pedagogical theories in their studies, many encounter difficulties in translating these concepts into their teaching practice once they enter the field (Sjöström, 2020; Alsterlund, 2023). The integration of theoretical and practical aspects of teaching evidently remains a challenge even after teacher training, leaving the knowledge base of teaching insufficient. Subject didactics could be the answer as to what could glue the different parts together in each discipline and thus increase teaching proficiency.

3.3 Understanding the Concept of Subject Didactics

Didactics is commonly defined as the art of teaching and refers to the general knowledge of the theory and practice of teaching and learning (Gundem, 2008; Riskulova & Yuldashova 2020; Zierer & Seel, 2012). While broader educational sciences, such as psychology and pedagogy, provide valuable insights into student learning, these fields may lack the discipline specific focus required for teachers to address the complexities of their subject areas. Pedagogy, in its broadest sense, is not sufficient to replace the need for a specialized understanding of how to teach particular subjects effectively (Sjöström, 2020). Lotta Brantefors (2016) further emphasizes the importance of subject didactics in teacher education, suggesting that it is through understanding and engaging with the content and traditions of different subjects that future teachers can develop a deeper and more nuanced view of their teaching practices. According to Brantefors, integrating research on subject didactics allows teacher students to critically analyze and question the established teaching traditions within their discipline. This process provides an opportunity for teachers to reflect on what is taught, how, and why certain knowledge is conveyed in specific ways.

The recognition of subject didactics as a key area in teacher training has grown substantially in Sweden since the 1990s. Researchers now commonly argue that the relationship between theory and practice is critical in developing teaching proficiency (Lunde, 2024; Ekendahl et al., 2015; Kindenberg & Wickman, 2018). Despite the growing interest in didactics, gaps still exist in terms of its application within teacher education. The role of subject didactics may offer one potential pathway for developing teaching proficiency since the challenge is particularly evident in teacher education programs, where the emphasis should ideally be on preparing students for the demands of the teaching profession (Ekendahl et al., 2015; Sjöström, 2020; Wickman & Kindenberg, 2017). Just as experts in other fields rely on specialized knowledge, teachers may also benefit from a more established and research-based understanding of how to teach specific subjects effectively.

Subject didactics, in this view, is more than just a combination of teaching methods and subject knowledge; it should be understood as discipline specific, integrating subject knowledge with didactics. As Brantefors points out, it is more complex than simply general didactics plus subject knowledge (2016). One way to

explain subject didactics is to picture it as a bridge between subject knowledge and didactics. By moving back and forth across this bridge during teaching, the teacher connects subject knowledge with the challenges of practical teaching in a particular classroom context, which in turn draws on the teacher's didactic skills. It should be seen as a dynamic process that requires transformation by the teacher, rather than a fixed body of knowledge (Shüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009; Ongstad, 2006). Ongstad uses the term *omstilling* to describe this act of transforming subject knowledge and interpreting the teaching situation to make decisions on classroom activities and explanations. A teacher's ability to carry out this transformation depends on their subject didactical skills (Shüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009; Ongstad, 2006). This thesis is based on the idea outlined above and will use this understanding throughout, but, to be able to describe didactic skills in sociology we first need to know something about the nature of subject knowledge in sociology as part of the broader field of social sciences.

3.4 Subject Knowledge and Sociology and the Social Sciences

As previously stated the social sciences as a research field are underdeveloped in terms of subject didactics (Bronäs & Selander, 2002; Olsson, 2016; Sandahl, 2018). One reason for this may be that, since social sciences is an interdisciplinary field and there is no single corresponding academic discipline or unified research community; instead, there is a great diversity (Sandahl, 2018). Teachers have described the social sciences as a holistic subject (Olsson, 2016). Within this variety of disciplines and research areas, the didactics of the social sciences has developed into its own research field, but it is difficult to define as well since the researchers involved often come from other disciplines, each with its own research traditions and communities. There is no shared research community in social science subject didactics with a common understanding of its definition, and the field is still in the process of establishing its boundaries in relation to neighboring areas such as general didactics, pedagogy, or political science (Ekendahl et al., 2015; Sandahl, 2018; Sandahl, 2020).

Unlike traditional school subjects, sociology has a short history in Swedish secondary schools and consequently in teacher education, considering it has been its own subject in secondary school only since the reform of Gy 2011. In his report *The Didactic Challenges of Sociology: A Report on Sociology Teaching in Teacher Education* (2017), researcher and senior lecturer Reza Azarian writes about the lack of

research-based sociology didactics within teacher education. Azarian points out that this reflects the general state of sociology in Sweden, as there is a general lack of didactic studies in the field. There is, in fact, very little research on the school subject of sociology overall. For this reason, Azarian builds his report on sociology didactics largely on American research, simply because it is much more extensive by comparison. Azarians report was written on behalf of the Department of Sociology at Uppsala University (UU) on initiative from the Faculty for Educational Sciences to improve the quality of the teacher training program in sociology at the university. Evaluations had identified shortcomings in the program, particularly in the areas of sociology didactics and the connection to teaching practice. It was established that the institution was missing subject didactic competence Azarian states. The fact that sociology didactics is a field lacking research altogether is known (Sandahl, 2018; Ginnerskov, 2023) but nevertheless the situation was described as a problem for the quality of teacher education at the university (Azarian, 2017). To solve the issue Azarian poses himself three general didactical questions:

- What should teacher education in sociology contain,
- how can this content be made accessible to students; and
- why do you choose to focus on the particular content you do and why should you teach it a certain way?

He adds a fourth question

- for what is the content to be used?

(Azarian, 2017)

In the report Azarian (2017) highlights the tension in the institution between sociology as an academic discipline on the one side and its relevance for teacher education on the other. The challenge, Azarian states, lies in designing courses that both preserve the integrity of sociology as a field *and* meet the practical needs of teacher students in their future practice. This question is important since the recipients are future teachers who will use the knowledge teaching pupils in school. Ekendahl et al. seems to agree with Azarian and suggests structuring and presenting the content in a way that feels meaningful to the recipients (Ekendahl et al., 2015). If the students are future teachers Ekendahl et al. argues teacher education should take a pragmatic stance and adjust the course content to fit the future needs of their students.

Azarian writes that the absence of a didactic framework for sociology is likely connected to "the problem of identifying the theoretical and methodological core of the discipline" (2017:8). In the United States, efforts have been made, primarily by the American Sociological Association (ASA), to agree on a core curriculum. However, as Azarian notes, there is still significant disagreement among sociologists about what the subject should include, what should be taught at different levels, and what students are expected to know upon completing their education. In the university context, this means that sociology teachers tend to rely on the available course literature, according to Azarian. He argues that this literature is usually organized either around different theoretical perspectives or around a selection of sociological themes. One of the consequences Azarian reflects on is that, as a result, university teaching becomes encyclopedic and general, which risks leaving students without a clear understanding of what sociology as a science actually is. This leaves us with the question if we cannot agree on the content can we agree on the processes?

3.5 Sociology Didactics

In the section of Azarian's report that addresses what is distinctively sociological, Azarian draws on the views and key works of prominent sociologists. He presents well-known sociologists and their thoughts on the unique character of sociology: Randall Collins's *The Sociological Eye* and Peter Berger's *The Sociological Perspective*, both of which highlight sociology's ability to see similarities or make distinctions; Zygmunt Bauman's *Sociological Thinking*, which is about seeing everything in context; and finally, C. Wright Mills's *The Sociological Imagination*, which is about relating personal experiences to an imagined, abstract usually referred to as "the structures". Azarian writes that Mills has been given particular attention in the American university world and that his perspective has had a significant impact there. One example of this is the fact that the concept runs like a red thread through the influential work *Sociology* by Anthony Giddens and Philip W. Sutton, Azarian notes (2017).

Azarian also writes about the fact that teachers need to plan their teaching based on students' areas of interest and observes that it is a challenge to reconcile what is considered core sociological content with what students expect or are interested in. In a context where future teachers are being trained, Azarian argues that a solution to this

problem is to focus on sociological thinking itself, as it can serve as a tool for decoding and structuring other course content and is therefore the most useful approach for future teachers in their professional practice. His suggestion is in this sense as pragmatic as Ekendahl et al.

In the Swedish journal *Sociologisk Forskning,* Josef Ginnerskov (2023) also writes about the contrasts between sociology in an American context compared to the Swedish. Ginnerskov reflects on the idea that work as a teacher at a university rests on two pillars: research and teaching. He argues that the fact that American sociology has been more effective in searching for its core is because, in the United States, practical teaching is valued as highly as research; unlike in Sweden, where teaching tends to have a subordinate role. In the U.S., the focus has thus been on gathering data from how teaching is actually carried out at universities and schools. The formation of sociology's core in the U.S. is "characterized by an effort to recreate a lived practice," Ginnerskov writes (2023, p.141).

Ginnerskov also highlights *The Sociological Imagination*, noting that it both captures what makes sociology unique and serves as a unifying concept, even though there has not been a shared understanding of what constitutes the core of sociology. Ginnerskov describes how a common research practice in sociology has been to replicate American studies in Swedish cases. Over time, this has led to the development of independent practices at Swedish universities. Ginnerskov suggests that it would be a good idea for sociology instructors to take inspiration from this example and allow American sociology didactics to also inspire efforts to develop context-adapted sociology didactics.

Azarian and Ginnerskov suggest the possible approach of emphasizing the development of Mills' *sociological imagination* as a didactic tool in teacher education in sociology, and in continuum for teaching sociology in school. Ekendahl et al. writes that by structuring knowledge in a way that is meaningful to future teachers, didactic approaches can bridge the gap between theoretical and applied learning (2015). The focus on sociological imagination could not only link theory and practice but also provide a coherent framework that aligns with both the academic and the professional dimensions of teacher education.This notion will be developed in the last section of the Literature review.

So far, various researchers in the social sciences and sociology, as shown, agree that the nature of the subject of sociology, like the social sciences as a whole, is difficult

to define. In fact, the variety of ideas about what constitutes the academic discipline could be said to define it. Instead of trying to determine which themes or theorists make up the core of sociology, we need to look for ideas about the processes that take place within sociology. Azarian, Ginnerskov, and Ekendahl et al. agree on the potential of *the sociological imagination* as a possible didactical tool for the education of future sociology teachers. In this thesis, *the sociological imagination* is seen as one possible concept, but equal potential is also recognized in other central concepts such as *sociological thinking* etc.

However, since the purpose of this thesis is to contribute to developing the concept of sociology didactics within teacher education by interviewing sociology teacher educators about their views on its role and possible development in teacher education, it seems appropriate to adopt a more general concept when describing sociology didactics. Therefore, the theoretical framework below has been selected to serve this purpose. The aim is to preserve the characteristic of linking abstract theory with concrete practice as in the examples above and to apply a model that helps us understand how teachers bridge the two. By effectively transforming abstract knowledge into practical examples and vice versa taking in consideration the context in which you operate, teachers demonstrate skills in sociology didactics and teaching proficiency. As this literature review has sought to show, this ability to connect theory and practice may be the lowest common denominator among the various perspectives on sociology didactics discussed above.

4. Theoretical Framework

To answer the research questions of this study, this thesis will use the British sociologist Basil Bernstein's theoretical framework, *The Pedagogic Device*. Bernstein sought to understand how teaching practices are developed and on what ideas about education those practices are based. To do this, he created a theory that explains how knowledge is transferred between different areas where knowledge is created and shared (Singh, 2002).

Bernstein's concept of *vertical and horizontal knowledge* provides a theoretical foundation for understanding the teacher's central role as a "translator" between different forms of knowledge. In sociology teaching, this ability can be seen as a core

component of subject didactics: enabling students to move between the abstract theory and practicalities of reality, thereby developing both theoretical understanding and practical competence.

In this study, Bernstein's framework is particularly useful since the focus lies on how sociology didactics is understood and shaped within teacher education. As a field where there is limited research and no clear shared definition, sociology didactics can be seen as something that is actively interpreted and transformed by teacher educators. Bernstein's concept of the recontextualization field therefore provides a way of analysing how this knowledge is selected, adapted, and made teachable in the context of teacher education.

4.1 Basil Bernstein and The Pedagogic Device

According to Bernstein, *The Pedagogic Device* is made up of three fields: *the field of production*, *the field of recontextualization*, and *the field of reproduction*. These fields do not influence each other equally. First, knowledge is produced, then it is recontextualized, and finally, it is reproduced. *The field of production* refers to the creation of knowledge through research in academia and research institutions (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002). In the context of this study, this means research on and definitions of subject didactics in teacher education institutions in Sweden and internationally.

The *field of recontextualization* is divided into two parts by Bernstein: *the official recontextualizing field* (ORF) and *the pedagogic recontextualizing field* (PRF). The ORF consists of the formal documents that regulate education, often created by government bodies, in a Swedish context for example Skolverket. The PRF refers to the institutions and educational content in higher education curated by teacher educators (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002). This study focuses on *the recontextualization field* and particularly how teacher educators view the choices they make as part of the PRF. Their decisions are regulated by the ORF, which consists of formal documents and policies but to some extent also designed by themselves via the content they chose for the programs and courses they teach.

The reproduction field involves everyday teaching practices in schools. Bernstein's view is that what and how subjects are taught in schools depends on the type of knowledge created in *the production field* (in this case, research on sociology

didactics in teacher education) and how that knowledge is selected and applied in the recontextualization field (here, teacher education in sociology). In short, the research conducted, what research is chosen for teacher education programs, and how that research is presented to teacher students influence what and how a subject is taught in schools in the *reproduction field* (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002). *The pedagogic device* helps us understand how first research and then teacher education impacts teaching proficiency in the practicality of teaching in school. In this study, the focus lies on how teacher educators perceive the research in sociology didactics and recontextualize it for their students. *The recontextualization field examined in this study,* the teacher education program for future sociology teachers, serves as a lens to explore how the teacher educators perceive the integration, or absence, of existing research on sociology didactics and how that in turn influences course content in teacher education.

4.2 Basil Bernstein and Vertical and Horizontal Knowledge

In order to describe the recontextualization process Bernstein's concept of *vertical and horizontal knowledge* can be useful. Bernstein concludes that complex and specialized knowledge increases quickly in most areas of society, and simultaneously time to communicate the specialized knowledge decreases for those in *the production field*. Consequently the role of *pedagogizing* (translating) the content to become understandable for people outside of the expert field falls on *the recontextualization field* inside educational institutions in higher education (Bernstein, 2000). The situation as Singh reflects makes you reflect on "which knowledge is made accessible, which people or institutions are responsible for *pedagogizing*, and how knowledge is transformed into forms that work in teaching" (Singh, 2002).

The terms *horizontal knowledge* and *vertical knowledge* were founded by Bernstein to describe two types of knowledge that connect the immaterial world (The theoretical, structural) with the materialistic world (The practical, everyday life). In *the recontextualization field* when knowledge is selected and transferred to the reproduction field a choice between how to balance the content from *the production field* is made (Singh 2002; Bernstein 1999). In the classroom in *the reproduction field* another transformation is made where the vertical/theoretical often abstract knowledge in e.g. sociology needs to be translated from theory to/or connected to the horizontal/practical knowledge via concrete everyday examples students can relate to in order to understand

the theory. In the study a connection is made between *vertical and horizontal knowledge*, theory and practice and the ability of teachers to connect and slide between the two as an example of sociology didactics and an example of teaching proficiency in sociology.

4.3 Vertical and horizontal knowledge as Teaching Proficiency

In this study the interpretation of Bernstein's concept is that a sociology teacher's ability to slide between *vertical and horizontal knowledge* is crucial. In this understanding the teacher can connect theoretical models and concepts to the students' own experiences and context, which both supports understanding and creates engagement. At the same time, this strengthens students' ability not only to reproduce knowledge but also to use it analytically in new contexts. A clear connection is made between *vertical and horizontal knowledge* and previous concepts presented in the Literature review e.g. *sociological imagination.*

When we apply this didactically to sociology, the connection becomes particularly clear. Sociology constantly moves between theory and empirical data, between abstract models (such as social stratification, socialization, globalization) and concrete examples (inequality in schools, gender roles in daily life, migration in the local area). A proficient sociology teacher helps students see how their everyday lives are connected to larger societal structures and how sociological theories can be used as tools to understand and analyze these connections.

Didactically, this means that the teacher not only conveys content but also trains students to switch between *horizontal and vertical knowledge* themselves. This strengthens their sociological competence: they learn to understand both social theoretical perspectives and their practical application, making the knowledge both deeper and more relevant.

4.4 Critical Reflections on Bernstein's Framework

Although Bernstein's theoretical framework is useful for analysing how knowledge is selected, transformed, and made teachable within teacher education, it also has limitations in relation to the aim of this study. One limitation is that Bernstein's concepts emphasize structures, fields, and power relations in educational systems. This makes the framework strong for analysing how sociology didactics is shaped by the

relation between the field of production, the official recontextualizing field, and the pedagogic recontextualizing field. However, it may also risk giving less analytical attention to the agency, creativity, and professional judgement of individual teacher educators.

This is important in the present study because the empirical material shows that sociology didactics is not only shaped by institutional structures or policy documents, but also by teacher educators' own experiences, interpretations, and situated decisions. When respondents describe subject didactics as something that emerges through discussion, reflection, or professional experience, these practices cannot be fully explained only as effects of the pedagogic device. They also need to be understood as active professional meaning-making.

A second limitation is that Bernstein's distinction between vertical and horizontal knowledge can clarify the movement between abstract sociological theory and everyday experience, but it may also simplify this relation. In sociology, everyday examples are not merely practical illustrations of abstract theory; they are often the empirical material through which sociological knowledge is produced and questioned. The relation between the vertical and the horizontal is therefore not only a movement from theory to practice, but also a movement from lived experience to sociological abstraction.

For this reason, Bernstein's concepts are used in this thesis as analytical tools rather than as a complete explanation of sociology didactics. They help make visible how knowledge is recontextualized in teacher education, but they need to be complemented by attention to the respondents' own interpretations and to the specific character of sociology as a discipline that constantly moves between personal experience, empirical observation, and structural analysis.

5. Method

The methodological approach of this study is based on qualitative interviews with three teacher educators, since the purpose is to explore how sociology didactics is understood and articulated by teacher educators within Swedish teacher education. The aim of the study is to learn how teacher educators perceive and reason about the role and development of subject didactics within sociology teacher education, hence, a

qualitative method is appropriate. This approach makes it possible to capture depth and nuance in their reflections rather than statistical generalization which matches the aim of the thesis.

As Jarl Backman (1998) notes, qualitative research focuses on depth and meaning rather than scope and frequency. The results of this study therefore do not aim to be generalizable but should be seen as examples of how teacher educators may understand and approach subject didactic issues in sociology as a first step of mapping the field.

The interviews conducted were semi-structured and conversational in nature. According to Anne Ryen (2004), semi-structured interviews should be guided by predefined themes or questions but allow variation in order and wording depending on the respondent's answers (Ryen 2004, p.46). This flexibility was important in order to let participants influence the direction of the conversation and thereby increase the trustworthiness of the results. The disadvantage of this method is that responses become more difficult to compare, which increases the researcher's responsibility during the interpretive process.

5.1 Selection of Participants

The study is based on three interviews with teacher educators who all teach sociology within two different teacher education programs: a subject teacher program and a professional program for qualified teachers. The selection was made through what Repstad (1999) refers to as *subjective sampling*, where participants are chosen for their relevant experience and knowledge rather than randomly. This type of selection is suitable when the research area requires specific expertise or interest, as was the case here.

Two participants are women and one is a man, all with several years of experience as teacher educators. All participants have experience teaching both sociology and subject didactics within higher education, although the degree varied. The participants were selected to be able to show the variation between the subject teacher program and the proficiency program. Three interviews were judged sufficient to understand the perception of sociology didactics in this study, given the fact that there are few teacher programs in sociology generally and few sociology teachers specifically. Another reason was the time constraint in the masters course. To protect anonymity, the

participants are referred to as respondent 1 (R1), respondent 2 (R2), and respondent 3 (R3) throughout the study.

5.2 Procedure

Participants were first contacted via e-mail with a formal request to participate (see Appendix 2). After consent was obtained, interview times and locations were scheduled according to the participants' preferences. Following Ryen's (2004) recommendation to create a comfortable interview setting, each participant was given the opportunity to choose time and place. The interviews were conducted in the respondents private offices at the university. At the start of each interview, participants were informed about the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the assurance of confidentiality.

Each interview lasted between 50 and 75 minutes and were recorded with the participants' permission. The recordings were then transcribed. The semi structured interview guide was designed in alignment with the research questions and covered the following main themes:

- How teacher educators perceive the role of subject didactics in teacher education,
- How they reflect on the development of sociology didactics,
- How they relate theory, practice, and teaching proficiency in their teaching.

5.3 Processing of the Transcripts and Thematic Analysis

The data analysis followed a process. First, all transcripts were read through several times to gain an overall understanding. Significant statements and recurring patterns were then coded and organized into thematic categories. The analysis was inspired by the thematic analysis approach described by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2006, 2023), where selection of themes are made consciously. This meant that I read the transcripts several times and made inductive, semantic codes myself. I then grouped similar codes into preliminary themes (for example "didactics as a parallel process," "Skolverket obligations," "priority of subject knowledge," "lack of resources").

In a second, more deductive step I looked at these themes again using Basil Bernstein's concepts *the pedagogic device* and *vertical/horizontal knowledge* to see how the teacher educators recontextualised knowledge. This stepwise analytical process

follows the research questions and is also reflected in how the results and analysis are structured in the thesis. The findings are first presented and, where relevant, related to previous research, and are then further analysed using Bernstein's theoretical framework. This is a conscious choice. Since sociology didactics is an under-researched field, it felt reasonable to first analyse the findings in relation to what we already know, before moving to a more theoretical interpretation of what the results might mean for sociology didactics and sociology didactics in teacher education. The aim of this approach is to be transparent and structured in how the analysis develops, moving step by step from empirical material, to research, and then to theory.

5.4 Positionality

As a researcher, my own professional background as a qualified sociology teacher has inevitably influenced both the design and interpretation of this study. My personal experience of having experienced the lack of clear subject didactic foundations during my own teacher education informed the initial research interest and the choice of focus. This insider perspective has been an asset in understanding the participants' reasoning and in interpreting their reflections.

At the same time, it has required careful consideration to avoid allowing my own assumptions or experiences to shape the analysis. Throughout the research process, I have sought to maintain what Repstad (1999) calls a balance between *closeness and distance*, acknowledging my familiarity with the context while continuously questioning my own interpretations. To enhance transparency, I have kept reflective notes during both the interview and analysis phases, documenting my reasoning and potential biases.

This positional awareness has been important for strengthening the transparency of the analysis and for making clear how the findings are rooted in the participants' perspectives rather than in my own expectations as a sociology teacher. However, the interviews in this study are treated not as neutral windows into the respondents' inner thoughts, but as situated conversations in which meaning was constructed between interviewer and respondent. Since the interviews were semi-structured, the respondents were able to influence the direction of the conversation, but the themes, follow-up questions, and framing of the topic were still shaped by the research purpose and by my own understanding of sociology didactics.

This is particularly important because I entered the interviews with previous experience as a qualified sociology teacher and with a personal interest in the lack of clear subject didactic foundations in sociology teacher education. This position may have influenced both the questions I asked and the aspects of the respondents' answers that I chose to follow up. For example, when respondents spoke about the relation between subject knowledge and teaching practice, my own professional experience may have made me especially attentive to statements that confirmed the importance of connecting theory and practice.

At the same time, the respondents were teacher educators with their own professional authority and experience. The interview situation therefore involved a meeting between different forms of knowledge: my experience as a sociology teacher and student researcher, and their experience as teacher educators in higher education. The data should therefore be understood as produced within this interaction, rather than as independent of it.

To handle this limitation, I have tried to be transparent about my position and to distinguish between the respondents' statements and my own interpretations in the analysis. Nevertheless, the findings should be read as interpretations of interview accounts, not as direct observations of how sociology didactics is practiced in teacher education.

5.5 Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council (2024). Participants were informed both orally and in writing about the purpose of the study, that participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw at any point without explanation. All collected data were treated confidentially, and recordings and transcripts were securely stored so that no unauthorized person could access them.

As Repstad (1999) points out, qualitative interviews always involve a risk that the researcher's own values may influence interpretation. This is also emphasized by Oliver (2020), who highlights the importance of reflexivity and the researcher's responsibility to be aware of how their position and assumptions may shape both the research process and its outcomes. Oliver (2020) also stresses that ethical considerations

are not limited to formal procedures at the beginning of a study, but need to be continuously reflected upon throughout the entire research process.To minimize this, all interviews were recorded and carefully transcribed to ensure that the analysis was based on the participants' statements. During the interviews, I kept an open and neutral approach, asking follow up questions that were broad to avoid steering the conversation.

The purpose of the study is not to generalize but to give insight into how teacher educators understand and reason about subject didactics within sociology teacher education. The study in this way aims to contribute to a possible understanding of how subject didactic perspectives are perceived and practiced in higher education.

6. Findings

This section presents the key findings from the interviews with the teacher educators. The findings are presented in two segments, according to the research questions, where the first presents the teachers' perceptions of the role of subject didactics in teacher education where the three teachers are part of organising and teaching the content in various courses. The second segment focuses on the possible development teacher educators see for the role of subject didactics in teacher education. In the section connections to the literature review will be made to confirm or contrast the findings in relation to the research presented. That interpretation will later be the base for the analysis of the findings using Bernstein's theory of the pedagogic device. The transcripts of the interviews are illustrated with representative quotes from the respondents R1, R2 and R3 respectively.

6.1 How Do Teacher Educators Perceive the Role of Subject Didactics in Teacher Education?

During the interviews, different understandings of subject didactics were noticed among the three respondents. While R2 immediately answered that "there is no subject didactics in sociology" and that there is very little research done on subject didactics in the social sciences overall, R1 refers to subject didactics as a part of the acquired competence of "a teacher through the work experience of a teacher that is good at his/her job". Didactic literature and general didactic models in textbooks are described by R1 as "too abstract to use effectively", and R1 points to discussion as a better way of

practicing subject didactics instead of reading theoretical examples or learning terminology: “otherwise you just get stuck in the language or theory or models (…) you need to connect the discussion on what, how and why to a context” (R1).

The discussion on the lack of subject didactics in sociology becomes evident in this discussion. R1 and R2 both point to that fact but in different ways. While R2 points out the fact that sociology didactics is missing entirely, R1 instead highlights that subject didactics is either implicitly acquired through professional practice or developed through reflective discussion that connects teaching content to context “I have no research supporting this but my experience is that as soon as I connect didactics to the specific subject I teach, it becomes understandable to the students”. This reasoning by R1 mirrors what Brantefors (2016) describes as a process of engaging critically with teaching traditions and reflecting on what, how, and why knowledge is taught. In this sense, R1’s description aligns with the idea that subject didactics functions as a dynamic bridge between theory and practice (Shüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009; Ongstad, 2006) rather than as a set of abstract models.

This interpretation is further supported by Elstad (2023) and Carlgren (2023), who both highlight that Swedish teacher education has long struggled to integrate theory and practice. Elstad and Carlgren both point out that teacher education programs often treat subject knowledge, pedagogy, methodology, and practice as separate components rather than as interconnected dimensions of teaching proficiency. The resistance R1 expresses toward general didactic models as “too abstract” itself illustrates the fact that the general and separated design is un-useful. What R1 seems to suggest; situated reflections and contextual discussions, might in fact instead be close to the transformative process Ongstad (2006) refers to as *omstilling*: the continual adaptation of subject knowledge to specific teaching situations that could be an example of sociology didactics using Ongstad’s term. Consequently, even though R1 claims not to engage with subject didactics since the course syllabi is not structured that way, this description of practice exemplifies the very core of subject didactic transformation as described by Ongstad (2006). In this sense, R1’s practical orientation can be understood as bridging the gap between theoretical frameworks and lived teaching experience, something that the literature identifies as central to developing professional teaching proficiency (Elstad, 2023; Carlgren, 2023).

Furthermore, R1’s interpretation demonstrates how, in the absence of established sociology didactics, teacher educators may compensate through what Brantefors (2016)

describes as critical reflection on disciplinary traditions. This also mirrors the broader challenge identified by Azarian (2017) and Sandahl (2018), who note that sociology and social science didactics remains underdeveloped as a field. R1's implicit approach can therefore be seen as an example of how subject didactics emerges through practice even when it is not formally recognized or named as such.

The third respondent (R3) concludes in the interview that the teachers attending the profession program already are teachers and therefore do not need to learn the didactic skills they already possess through their previous teacher education and teaching experience. When it comes to the profession program, R3 states that the learning goals of the course plan for future sociology teachers that focus on didactical skills were added by Skolverket and are "something we are obligated to do" (R3). In this conception, didactics is understood as something general, "something larger" (R3), to be applied to any discipline. It also shows an understanding of didactics as a separate goal and sometimes unnecessary, taking time from what is important. R2 voices the same experience when arguing that the learning outcomes connected to didactic skills is something forced in by Skolverket "...specifically in the profession program were we teach practicing teachers with years of experience, the assignments seem to easy and do not support learning in the way it should" (R2). R1 also mentions the way Skolverket has phrased the didactic learning outcomes "with focus on equity, non-discrimination and assessment". This understanding of didactics as a general framework rather than a subject specific practice reflects what Sjöström (2020) warns against. The tendency to let general pedagogy replace the need for specialized didactic knowledge. R2 and R3's position may therefore reveal how institutional structures promote general didactics while missing the importance of transforming subject knowledge into teachable content, a process central to subject didactics. This might be explained by and contribute to a lack of professional language, as Elstad (2023) pointed out, and coherence within teacher education which risks reinforcing the view of didactics as a bureaucratic or general requirement rather than a subject specific process developing the teaching proficiency of future teachers.

R1 and R2 further reflect on the fact that the students in the professional program already are skilled teachers: "the level is higher than with the students in the full program" (R2), and R1 says it is important not to "state the obvious" to someone already knowing. A conclusion one can draw from this line of reasoning is that teaching proficiency draws on experience. It is difficult to know why R1, R2 and R3 find the

students in the professional program more skilled but one factor other than experience alone might be that the students as practicing teachers might already be walking back and forth across the "bridge" between subject knowledge and teaching practice, as described by Shüllerqvist and Osbeck (2009) and Ongstad (2006) drawing on the experience from teaching other subjects but without naming or theorizing it as subject didactics in sociology. In this light, the teachers' reflections might be seen as early forms of such bridging practices, where subject knowledge is transformed into educational meaning through experience and contextual understanding. Sociology didactics may already exist in practice as an implicit and evolving process that integrates theory, context, and reflection in the profession program and in schools, even in the absence of formal recognition and supported by teaching proficiency acquired from actual teaching and subject didactics in teacher education.

The descriptions given in the interviews connects to what both Azarian (2017) and Ginnerskov (2023) describe when accounting for the American initiatives on using the concept of for example sociological thinking, the lived experiences and a pragmatic stance (Ekendahl et al., 2015) when creating content for teacher education, but are not detailed enough or studied in practice to be sure of that fact.

6.1.1 Perceived Differences Between the Programs

When R3 describes how the didactic learning outcomes are examined in the professional program, R3 explains that "a separate assignment in the form of a *didactical diary* runs as a red thread through all the courses". This choice even further signals that didactics is treated as an add-on or separate process that is kept separate from learning subject knowledge, and assessed elsewhere, rather than being an integrated part of what counts as knowing sociology for teaching. This makes up another example of the separation of components in Swedish teacher education rather than their integration into a coherent professional knowledge base or teaching proficiency (Carlgren, 2023; Elstad, 2023). The diary, while offering space for reflection, risks positioning subject didactics outside core subject studies instead of embedding transformation work (*omstilling*) within the subject learning itself (Ongstad, 2006; Shüllerqvist & Osbeck, 2009).

Both R3 and R2 state that the professional program has been explicitly aligned to the upper-secondary syllabus, "we wrote and planned it according to Gy11" R3 states. This alignment exemplifies what Ekendahl et al. (2015) describe as a utility

oriented stance: structuring content so it is meaningful for future teachers' anticipated practice. R2 develops the reasoning saying "we cannot work like that in the long program since the experience just is not there". A possible consequence might be that sociology teachers trained in the subject teacher program will be less proficient when starting their careers. A conclusion supported by Alsterlund (2023) in the study of the consequences of the lack of subject didactics in subject teacher programs for future history teachers and by Sjöström (2020). In contrast, R1 notes that the subject teacher program is not designed around school course plans "partly because those plans change". One can argue that the professional program with this insight chooses its content from curricular aims while the subject teacher program derives it from the academic discipline. Sandahl (2020) supports this understanding when he concludes there is a difference between who influences the curricula at university and in school respectively.

6.1.3 Limitations

There also seems to be an understanding among the teacher educators of didactics as something taking up time from more important course content instead of being a way to teach that same content. R2 for example states that it would have been more rewarding if Skolverket had written the syllabi in a way that would have allowed students to critically assess the syllabi itself, asking what R2 call "sociological questions " and exemplifies "..what discourses affect the syllabi and what view on knowledge does that imply?". If subject didactics is understood as a way of connecting subject knowledge with the context in which it is studied it should not be treated as an activity separated from subject knowledge (Ekendahl et al., 2015). In R2's view sociology didactical approaches instead could be the kind of meta analysis proposed above.

The teachers also speak of the time constraints as an obstacle for spending more time on didactics and all three state that it is more important to spend time on subject knowledge. R1 says that "with more resources, time on subject didactics could absolutely be something to spend time on but as it is now, my priority is subject knowledge" (R1). R1's reflection reveals a systemic issue identified by Elstad (2023): the uneven allocation of teaching hours, which does not seem to leave room for didactic development. As R1, R2, and R3 note, the teachers have limited classroom time "four hours a week with students" as R2 concludes, which restricts opportunities for

exploration of subject didactic strategies. This lack of time can make teaching feel fragmented and may contribute to what R1 describes as a sense of meaninglessness or loss of focus on what is most central in the subject.

At the same time, the literature (Carlgren, 2023; Brantefors, 2016) suggests that more time alone may not be sufficient; what is needed is also *better structuring* of how subject didactics is integrated. Rather than adding separate sessions or assignments, the challenge is to design learning activities where didactic transformation is practiced within subject work. As Ongstad (2006) and Shüllerqvist and Osbeck (2009) propose, this means cultivating spaces where teachers and students engage in continual *omstilling*: transforming abstract sociological ideas into contextualized teaching knowledge.

Finally, as Elstad (2023) and Azarian (2017) both point out, the increasing alignment of teacher education with overarching national goals and standardization efforts (e.g., Gy11, Skolverket) can further hinder flexibility in course design. When teachers must cover a broad range of mandated content, less time remains for contextual or creative engagement with core disciplinary questions. This trend may risk diluting what R1 calls the "meaningful" aspects of sociology teaching. Addressing this requires not only more time but also more autonomy and professional space for teacher educators to engage in subject didactic inquiry as part of their regular teaching work. As R1 puts it "there is a need for more flexibility" within teacher education. The teachers' remarks that didactic outcomes are "obligations" (R2, R3) can be read as connected to research *on* teacher education where logic overrules the practice oriented research teacher education (Hallsén, 2013). In this thesis however, the focus has been on the latter and does not dwell into this any further. In the next segment the teachers reflect on how they would like to develop their work with subject didactics if they had the opportunity.

6.2 How Do Teacher Educators Reflect on the Development of Sociology Didactics?

The interviews show that while all three teacher educators value subject knowledge they differ in how they exemplify the role subject didactics could have within sociology teacher education. Their responses reveal both the absence of an established didactic framework in sociology and the strategies educators possess to connect theoretical

knowledge to teaching practice. The findings confirm broader patterns in Swedish teacher education described by Elstad (2023) and Carlgren (2023) as shown above: a separation of theory, subject content, and practical teaching experience, but they also reflect what Azarian (2017) identifies as the particular challenge of developing a didactic framework for sociology.

6.2.1 Importance of Subject Knowledge

All three teacher educators emphasize that strong subject knowledge is the foundation of effective teaching. As R3 states, "otherwise they have nothing to tell the students." R2 similarly explains, "I start with the what, but I try to remind my students to keep the profession in the back of their minds all the time." This orientation toward content aligns with Elstad's (2023) and Carlgren's (2023) observations that Swedish teacher education has historically been organized around separate components rather than around their integration. When program structures support theoretical content, it becomes natural for educators to prioritize "the what" and treat didactics as an additional or secondary layer. Although the teachers are familiar with the concept of subject didactics, they do not regard it as central to sociology teacher education. Perhaps because of the lack of literature and research defining what sociology didactics could be or how it might be applied in practice.

This emphasis directly mirrors the problem Azarian (2017) identifies in his report on sociology didactics at Uppsala University. According to Azarian, the absence of a defined didactic framework in sociology forces teacher educators to rely on broad theoretical surveys, what he calls "encyclopedic" teaching, rather than on guiding principles that help translate theory into practice. Because sociologists have not reached agreement on the discipline's theoretical or methodological core, educators are left with the challenge of deciding what knowledge is most relevant for future teachers. This uncertainty, visible in R2's and R3's reflections, results in a focus on subject knowledge.

However, Azarian (2017) does not suggest narrowing the field to a fixed canon; instead, he proposes emphasizing sociological imagination and sociological thinking as *didactic processes* that help students connect theory to social experience. Ekendahl et al (2015) agrees with him when they suggest a pragmatic focus on the future needs of teacher students. From this perspective, R1's belief that "didactics should always be connected to subject knowledge" can be interpreted as compatible with Azarian's

processual approach: didactics is not something external but rather the *means* by which subject knowledge becomes teachable.

6.2.2 Best Practice

Azarian (2017) and Sandahl (2018), both emphasize the need for clearer definitions of what constitutes the subject's core and, as Ginnerskov (2023) argues, focusing on processes such as sociological thinking and imagination might offer a way forward to meeting that need; focusing on transformation and contextualization instead of mutual understandings of specific content. Moreover, Azarian (2017) and Ginnerskov (2023) propose that focusing on sociological processes, such as *the sociological imagination*, can serve as a didactic tool to bridge the gap between abstract academic theory and the professional practice of teaching. In this understanding a pragmatic stance once again is suggested to meet the needs of future teachers. The respondents all reason about the same focus on the process being typically sociological even if they do not label it as such. R1 mentions the classroom discussions as mentioned previously and the continuous focus on the future classroom but also collaborations between teacher education and schools "where our students practice on, for example giving feedback and tutoring real pupils in upper secondary school [...] I would like to see more of that [...] the students are aware of the real situation and it makes it more important to them" (R1). R2 brings up the meta-reflection and the sociological thinking as an example of a sociological analysis as mentioned before but also speaks of the importance of reflection in general and mentions the seminar as an important way to apply sociological thinking "we have introduced obligatory seminars in the subject teacher program [...] we do not assess the students but make them participate since we believe they are important". R3 proposes sociological method as a didactical approach that should be given more space in the case one would want to work more with subject didactics "I think observation of real societal phenomena is essential". R3 also mentions the "sociological conversation and general reflection" as important processes for supporting sociological thinking. "I also think reading and writing is essential", R3 says. The least common denominator in the three teachers examples one can conclude is reflection in interaction through discussions, collaborative analysis, and engagement with literature. R1 emphasizes that students must continually consider "what they are going to use their knowledge for." It is in those conversations, R1 explains, that the

“didactical questions: what, how, and why, actually happen.” R2 describes sociology as “stepping outside of yourself to reflect on a subject, informing yourself of other experiences,” while R3 stresses the value of conducting studies that “start in the personal experience but travel outside yourself to understand other people’s circumstances.” R2 points to the critical perspective as central, and R3 underscores “the need for constant analysis of power and control.” These descriptions resonate with Azarian’s (2017) findings from Uppsala University. According to Azarian, the solution is not to codify content but to emphasize *processes* such as learning to connect the individual with the structural and the local with the global. In the respondents’ emphasis on reflection, self distancing, and analysis of power, we can see these processual skills being practiced informally. Their approaches exemplify what Ginnerskov (2023) later calls “recreating a lived practice” of sociology teaching: cultivating students’ ability to think sociologically rather than memorize content.

R3’s focus on empirical methods and inquiry based learning “I believe in letting the pupils in school perform their own sociological studies” also aligns with Ekendahl et al.’s (2015) pragmatic model. Ekendahl and colleagues argue that teacher education should make content *useful* by restructuring it according to the recipients’ professional needs. In this case, methodological training becomes meaningful when it changes from a research-oriented exercise into a pedagogical process: helping teacher students learn how to guide pupils in sociological inquiry. This form of transformation also exemplifies Ongstad’s (2006) concept of *omstilling*.

7. Analysis

This section analyses the findings using Basil Bernstein’s theory of the *Pedagogic Device* and his concepts of *vertical* and *horizontal knowledge*. The analysis builds on the previous section, where the findings were first related to existing research. In this chapter, the results are further interpreted using Bernstein’s theoretical framework in order to deepen the understanding of how sociology didactics is recontextualized within teacher education.The aim is to understand how the teachers' reasoning and their choices can be understood through the relations between the fields of production, recontextualization, and reproduction (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002). In line with the critical discussion in section 4.4, the analysis uses Bernstein to identify structural

patterns of recontextualization, while also recognizing that the respondents' accounts involve professional judgement and situated meaning-making.

7.1 How Do Teacher Educators Recontextualize Sociology Didactics in Teacher Education?

The interviews show that the teacher educators interpret and use subject didactics in different ways implicitly. Using Bernstein's model, it can be interpreted as examples of how knowledge moves through the *Pedagogic Device* and is transformed in the *field of recontextualization* (Bernstein, 2000).

7.1.1 The Recontextualization Field: Absent research and implicit subject didactics

When R2 states that "there is no subject didactics in sociology," and the other teachers' reasoning underscores that fact, this points to a weak connection between the field of production, where knowledge is created, and the field of recontextualization, where it is transformed for teaching. Since there is very little research performed on sociology didactics, teacher educators lack a clear knowledge base from the field of production to use. This means that they must rely on their own professional experiences or on general didactics instead of subject specific didactic research.

R1's description of subject didactics as something that "a good teacher learns through experience" and the other teachers' examples of what they find important when teaching future educators in sociology, show how teacher educators themselves become responsible for pedagogizing within what Bernstein calls the pedagogic recontextualizing field (PRF). Without formal research to draw from, they create their own versions of subject didactics based on practical experience and reflection or as shown leave it up to their students, at least the ones with experience from teaching. Even if for example R1's approach to connect theory, content, and discussion "to a context" shows a general process of transformation from abstract theory to teaching practice; Another example of active recontextualization inside the PRF (Bernstein, 2000).

R3's explanation that the didactic goals in the profession program are "added by Skolverket" shows the influence of the official recontextualizing field (ORF), which includes policy documents and formal requirements. When R3 and R2 describe these goals as "obligations" and R1 wishes for more "flexibility" in teacher education in

general it reflects how the ORF sets boundaries for what counts as valid content in the teacher education, excluding potentially useful goals of subject didactics in the eyes of the teachers. In Bernstein's terms, this means that the ORF leaves limited space for the PRF to develop subject specific approaches on its own.

This difference between an implicitly created approach and a policy driven understanding illustrates how the recontextualization field is shaped by both top down-control, from the ORF and bottom up-practice, from the PRF. As concluded above Bernstein sees the role of *pedagogizing* or translating the content to become understandable for people outside of the expert field falling on *the recontextualization field* inside educational institutions in higher education. The question is how educational institutions perform that task when research from the production field is scarce. This would be an aspect to follow up on with more research since it is not examined in this study.

7.1.2 Balancing Vertical and Horizontal Knowledge

Bernstein (1999; 2000) describes vertical knowledge as structured, theoretical, and abstract, while horizontal knowledge is practical, everyday, and context based. In the findings, the teacher educators show different ways of balancing these forms of knowledge.

Again, Bernstein describes pedagogizing as an example of the translating the recontextualization field does to make specialized knowledge accessible to people in the production field (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002) R1's emphasis on connecting discussions to teaching contexts shows an effort to move between vertical and horizontal knowledge as an example of pedagogizing. This ability to "slide" between the two is also interpreted as central to teaching proficiency and possibly sociology didactics; the ability of translating complex theory into forms that students can relate to. R1's suggestion of situating discussions in concrete teaching situations allows the students to see how theory can be applied in the classroom, which strengthens both understanding and engagement.

R1, R2 and R3, on the other hand, all emphasize subject knowledge as the main priority. Their focus on "the what" reflects a stronger orientation toward vertical knowledge and less toward horizontal integration. When they describe didactics as something that takes time away from subject content, it shows that theoretical and

practical aspects are still treated as separate even if that fact is the consequence of control from the ORF as the respondents say when they point to Skolverkets control of curricula. According to Bernstein (2000), this separation can make the recontextualization process weaker, since knowledge is not being translated into pedagogic procedures.

7.1.3 Differences Between the Two Programs and the Pedagogic Device

The differences between the two programs (the subject teacher program and the profession program) can also be understood through Bernstein's three fields. The subject teacher program, which is more closely connected to university research, reflects the field of production, where the knowledge is academic and theoretical. The profession program, on the other hand, is more directly connected to the field of reproduction, where knowledge is shaped by the school curriculum and everyday teaching.

R3's statement that the professional program was "planned by us according to Gy11" shows that the program is directly influenced by the PRF, while the subject teacher program draws its structure from the academic discipline and the ORF. Using Bernstein (2000) a consequence of the ORF having strong control, the content is adapted to fit official demands rather than developed through professional judgment. The teachers' remarks that didactic outcomes are shoe-horned in can also be explained by research *on* teacher education where logic overrules the practice oriented research teacher education. The scope of this essay does not allow any further analysis of policy enactment but it would definitely be interesting to study further. However, this might also explain why the professional program tends to separate didactics from subject content through assignments like the "didactic diary." Although the diary supports reflection, it positions didactics as something parallel rather than integrated, weakening the link between vertical and horizontal knowledge. The PRF might be influenced by the ORF even when they could decide differently.

7.1.4 Constraints in the Recontextualization Field

The teachers' descriptions of time limitations and lack of resources can also be understood through Bernstein's theory. Bernstein (2000) describes how institutional structures can give teachers limited freedom in how they organize teaching and

knowledge as explained above. When R1 and R2 say they would spend more time on didactics "if there were more resources," it shows how external structures affect what can be prioritized.

This situation leads to a weaker recontextualization process, since the educators do not have time to perform activities e.g. reflect collectively on how to transform theory into teaching practice. The result is that subject knowledge remains at the theoretical level and vertical knowledge instead of being translated into horizontal, practical understanding. In Bernstein's terms, this means that the pedagogic device becomes dominated by the ORF, where structure and control limit creativity and reflection.

7.2 How Do Teacher Educators Reflect on the Development of Sociology Didactics?

The teacher educators' reflections on how sociology didactics could be developed can also be understood as attempts to strengthen the pedagogic recontextualizing field. Even if there is little research available, they still try to create connections between theory, practice, and school reality, which can be seen as an example of recontextualization.

7.2.1 Recontextualization in Practice

Several of the examples mentioned by the respondents such as classroom discussions, seminars, and collaboration with schools, can be seen as strategies for recontextualization. R1's example of students working with "real pupils in upper secondary school" and R3's suggestion to let pupils perform "their own sociological studies" are both ways of connecting theoretical knowledge to real world contexts. In Bernstein's terminology, these are examples of allowing theory to be transferred into practical understanding (Bernstein, 2000; Singh, 2002).

R2's idea that students should learn to ask "sociological questions" about the curriculum shows how subject knowledge itself can become a didactic tool. When teacher students analyze school documents through a sociological lens, they learn to transform theoretical thinking into teaching practice. This kind of reasoning connects directly to Bernstein's description of recontextualization as a process of translating and transforming knowledge between different contexts.

7.2.2 Sliding Between the Vertical and Horizontal as a Sign of Teaching Proficiency

Bernstein's concept of vertical and horizontal knowledge also helps to understand the respondents' examples of best practice. The activities they describe: reflection, discussion, sociological imagination, and using sociological methods, all require movement between abstract and concrete levels of knowledge.

R2's way of using meta-reflection and sociological analysis and R3's focus on using sociological methods are good examples of how vertical knowledge (theoretical models) and horizontal knowledge (everyday experiences) can be connected. Using Bernstein (2000), this translation between levels can define teaching proficiency. In this sense, the educators' examples show the beginnings of what could become sociology didactics based on practice, even if it has not yet been formally developed as a field. The question if these practices could be examples of working with sociological thinking is interesting and well worth examining further even if the study with its limitations does not give enough data to draw conclusions on that point further.

8. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore and contribute to the development of sociology didactics within teacher education by examining how teacher educators understand its role and how they reflect on its possible future development. The discussion below links the main results to the research purpose and questions and provides an overall interpretation of what the findings show about sociology didactics as a concept and as a practice within teacher education.

8.1 Perceptions of the Role of Subject Didactics

The results show that the teacher educators hold diverse and often implicit understandings of what sociology didactics is and that they do not necessarily label them as such. There is both a perception that sociology didactics is largely absent within teacher education, while simultaneously they associate it with practical experience or general pedagogical skills rather than with subject specific knowledge. These differences reveal a lack of shared understanding and an absence of clear structures for how subject didactics should be included in sociology teacher education.

Overall, subject didactics appears to be something that happens informally in discussions, reflections, and classroom experiences rather than as a defined or theoretically grounded area of study. This reflects the broader challenge within teacher education of integrating theory and practice and confirms Elstad's three criticisms in teacher education. In programs where subject knowledge and pedagogy are treated as separate components, didactics tends to become a parallel or additional activity rather than an integrated part of developing teaching proficiency.

This separation means that teacher educators rely on their personal experience and professional judgement to make connections between theory, content, and teaching. While this results in valuable contextual practices, it also leads to inconsistency in how future teachers encounter and develop subject didactical thinking. The study thus confirms that sociology didactics lacks a clear foundation and that its role in teacher education therefore is weak and undefined.

8.2 Reflections on the Development of Sociology Didactics

Despite this lack of clarity, the educators' reflections point toward possible ways of developing sociology didactics further. In all three interviews, there is a shared belief in process oriented and reflective approaches, linking theory to classroom practice, encouraging students to think critically about their teaching, and a wish for using sociological methods and perspectives as tools for learning.

These reflections suggest that sociology didactics could be understood less as a body of content and more as a way of working that enables students to move between abstract sociological ideas and practical teaching situations. In other words, it is through activities such as discussion, analysis, inquiry, and reflection that subject knowledge becomes teachable. Perhaps if teacher education were organized around such processes, theory and practice would naturally be connected, and students could develop both subject understanding and sociology didactics that can be interpreted as teaching proficiency. The educators' examples: seminars, collaborative projects with schools, and reflective tasks, illustrate that elements of sociology didactics already exist in practice, even if they are not formally named or structured as such. However, while the literature distinguishes between social science didactics and sociology didactics, the teacher educators' practices did not show or reflect on this distinction. Their strategies are process oriented and could most likely work across social science subjects. This

indicates that the foundation for developing sociology didactics is already present within current teaching practices, but it needs to be made explicit. In order to do so more research is needed to learn about what defines sociology didactics in particular.

The study achieves its purpose by identifying how subject didactics is applied, even if it is done implicitly, within existing teaching practices and by showing that its further development depends on recognizing, articulating, and supporting these processes more explicitly in teacher education, with research.

8.3 Limitations and Future Research

The study is based on interviews with three teacher educators from one institutional context. The small number of participants limits the generalizability of the findings. The results should therefore be seen as indicative rather than representative. Moreover, as the study draws on self-reported experiences and reflections, it captures how participants describe their work but not necessarily how it really is in practice. Observational or document based data could have complemented the interviews and strengthened the analysis.

Another limitation concerns my own positionality as a researcher. My own background as a sociology teacher and personal experience of the identified problem likely influence the interpretation of the data. While this perspective also adds valuable understanding, it also risks shaping the analysis toward certain interpretations, particularly the emphasis on connecting theory and practice as a central goal.

A further limitation is that the interview material was co-constructed in interaction between interviewer and respondents. The study therefore captures how sociology didactics was articulated in a specific interview context, rather than providing direct access to stable or pre-existing views. Linked to this limitation is also the limitation of the selected theory. While Bernstein helps explain the structural conditions under which sociology didactics is recontextualized, the framework is less helpful for analysing the micro-level interactional processes through which interviewees construct meaning during the interviews.

Future research could build on this study by including more teacher education programs and teacher educators, in different contexts to see if the patterns identified here are similar across a broader field. Since the study is based on interviews, it would also be valuable to include observations of teaching in order to understand how subject

didactics is actually practiced, not only how it is described by teacher educators. Another possible direction is to include the perspectives of teacher students, to explore how they experience and develop subject didactical understanding during their education.

An important next step for research could also be to examine whether concepts such as sociological thinking or sociological imagination could function as a shared didactic foundation in sociology teacher education. Studying how such process-oriented approaches can be integrated into teaching could contribute to strengthening the connection between theory and practice, and to developing sociology didactics further as a field within higher education.

8.4 Contributions of the Study

What the study does show is how the challenges of teacher education are experienced in practice. First, the findings highlight how sociology didactics is not only unclear as a concept but also held back by practical conditions. Limited time, resources, and institutional support make work with subject didactics seem like an extra task rather than a natural part of teaching.

Second, the study gives a clear example of this separation through the examples of the organisation of teacher education in general and the use of the didactic diary in the professional program specifically. In both cases didactics is handled as a separate activity instead of being built into subject courses. This shows how didactical thinking is often treated as something apart from ordinary learning activities.

Third, the findings reveal that in the professional program, where participants already have classroom experience, didactics tends to become invisible. When teachers already connect theory and practice in their daily work, they no longer name these actions as didactical. This means that teaching proficiency risks remaining unarticulated and therefore difficult to develop further. Especially the link to sociological thinking as a concept and common denominator would be interesting to develop in further research and if the concept could be one way of describing what happens when the production field leaves the recontextualization field to pedagogize and the reproduction field, as a possible consequence of that fact, teaches sociology in secondary school as small university courses without the ability to slide between vertical and horizontal knowledge due to underdeveloped teaching proficiency.

Together, these findings show that the challenges surrounding sociology didactics in teacher education are not only about ideas and definitions, but also about how teacher education is organized and understood in everyday practice. The findings are not only relevant for sociology but can be understood in relation to higher education generally. Research in this field has emphasized the importance of connecting subject knowledge and pedagogy, for example through the concept of PCK (Shulman, 1987), and the need for coherence in teacher education (Carlgren, 2023; Elstad, 2023). The results of this study show what can happen when this connection is weak: subject didactics becomes implicit, fragmented, or treated as something separate rather than as a central part of teaching and learning.

From a higher education perspective, this highlights the importance of structuring teacher education in ways that support the transformation of subject knowledge into teaching proficiency. The study therefore suggests that subject didactics should not only be seen as a discipline-specific issue, but as an important question for higher education pedagogy more broadly, especially in programs that prepare students for a profession.

8.5 Conclusion

This study set out to explore how sociology didactics can be understood and developed within teacher education, by examining how teacher educators perceive its role and possible future development. The findings show that sociology didactics is not clearly defined and often appears as an implicit part of teaching, shaped by experience and context rather than by a shared theoretical framework. At the same time, the study shows that important elements of sociology didactics are already present in practice, especially in activities that connect theory and learning activities such as reflection, discussion and sociological analysis.

The study contributes to higher education pedagogy and teacher education by making these implicit practices visible and by showing the importance of developing subject didactics as part of teaching proficiency. Using Bernstein's concepts, sociology didactics can be understood as a process moving between theoretical and practical knowledge, where teaching involves transforming knowledge into forms that are meaningful in a classroom context.

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Appendix 1

Semi structured interview

Interview questions

Del 1: Personlig ingång och bakgrund

A. Kan du kort beskriva din bakgrund och din roll på lärarutbildningen för blivande sociologilärare? Vilka slags kurser undervisar du i?
B. Hur ser du på relationen mellan ämneskunskap och ämnesdidaktik i dina kurser/för blivande sociologilärare?
C. Vad anser du vara syftet med lärarutbildning i sociologi?

Del 2: Urval av kursinnehåll och anpassning av stoff

(Hur kunskap väljs och omvandlas för lärarutbildning)

A. Hur bestämmer du vilka sociologiska begrepp och teorier som ska inkluderas i dina kurser?
B. Finns det specifika policys eller institutionella riktlinjer som påverkar hur du undervisar i ämnesdidaktik?
C. Ser du några skillnader mellan hur sociologi undervisas akademiskt och inom ramen för lärarutbildning?
D. Hur balanserar du teoretisk kunskap och praktiska didaktiska metoder när du förbereder lärarstudenter?
E. I vilken utsträckning anser du att du undervisar explicit i ämnesdidaktik i dina kurser? Kan du ge ett exempel?

Del 3: Undervisningspraktik och pedagogisk kommunikation

(Hur kunskap överförs till lärarstudenter)

A. Hur tror du att studenter bäst lär sig att undervisa i sociologi i sin framtida yrkesutövning?
B. Hur bedömer du att lärarstudenter förstår och kan tillämpa ämnesdidaktik i slutet av sin utbildning?
C. Hur upplever du att lärarstudenter reagerar på undervisningen i ämnesdidaktik? Finns vanliga svårigheter eller missförstånd?

D. Vilka specifika didaktiska metoder eller verktyg anser du är mest effektiva för att lära ut sociologi?

E. (Vilka undervisningsstrategier använder du för att hjälpa lärarstudenter att engagera sig i ämnesdidaktik?)

Del 4: Utmaningar och möjligheter

A. Vilka är de största utmaningarna du möter i undervisningen av ämnesdidaktik?
B. Finns det några personliga, strukturella eller institutionella hinder som påverkar hur du integrerar ämnesdidaktik i lärarutbildningen?
C. Hur upplever du att styrdokument och kursplaner påverkar din undervisning? Finns det något du skulle vilja förändra?
D. Vilka möjligheter ser du för att stärka ämnesdidaktik i lärarutbildningen?
E. Vilket stöd eller vilka resurser skulle hjälpa dig att förbättra din undervisning i ämnesdidaktik?

Del 5: Reflektion

A. Har din syn på hur sociologi bör undervisas i lärarutbildning förändrats under din tid som lärarutbildare? I så fall hur?
B. Om du kunde förändra en sak i hur ämnesdidaktik integreras i lärarutbildningen, vad skulle det vara?
C. Hur tänker du övergripande att du skulle förklara skillnaden mellan hur ni undervisar i ämnesdidaktik och hur ni skulle vilja undervisa i ämnesdidaktik på lärarprogrammet i sociologi?
D. Finns det något annat du vill tillägga som vi inte har diskuterat?

Appendix 2

Information Letter in Swedish to the Participants

Information om studien kring ämnesdidaktik på lärarutbildningen

Denna studie genomförs som en del av en masteruppsats inom masterutbildningen *Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* vid Malmö universitet. Studien syftar till att undersöka lärarutbildares erfarenheter av ämnesdidaktik inom professionsprogram för blivande lärare. Fokus ligger på utbildarnas uppfattningar om möjligheter och utmaningar i planering av kursinnehåll och undervisning i relation till ämnesdidaktik.

Studien genomförs genom intervjuer under mars 2025. Intervjuerna beräknas ta cirka 45 minuter vardera och kommer att utgå från lärarutbildares erfarenhet av ämnesdidaktiskt arbete på lärarutbildningen. För att säkerställa en god intervjumiljö bör samtalet ske ostört, vid en tid och plats som du väljer.

Intervjun kommer att spelas in och transkriberas. All information behandlas konfidentiellt och förvaras säkert så att obehöriga inte kan ta del av den. Alla deltagare samt lärosätets namn kommer att anonymiseras i den slutliga redovisningen. Resultaten presenteras både i en muntlig presentation för andra masterstudenter och i en skriftlig masteruppsats. När masteruppsatsen är godkänd kommer den att finnas tillgänglig i akademiska databaser. Inspelningarna och transkriptionerna raderas när uppsatsen är färdig och godkänd. Du har möjlighet att ta del av den färdiga uppsatsen om du önskar. Ditt deltagande är frivilligt, och du kan när som helst avbryta din medverkan utan att ange orsak.

Vänliga hälsningar,
Elin Dahmberg

Samtycke:
☐ Ja, jag vill delta i studien

Namnteckning Namnförtydligande

Plats, datum