



XLII / SULF PUBLICATIONS

Academic teachership
/Klara Bolander Laksov & Max Scheja





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Authors: Klara Bolander Laksov & Max Scheja, Department of Education,
Stockholms university

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Preface

Education as an antidote to hostility to knowledge and resistance to facts is a decisive factor for constructive and democratic development. Education must therefore be of the very best quality and all attempts that reduce quality must be resisted. However, the conditions for university teachers to develop their teaching is far from optimal. That is why SULF (The Swedish Association of University Teachers and Researchers) has intensified its efforts to create the right conditions to strengthen higher education teaching. This is absolutely vital if teaching is to be able to adapt to a variety of forms and meet the needs of a variety of students.

SULF, with this publication, wishes to contribute to the ongoing development of the higher education pedagogical debate. We have invited two Swedish professors in the field of higher education pedagogics, Klara Bolander Laksov and Max Scheja, to write this text that we hope will come to good use in higher education.

SULF demands the following measures for the development of academic teachership and to ensure the quality of higher education:

The State must:

- Guarantee that a future system for the allocation of resources provides the right conditions for university teachers to develop their academic teachership in the best possible way.
- Prevent the reduction of resources by cancelling the productivity deduction.

The higher education institutions must:

- Ensure that all teachers are given time and opportunities to conduct academic teachership. The time allowed for pedagogical development must be clearly stated in the worktime contract
- Offer all teachers continual pedagogical competence development that is based on research and proven experience.
- Ensure that at every higher education institution there are clear criteria for assessing pedagogical merit for careers, recruitment and salary setting.
- Create arenas that make it possible for teachers to meet and conduct a dialogue about higher education pedagogical development.

Mats Ericson, president of SULF



Introduction

Summary

This text introduces the idea of academic teachership. Academic teachership can best be described as *an approach whereby a teacher continuously and systematically reflects on, investigates and develops her or his pedagogical practice and its influence on the students' learning*. We examine the various dimensions that contribute to forming the framework of fruitful teachership.

First, we examine the *individual dimension* of academic teachership whereby the individual teacher's reflections on personal experiences from various teaching contexts form an important platform for the development of her/his pedagogical practice as a professional university teacher.

Second, we draw attention to the *collegial dimension* of academic teachership. This concerns the ways in which university teachers present reflections and arguments concerning their own pedagogical practice in a dialogue with their colleagues.

Third, we explore the *institutional dimension* of academic teachership. These are the institutional frameworks that a department, institute or college creates to stimulate the continuous and systematic examination of educational activities.

Introduction

This text aims to introduce the idea of academic teachership in higher education. First, we describe the background and emergence of the phenomenon that has come to be called academic teachership, *akademiskt lärarskap* in Swedish, and then show how the term academic teachership itself has evolved in the Swedish context. The text concludes by clarifying our own understanding of what academic teachership implies at an individual, a collegial and an institutional levels.

Academic teachership can be said to have originated in a discussion about the ways in which the various tasks that university teachers are required to carry out are organised as constitutive parts of an academic institution. Academic activities are often carried out with the emphasis on certain tasks rather

than others; conflicts normally arise from the ways in which the distribution between different tasks should be organised. In the early 1990s Ernest Boyer, then President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the United States, raised this issue in a text entitled *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Boyer, 1990). This text discusses how different aspects of academic activities are prioritised, actualised and valued in relation to potential career paths for teachers in higher education; Boyer distinguishes four forms of scholarship: 1. The scholarship of discovery, 2. The scholarship of integration, 3. The scholarship of application, 4. The scholarship of teaching.

The way in which Boyer uses the term 'scholarship' leads to a broader understanding of the word "vetenskap" in Swedish [Eng. 'science'], thus foregrounding various dimensions of scientific activity. Boyer's reflections at the time reflected a more general problem involving a tendency to value one-sidedly research efforts; in the text Boyer argues for a more balanced view in which all forms of scholarship in academia – including the scholarship of teaching – are valued according to the fundamental functions they fill in the academic world.



Here, then, is our conclusion. What we urgently need today is a more inclusive view of what it means to be a scholar – a recognition that knowledge is acquired through research, through synthesis, through practice, and through teaching. We acknowledge that these four categories – the scholarship of discovery, of integration, of application, and of teaching – divide intellectual functions that are tied inseparably to each other. Still, there is value, we believe, in analyzing the various kinds of academic work while also acknowledging that they dynamically interact, forming an interdependent whole. Such a vision of scholarship, one that recognizes the great diversity of talent within the professoriate, also may prove especially useful to faculty as they reflect on the meaning and direction of their professional lives.”
(Boyer, 1990 s. 24-25)

Thirty years later, the issue of how universities and university colleges should balance the different components of academic activities in their merit systems is still alive. Boyer's ideas about teaching have gained wide international im-

pact and developed into an organisational force that, in terms of the somewhat broader term "Scholarship of Teaching and Learning" (SoTL), brings together and conceptualises systematic educational development efforts and their impact on student learning in different educational contexts (Trigwell & Shale, 2004).

In order to understand how SoTL has come to influence the educational development discussion in Sweden, an international outlook will be helpful in describing some of its key development lines which have influenced the Swedish conception of academic teachership.

Thirty years of development towards academic teachership and its consequences

Thus the status of research and teaching in the higher education sector constitutes a central question of the SoTL movement (Chalmers, 2011). However, from an international perspective, SoTL has taken different directions in different parts of the world. Some may involve a strong focus on the individual's SoTL practice, that is, how university teachers exercise their teachership. Other directions focus on how different disciplines tend to influence different teaching practices, and yet others focus on questions relating to the reward structure and capacity building among academics and on the potential of particular educational programmes to furnish students with knowledge and skills that prepare them for the challenges and complexities of working life/citizenship.

In the United States and Canada, SoTL consists primarily of *publishing* systematic exploratory studies on teachers' own teaching practices. This is in contrast to 'scholarly teaching', which focuses on forms and processes of teaching anchored in research. In Europe and Australasia, a broader view of SoTL has been adopted which focuses more on individual academics' systematic reflection and development and only occasionally leads to publication. Some areas have also highlighted the importance of the national and international context in terms of collaboration, policy issues and the like (Fanghanel, Pritchard et al, 2016). SoTL literature has also dealt with issues concerning the knowledge, skills and abilities that different university degree courses should impart and

The background features a vibrant, abstract composition of stylized tropical foliage. Large, overlapping leaves in shades of green, yellow, and teal are scattered across the frame. Some leaves have intricate patterns, such as pink dots or lines. The overall aesthetic is modern and artistic, with a focus on bold colors and geometric shapes.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

how the development of such qualities can be related to issues of education and employability (Brown & Carasso, 2013).

The development of SoTL has also been strongly linked to various disciplines. Thus, for example, medicine and health education have built their SoTL around the idea of evidence-based teaching where systematic studies lay the foundation for scientifically based teaching practice (Mennin, 2000).

Common to these different directions within SoTL is a strong emphasis on the importance of developing a professional approach to university teaching. In particular SoTL strives to find ways of stimulating student learning, using approaches to teaching based on research and proven experience. This ambition also recognises that changing conditions of higher education – involving broadened participation, increased digitalisation and globalisation – affect university teaching in a number of different ways (Geschwind & Forsberg, 2015).

Let us take a closer look at two of the main branches of SoTL that are brought to the fore in the literature and that are of interest for the ongoing discussion about academic teachership in Sweden: 1) SoTL aimed at improving the status of teaching, and 2) SoTL aimed at improving student learning.

1. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning aimed at improving the status of teaching

One central focus within SoTL is to balance the status of research and of teaching. Boyer's (1990) work marked the starting point of an ongoing reflection on the role of academia in relation to research and teaching. The separation of these activities in terms of what may be more or less productive careerwise, and what counts in terms of quality, has led to a situation in which research, generally speaking, is valued higher than teaching. This applies both to the reputation of academic institutions and to the career development of individual academics (Locke, 2012). This division between teaching and research has become increasingly clear as higher education institutions around the world have had to cope with shrinking resources, alongside a ranking culture involving different forms of quality assurance exercises in relation to both research and education (Locke, 2014).

Especially in the 2010s and beyond, SoTL has come to be used as a strategic framework for bridging teaching and research and countering notions that teaching should be given lower status. It is also in the light of this development that different frameworks for enabling and making visible the assessment of educational qualifications should be seen.

By creating assessment structures, or criteria, to distinguish variations in pedagogical competence and skills, it also becomes possible to reward teachers' pedagogical qualifications. In Sweden, this has so far taken place locally at higher education institutions that have developed local educational merit models (Winka, 2017). Internationally, however, different models and frameworks for assessing pedagogical competence have been developed since the beginning of the 2000s, such as the UK Professional Standards Framework in the United Kingdom (see <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/ukpsf>) and the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards (see <http://uniteachingcriteria.edu.au/framework/indicative-criteria/indicative-standards-criteria/>)

The question of how pedagogical qualifications can and should be assessed in relation to the central role that teaching plays in academia is, of course, of great interest for the professional development of staff at higher education institutions (associate senior lecturers, lecturers and professors). We will come back to this issue below in relation to discussing the concept of academic teacher-ship from a national perspective.

2. Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to improving student learning

The other strong trend within SoTL has been to stimulate student learning by adopting a systematic and explorative approach to teaching. Lee Shulman, Ernest Boyer's successor as President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in the United States, has been one of the proponents of this particular approach (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999) which stresses that SoTL work needs to include a) peer review procedures, and b) be based on theory and existing research on learning and teaching (Kreber & Cranton, 2000). This SoTL strand has generated a number of tools or taxonomies that have also

been used in Sweden (Kreber & Cranton, 2000; Trigwell & Shale, 2004) to describe different levels of how academics manage to communicate and review their own educational activities.

Over time, more discipline-focused strands of SoTL have also been developed which emphasise the ways in which particular disciplines create particular conditions for teaching in higher education (McKinney, 2013). This development of SoTL has been particularly evident in the United Kingdom, where it has also been emphasised that university teachers must constantly reflect on their own teaching practice and its development and systematically keep up-to-date with relevant studies of learning and teaching. In this way, SoTL has evolved into something of a paradigm for designing and carrying out educational development work in local educational contexts. Often, such efforts have focused on solving practical challenges and problems rather than, as in higher education research, exploring more general issues in relation to ongoing theory development on teaching and learning in higher education (Wright, Finelli, Meizlish, & Bergom, 2011).

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning or pedagogical research

In the literature, there is tension between regarding SoTL as educational research or as development work; and teachers' small-scale studies of their own teaching practice, although they may have been made public (and been published), have been critiqued for not providing sufficient 'evidence' to be used for development purposes. For example, Kanuka, (2011) argues that a teacher who works according to the principles of SoTL is primarily a specialist in his or her own disciplinary field (such as medicine, chemistry, history etc.) and therefore has limited opportunities to make a scientific contribution to the field of education in general.

An alternative approach is presented by Geschwind and Forsberg (2015), who argue that, should the field of higher education research be populated by educational researchers only, there is a risk that only certain aspects of higher education are made visible. An inclusive approach to the systematic exploration of higher education teaching and learning in many different disciplines

Academic teachership in a Swedish context



enables a better understanding of the field in all its complexity (Geschwind & Forsberg, 2015). Thus SoTL can raise issues concerning legitimacy and power, which may be one of the reasons for the relatively slow development that the SoTL movement has experienced in academia.

Another critical view on SoTL is that it forms part of a measurability agenda characterising the work of many institutions and as such contributes to the 'performance' or 'fulfilment' of pre-established criteria (Boshier, 2009). One concern sometimes mentioned in connection with SoTL discussions is that this type of activity actually helps to reinforce the division between education and research by focusing too much on individual academics' opportunities to develop as teachers regardless of the potential opportunities to develop as researchers within their respective disciplinary fields.

On the other hand, it can be argued that higher education institutions that do not develop clear criteria for assessing pedagogical merits undermine teachers' opportunities to qualify pedagogically, since it is not clear what this could mean or how such merits are to be assessed. Again, the question then arises as to how the merit value of research and teaching can be balanced within the framework of academia, which in turn has implications for how these central functions are assessed by different educational institutions and to what extent they can be considered to give credit value in connection with promotion and recruitment.

Academic teachership in a Swedish context

In light of the above description of SoTL from an international perspective, we now turn to the educational development discussion that has taken place in the Swedish higher education sector. The discussion here has mainly been inspired by the SoTL movement as developed in the UK and Australia; this focuses, on the one hand, on the issue of educational merit and, on the other, on the issue of how teachers in higher education can systematically and continuously develop teaching practices that stimulate student learning in different educational contexts. The term "academic teachership" [Sw. "akademiskt lärarskap"] was introduced informally in the 1990s as a proposed translation of SoTL in connection with discussions about higher education pedagogical competence development for teachers (see, for example, Lindberg-Sand & Sonesson, 2008).

The issue of academic teachership linked to pedagogical development is also highlighted in a report published by the Academic Development Unit at Karolinska institutet (KI) in 2008. This report, which was originally written as a guide for KI teachers, provides a historical background to SoTL and presents a model developed at the Center for Medical Education at KI consisting of six steps: exploring existing knowledge, developing, investigating, documenting, peer review and publishing/collaborating.

It is not until recent years that the term academic teachership has become more frequently used to describe the professional activities of teachers in Swedish higher education institutions (Karlsson, Fjellström, Lindberg-Sand, Scheja, Pålsson, Alvfors, et al., 2017; Silén & Bolander Laksov, 2013). So academic teachership in Sweden has been developed using inspiration from the various international strands of SotL described above. At the same time, it is doubtful whether academic teachership is understood in exactly the same way at different higher education institutions in Sweden. Interpretations of the meaning of academic teachership depend, to a great extent, on how different institutions have worked locally with issues related to educational merits and educational development in different disciplines.

However, it is clear that, since the 2010s, we have seen a trend in Swedish policy documents and regulations in the form of quality systems, formulations in employment schemes, expert reviews and merit models (Fjellström & Wester, 2019), where expectations are expressed that higher education teachers should be able to problematise, analyse and document their own teaching in order to develop their pedagogical practices (Fjellström & Wester, 2019; Geschwind & Forsberg, 2015). This aim – to strengthen the professional basis for higher education teachers – is also clearly expressed in the recommendations adopted by the Association of Swedish Higher Education Institutions (SUHF) on general learning outcomes for the teaching qualifications required for employment as a teacher in higher education, where academic teachership is also mentioned (Karlsson, Fjellström, Lindberg-Sand, Scheja, Pålsson & Gerén, 2017).

This movement towards a professionalisation of teaching in higher education is also evident in an evaluation report assessing the Academic Development

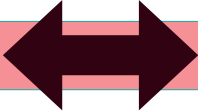
Unit¹ at the then Malmö University College (today Malmö University), where Edström (2010) identified four different aspects: identity development, course development, organisational learning and meeting areas/arenas. We argue that these aspects can be seen as constituting a foundational framework in what has come to be regarded as academic teachership from a national perspective:

- Identity development – university teachers who attend courses on higher education teaching and learning testify that their participation in these courses makes them take the role of the teacher in academia more seriously. The courses provide tools for dealing with different aspects of this role while at the same time giving the teaching role legitimacy for the individual: I am a teacher now, previously I just winged it as I lacked the training.
- Course development – as part of their teachership, higher education teachers are expected to work continuously on developing the courses they teach with the help of evaluations, experience and scientific support from educational research (and SoTL).
- Organisational learning – when units, institutions, programmes, sometimes the entire educational institution, take a systematic approach to identifying and studying various burning issues, this leads to development and change in the organisation. These changes, in turn, also need to be examined. Did they lead to the desired result? Such a process can lead to further organisational development.
- Meeting places/arenas – when a university teacher is dedicated to working as a teacher, this process also brings about collaboration with others. This can be carried out in the teacher team in the small-scale context of the course but also institution-wide in different networks and courses or collaborative projects. Conferences for higher education teaching staff at the institution or on the national level (such as the NU Conference) also provide opportunities for teachers to disseminate and discuss their experiences and the systematic examination of their own pedagogical practice.

¹ Interestingly, the academic development unit at the then Malmö University College (today Malmö University) was already at that time (as still is) labelled “academic teachership” [Sw. “akademiskt lärarskap”]. Malmö University College was created partially in contrast to the established academic institution in the area (Lund University), with the expressed ambition of contributing to the establishment of a new university and being academic.

The scientific, systematic approach to academic teachership is also emphasised in a chapter in a book entitled *Att skapa pedagogiska möten i medicin och vård* (Creating Educational Meetings in Medicine and Care) (Bolander Laksov, 2013). Here it is emphasised that teachership is not regarded as something isolated and individual but rather as activities that develop in dialogue with students, colleagues and management. The chapter also discusses academic teachership in terms of higher education teachers sharing their personal learning experiences from systematic explorations through publications.

One legitimate question is whether academic teachership in practice means that teachers, in addition to their researcher/teacher roles, need to conduct educational research as part of their teaching practice. This is, of course, not a reasonable requirement for academic teachership. The difference between the sorts of publications generated in educational research and the publications produced within the framework of academic teachership is highlighted in the following model:

Educational research		Academic teachership
Aim: describe, analyse, conceptualise		Aim: improve educational practice
Formal research applications		Informal methodology
Applicable in wider contexts		Context-specific
Independent of department		Own teaching/department
Target group: national/international		Target group: local "audience"
Based on established theory		Pragmatic, low-level theorisation
Peer review publication		Non peer review publication

Adapted from Silén & Bolander Laksov (2013), Figure 7.3.

The important aspect to emphasise here is that academic teachership is associated with the desire to go beyond individual experiences of educational development and share these experiences in a context that allows different perspectives on teaching and learning to be exposed to critical reflection and feedback. Such a dissemination procedure does, of course, bear some resemblance to higher education research. However, the purpose of academic teachership is not primarily to contribute to ongoing theory development but rather to create an increased awareness and ability to support and challenge students' learning in particular educational contexts (see, for example, Entwistle, 2009).²

In line with such a view of teachership as involving collaboration and making visible educational practices, Fjellström and colleagues have proposed a definition of academic teachership:

”

In practice, academic teachership means that, based on an investigative approach to teaching and learning, teachers collaborate with other actors within teaching: conduct, change and develop teaching and make their practice and their experiences public.”

(Fjellström & Wester, 2019, s. 21)

From such a perspective, academic teachership may include action-research oriented studies of teaching practices and teaching materials that teachers develop to support student learning in a particular discipline, provided that these efforts can be used as a platform for the ”critically examining collegial conversations” that have the potential to fuel the development of higher education (Mårtensson, Roxå, & Stensaker, 2014).

² As examples of SoTL publications, several universities, including Lund University, the University of Gothenburg and Karolinska institutet, started up various channels where teachers could publish their experiences from their development projects at the beginning of the 2010s as part of a searchable database (LU). These were either files posted on a web page (GU) or the establishment of a peer-reviewed journal that was printed but also found online (KI). There are certainly more examples of similar ways of documenting and disseminating educational development efforts at other departments of education.



Expressions of academic teachership

In sum, our view is that academic teachership in Sweden points to a professionalisation of the role of being a teacher in higher education. It is not merely about inhabiting the 'teacher' function but also about regarding oneself as a teacher whose teachership is under continuous development. From an individual perspective, this implies developing competencies in a number of different areas and sharing knowledge and research in areas relevant to one's teachership. It is also a matter of being part of a collegial context around academic teachership and, in dialogue with students, colleagues and management, contributing to course and programme development. Finally, we have touched on aspects of academic teachership that relate to higher education institutions as organisations and their ability to create structures that promote learning and development, for example through the establishment of arenas for exchanging teaching experiences and the development of incentive structures.

Expressions of academic teachership

Academic teachership can thus be expressed in different ways, and we wish to illustrate this by using three examples from the Swedish journal *Högre utbildning* (Eng. Higher Education) and then discussing some examples of academic teachership at the individual, collegiate and institutional levels. *Högre utbildning* is a Swedish journal that was created to enable anyone who is involved in higher education as a teacher, supervisor, student, educational developer or manager, as well as researchers focusing on higher education, to publish nationally. This journal aims to "support the emergence of knowledge relevant to teaching and education at the country's higher education institutions" (from 'About the journal' (Sw. 'Om tidskriften') www.hogreutbildning.se). *Högre utbildning*, which was initiated by Swednet, the Swedish Educational Development Network (www.swednetwork.se), has played a central role in the practice of academic teachership since it was established in 2011. In this journal, higher education teachers can choose to publish findings generated in studies that examine their own practice, thus disseminating to colleagues in various disciplines experiences gained from ongoing development work. The articles published are widely used in the higher education pedagogical courses offered by most of Sweden's educational institutions today. Below are three examples of studies from 2019 that in different ways have sought to stimulate academic teachership.

In one study (Fjellström & Wester, 2019), questionnaire and interview data were collected from 30 participants in a higher education pedagogical course focusing on writing about, and for, teaching. The study shows that such "educational" writing often occurs in solitude and with great uncertainty, as it is perceived as different from how you usually write in the discipline you are active in as a researcher and teacher. Although there is room to write about teaching, such activities are seldom prioritised because the time available for professional development (sometimes called research time) is often devoted to strengthening research merits. The academic development-oriented writing that was initiated by management teams in the study was seen by participants as having to do with creating teaching materials. There were participants in the study who described a positive response from management with presentations at lunch seminars and encouragement, but most of them experienced a lack of managerial support for or expectations of this form of academic teachership.

Another study focused on developing academic teachership by opening up teaching sessions and allowing colleagues to share pedagogical reflections and ways of working. More precisely, participants involved themselves in a process in which they observe each others' teaching (auscultation) with the aim of creating a community of practice where experiences are discussed and lead to collective learning and commitment (Wennerberg, Blomström, & Nobel, 2019). This article is based on Gunnar Handal's model of critical friends in a team, which enables collegial development (Handal, 1999). In the project, a structure was created using templates for the auscultation and the feedback that the teachers provided each other with. Sixteen teachers (out of 17) participated in the project and they were allotted extra time (5 hours) by the departmental management to participate in the initiative. What distinguished this project from other auscultation initiatives was that it involved (almost) all the teachers within a specific discipline. The participants experienced that the model had provided them with great opportunities for development and the authors of the article conclude that the program did promote the development of academic teachership among the participants.

The third study focuses on the infrastructure around the recruitment of staff employed as teachers at higher education institutions, thus taking on the institutional aspect of academic teachership. The study is based on the Higher Edu-

cation Ordinance requirement that scientific and pedagogical merits should be given equal careful consideration in employment procedures. A case study at Stockholm University, The Faculty of Law (Laksov, 2018) examines how this requirement is expressed in expert reviews of teaching portfolios handed in for assessment. The study shows how the assessments differ, both quantitatively and qualitatively, depending on whether scientific experts or specifically appointed pedagogical experts have conducted the review. The article argues for the importance of developing clear criteria that can be understood and used as a basis for expert reviews, and for the training of experts to assess pedagogical skills in relation to recruitment and promotion matters.

So the above three examples can be said to illustrate different aspects of academic teachership. The first focuses on individual 'pedagogical writing', the second highlights the importance of collegial exchange and the third problematises institutional structures that influence assessments of educational merits in connection with expert reviews in employment procedures. With regard to the latter issue, which deals with institutional aspects of academic teachership, there is reason to reflect on how such aspects affect opportunities for the development of academic teachership both individually and collegially. A central issue then becomes the support that the university management can provide.

Managerial support essential to academic teachership

Studies have repeatedly shown how important the management of academic organisations is for what its members value and what kinds of activities they tend to prioritise. (Bolander Laksov, Kettis, & Alexandersson, 2014; Chalmers, 2011; Edström, 2010; Geschwind & Forsberg, 2015; Lueddeke, 1997). Management, together with higher education sector framework factors such as resources and regulations, create the conditions under which academics operate. The working conditions in workplaces at different higher education institutions may be experienced as providing varying degrees of freedom and limitation. Thus a central question for management is how each person in a managerial position should use his/her scope to create the best possible conditions not only for academics to conduct good research but also to promote the best possible learning experiences for students and colleagues

Educational leadership



(Bolander Laksov et al., 2014). For example, Edström argues (Edström, 2010) that: "Without strategic and concrete backing from management, educational development becomes a matter of preaching to the converted, and the unit's work cannot have a broad impact on the organisation" (page 18). What appears to be essential is management commitment to help strengthen the conditions for practising academic teachership. For this to happen, account must be taken of factors that contribute to the value of particular activities and practices and make sure that such activities are given status within the framework of the academic organisation.

Management in this context refers not only to senior management or formal executives. Rather, it is about leadership along the entire line: vice chancellors, deans, heads of department, directors and so on. which may also include the informal leadership that is often exercised by middle-level employees such as programme and course directors. In other words, the leadership of the academic institution potentially includes quite a few people. One way of describing the leadership that has bearing on academic teachership is in terms of educational leadership.

Educational leadership

Educational leadership is about developing a form of leadership that is aware of the educational consequences of its decisions and helps to give the teachers and students who are participants in an activity both a direction for their educational activities and opportunities to learn and develop in their educational roles.

Formal leaders in the academic world such as presidents, deans, heads of departments and directors of study can be described as possessing "position power". Through their positions, they have power over resources in terms of financial and managerial responsibility and so can set priorities and make investments that people without such power cannot. When formal leaders also exercise educational leadership, educational perspectives influence decisions and priorities, raising questions such as: What does this decision mean to the education, teaching and learning of staff, students and the organisation?

Another central part of educational leadership that formal leaders can influence has to do with what is assigned importance by making it visible and highlighting it. For example, a head of department may choose to emphasise, in the department's monthly newsletter (or equivalent), both the employees who have received research funding and those who have undertaken educational development work or received local funding for such work. Agendas for various departmental or faculty meetings may contain items of educational focus, and students and active teachers may be invited to present perspectives or proposals.

However, educational leadership is not only reserved for people with formal leadership positions. This is because leadership, unlike management, does not require positional power but primarily involves creating relationships that are based on trust and loyalty as well as the recognition of expertise and knowledge in the field to which the leadership applies (Jackson & Parry, 2011). So educational leadership can potentially be exercised by anyone who develops such knowledge and expertise.

Central issues in the practice of educational leadership can be summarised in the following points (Bolander Laksov & Tomson, 2017):

- 1) Assume a student-centred perspective
- 2) Lead development and improvement activities
- 3) The leader as a visionary and inspiration for others
- 4) Focus on organisational learning
- 5) Build bridges between operations/units and networks

It is not difficult to see that these points are similar to what in this text are pointed out as ingredients of academic teachership. In other words, academic teachership, to a certain extent, also involves practising educational leadership. However, there are several challenges associated with educational leadership. In particular, McGrath (McGrath, Roxå, & Bolander Laksov, 2019) and colleagues point to challenges associated with middle-level leadership such as those that study directors, programme, course directors and so on may meet which may imply both formal and informal leadership roles. These challenges include how to work for change, experiences of resistance from colleagues and students and views on theoretical knowledge of change and leadership. This research

also makes it clear that experience of scope and dialogue are central factors for developing fruitful educational leadership.

Finally, based on the above, we will conclude by trying to clarify our own understanding of what academic teachership involves and the implications this may have for the ways in which we can boost academic teachership at higher education institutions.

In conclusion

This text has attempted to introduce the idea of academic teachership in relation to educational development issues at higher education institutions. In light of the above, we can summarise academic teachership in terms of an *approach by which higher education teachers continuously and systematically reflect on, explore and develop their own pedagogical practice and its influence on student learning*. As illustrated above, such systematic exploration of pedagogical practice involves different dimensions that contribute to shaping the framework of fruitful teachership.

Firstly, there is the *individual dimension* of academic teachership in which individual teachers' reflections on personal experiences of different teaching contexts provide an important platform for developing their own educational practice and identity as professional teachers in higher education. This individual dimension includes, among other things, aspects that have to do with what we as teachers choose to highlight in terms of disciplinary content, why this content is important and how we think about the educational potential of this content and ways of communicating it in dialogue with students so as to generate as much learning as possible. In addition, the individual dimension includes an endeavour to build on the experiences of others and on what research has shown best supports student learning as a starting point for developing one's own pedagogical practice. Moreover, the individual dimension of academic teachership involves a progressively increasing awareness of how enacting one's teachership can influence conceptions among students and colleagues of what it means to be a skilled and competent teacher within a particular discipline.

Secondly, we need to pay attention to the *collegial dimension* of academic teachership, which refers to the ways in which higher education teachers make visible and communicate their reflections and arguments about their own pedagogical practice in dialogue with colleagues. For example, collaboration with colleagues on how different quality dimensions in student learning should be assessed can create opportunities not only to develop better forms of examinations but also to develop a *shared* educational practice. Although the role of the examiner in higher education institutions is often attributed to individuals, academic teachership provides an opportunity to let the examiner role serve as an expression of a common and entrenched view of quality in student work. The same applies to work on course development and course design, where changes are rooted both in higher education research and in dialogue with colleagues and so linking on to what happens in other courses and creating potential to contribute to the development of quality in education. Basically, the collegial dimension of academic teachership is about collegial collaboration, where the teaching profession in higher education becomes the subject of critical analysis and where teachers are provided with opportunities to disseminate, but also acquire, ideas, examples and reflections on aspects relevant to teaching and learning in higher education.

Last but not least, it is important to recognise the *institutional dimension* of academic teachership. This dimension refers to the institutional framework that a department, school or institution creates to stimulate continuous, systematic exploration of educational activities. Thus there are strategic issues to do with educational leadership, incentive structures for educational merit and incentive strategies for continuous professional development that strengthen the teaching profession and further contribute to creating the right conditions for academic teachership in higher education. In other words, the question of the status of the academic teacher is central to the institutional dimension of academic teachership; it involves recognising the educational development work that teachers carry out as valuable to the organisation by, for example, integrating incentives for such work into university employment and promotion structures.

It is also about creating the right conditions for professional development by enabling higher education teachers to put time and effort into developing their pedagogical practices, for example by creating opportunities to apply for fun-

ding for educational development projects. The institutional dimension also includes an ambition to consciously create arenas for exchange and learning about different educational practices within a particular higher education institution. Last but not least, management can play a central role in strengthening the professional work that higher education teachers perform, partly by including educational perspectives in decision-making processes so as to provide the best possible basis for decisions about quality enhancement efforts, and partly by striving to build an organisational infrastructure that clearly supports the development of academic teachership.



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This text introduces the idea of academic teachership. Academic teachership can best be described as *an approach whereby a teacher continuously and systematically reflects on, investigates and develops her or his pedagogical practice and its influence on the students' learning*. We examine the various dimensions that contribute to forming the framework of fruitful teachership.

First, we examine the *individual dimension* of academic teachership whereby the individual teacher's reflections on personal experiences from various teaching contexts form an important platform for the development of her/his pedagogical practice as a professional university teacher.

Second, we draw attention to the *collegial dimension* of academic teachership. This concerns the ways in which university teachers present reflections and arguments concerning their own pedagogical practice in a dialogue with their colleagues.

Third, we explore the *institutional dimension* of academic teachership. These are the institutional frameworks that a department, institute or college creates to stimulate the continuous and systematic examination of educational activities.